

**MARENA A LESOTHO**  
**CHIEFS, POLITICS AND CULTURE IN LESOTHO**

**Tim Quinlan**  
**Department of Anthropology**  
**University of Cape Town**

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## ABSTRACT

'What is a chief?' and 'what do chiefs do?' are the two questions which begin this study of political authority in rural Lesotho. These questions are contained within a broader one, 'why do villagers often hold chiefs, individually and generally, in contempt but recoil at the suggestion of dissolution of the chieftainship?' The latter question arose from the author's initial field experiences to become the basis for a study which examines the history of the chieftainship in Lesotho. This history is seen as a dialectical process involving a struggle over, and a struggle for, the chieftainship. The former struggle refers to the interventions of elites in society, namely senior chiefs, colonial government officials and, in more recent times, post-independence governments and foreign aid agencies. The latter struggle refers to the interventions of chiefs and the rural populace.

Having outlined different ethnographic descriptions of Lesotho's chieftainship, in order to illustrate the different criteria of authority which were applied in the making of the chieftainship, the study goes on to consider the efforts of different agencies to make the chieftainship in the image they desired. The contradictions within, and between, these interventions are explored as the study moves towards consideration of why rural Basotho still support the chieftainship. This analysis takes the discussion from the colonial context, during which Basutoland and the chieftainship were created, to contemporary regional and local rural contexts, in which the chieftainship exists. The discussion illustrates how

chiefs have been personifications of family and society, and how this representation is being challenged amongst the rural populace today. The multiplicity of forces which have shaped the chieftainship are then drawn together in a conclusion which examines the pivotal role of the chieftainship in the creation of a national identity and in the crisis of legitimacy facing the contemporary state in Lesotho.

The study is informed by a marxist theoretical perspective, but it is also influenced by the debate on postmodernism in Anthropology. This leads the study to acknowledge the current context of theoretical uncertainty for ethnographic research, and the opportunities this affords for exploration of new perspectives. One result is that the study examines tentatively the role of bio-physical phenomena in the way Basotho have constructed society and nature, and represented this construction in their collective understanding of political authority.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Once funds were used up, I was fortunate to be offered the chance to stay in Lesotho by Professor Butler Adam, then Director of the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Durban Westville. Professor Butler Adam secured work for me on The Drakensberg/Maluti Catchment Conservation Programme, a conservation oriented project which enabled me to extend my research beyond the villages and into the alpine grazing post areas.

Within Lesotho, I am grateful for the assistance given freely by many individuals. In particular, I owe a debt to Mr Letlaka Moteetee who became a patron and a critique of my efforts to understand politics in rural Lesotho. Sadly, Mr Moteetee died prematurely during 1993 as a result of the stress accumulated after many years of fighting against the political injustices perpetrated in rural Lesotho by the Basotho National Party government. Although Mr Moteetee was no supporter of the chieftainship, his interest in my research stimulated what sensitivity there is in this study with regard to the history of the institution. In addition, I thank Machaea and 'Old', Frank, Moteetee for their friendship and debates on Lesotho. I am also particularly grateful to home I stayed for much of my time in Lesotho and who assisted me in so many ways, and who continue to

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There are many other individuals in Lesotho whom I cannot acknowledge appropriately here but I thank the following individually and where relevant as representatives of the families and institutions which assisted me in my research: Ward chief 'Mamphofu Sekonyela, her senior councillor, Makalo Sekonyela, Steve Gill, now curator of the Morija Archives and Museum, chief Thabo Matete, chief Reselisitsoe Sekonyela, Noah Nkuni, Mashaile Kapa, Loi Motutubali, Lynn Somers, Lauri Bloberg, Mr Morojele, and Remaketse Letlema.

Finally, I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor John Sharp, and Professor Robert Thornton and Dr. Peter Skalnik, whose teaching culminated in the research for this study.

## NOTE ON ORTHOGRAPHY

The citizens of Lesotho refer to themselves collectively as Basotho. The individual citizen is referred to as Mosotho. Sesotho is the language spoken in Lesotho, but it also refers to anything pertaining to Lesotho, Basotho and their heritage.

There are two orthographies of Sesotho. One orthography is used in Lesotho and it is derived from the lexicographic works of the early French missionaries in the country. The other orthography is used in South Africa and it is an anglicised version of the former orthography. I use the first orthography in this study, except in specific instances where use of the second orthography is appropriate.

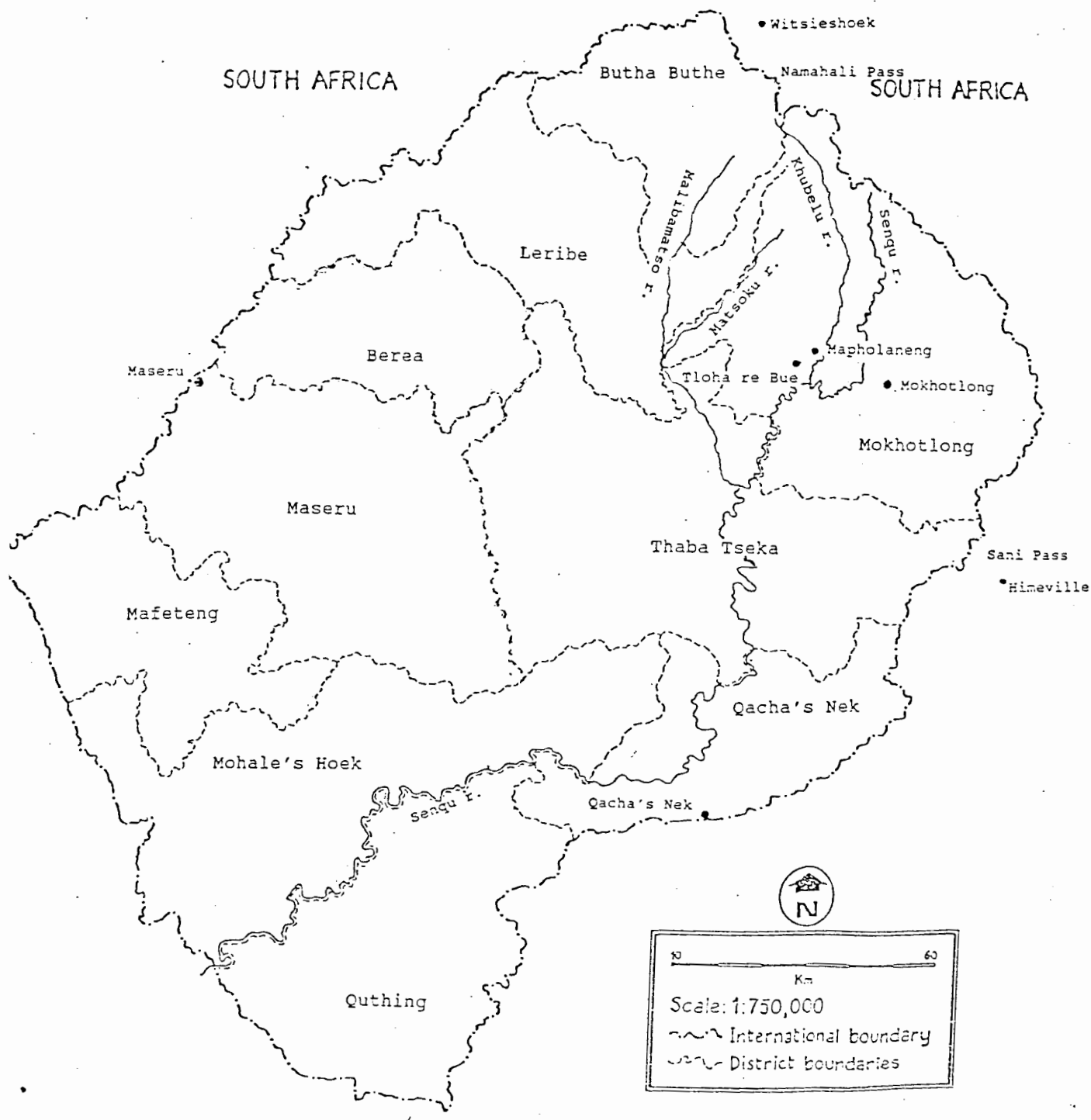
The Lesotho orthography contains several idiomatic features which appear in this study:

- 1) "th" is an aspirated "t" and there is no locution in Sesotho of "th" as there is in English.
- 2) "oa" together in a word is pronounced "wa" in English.
- 3) "ea" together in a word is pronounced "ya" in English.
- 4) An "l" before an "i" or a "u" is pronounced as "d" in English.
- 5) A "ph" is an aspirated "p", and there is no locution in Sesotho of "ph" as "f".

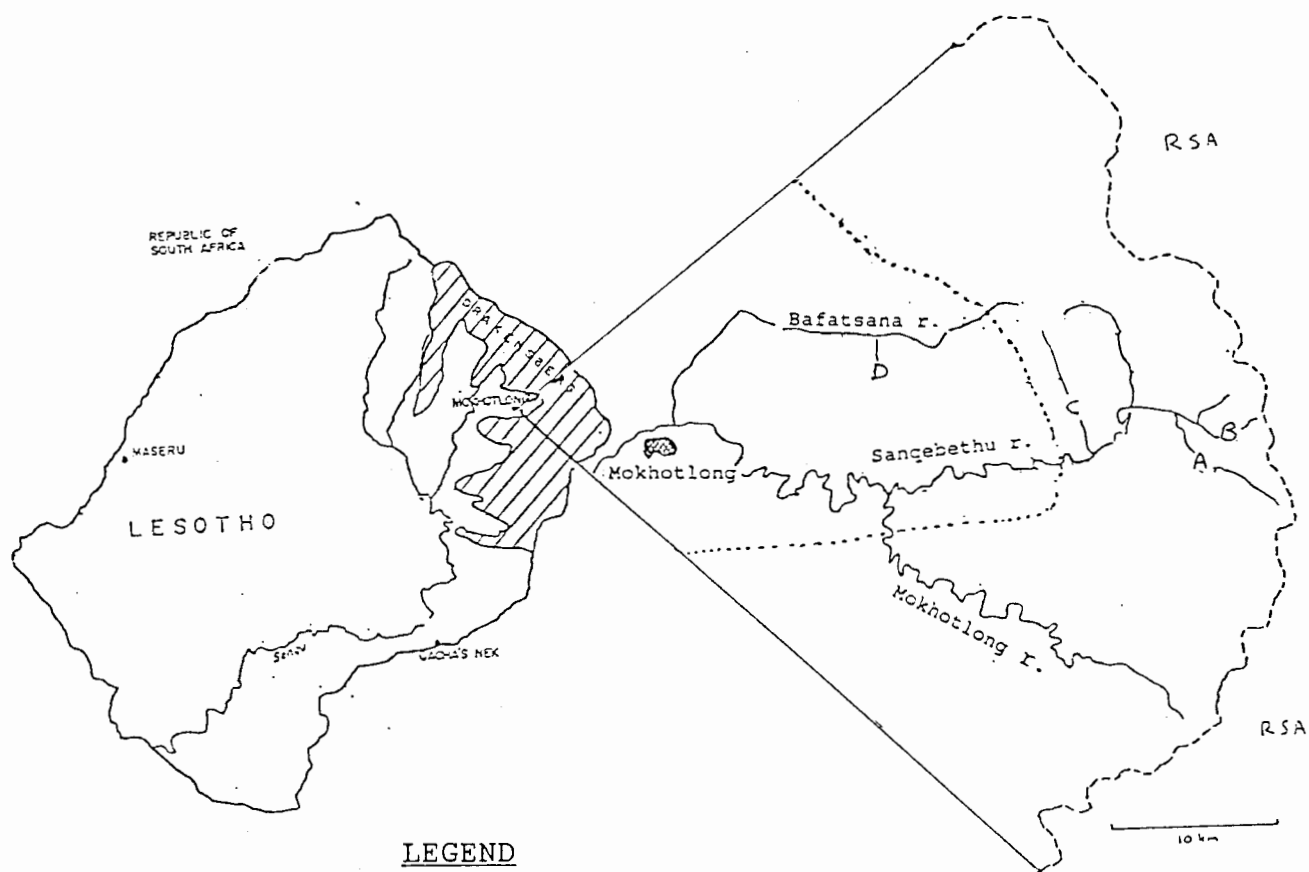
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
MAP 1: LESOTHO - DISTRICTS



MAP 2: GRAZING POST RESEARCH AREA AND MANAGED RESOURCE AREA  
(MRA)



**LEGEND**

-  Managed Resource Area (MRA)
-  Boundary of MRA

- A: Jareteng valley
- B: Langalabalele valley
- C: Merareng valley
- D: Khohlo Lintja valley

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### What is a chief? What do chiefs do?

On October 5th 1986 I drove into Mapholaneng, a village in the Mokhotlong district of Lesotho, to begin field research on the chieftainship. I arrived with two practical questions in mind: what are chiefs, and what do chiefs do? These questions were to be the basis for broader research on the practice of authority with a view to understanding the likely future of the chieftainship. That future appeared uncertain, for the chieftainship seemed to me to be an archaic form of authority.

The statutory erosion of the chiefs' authority as a result of interventions by the colonial government and by the dictatorial, post-independence government of the Basotho National Party seemed destined to continue, in view of the coup d'état in January 1986 which put the military in power. The ruling military council was vacillating on the question of re-establishing parliamentary party politics, but it was affirming ministerial government staffed by civil servants to the exclusion of chiefs. In each district, the District Secretary and the District Military Officer presided over a bureaucracy which incorporated a number of departments, ranging from an army garrison to a vehicle licensing department, and co-ordinated the activities of many donor aid organisations. The rise of populist and socialist political movements in South Africa with little regard for chiefs, as an institution of authority, was another threat, albeit it an indirect one, to the chieftainship in Lesotho. Also,



the economic welfare of most Basotho depended less on chiefs' authority to control local use of natural resources than on earnings remitted by the many men and women who migrated to South Africa to work, and on access to an ever expanding network of traders who import manufactured goods from South Africa.

My two questions concealed an interest in the cultural heritage of the chieftainship. I came to Mapholaneng because it lay in Tlokoeng ward, an administrative section of Mokhotlong district, and an area of historical significance in the evolution of Lesotho's chieftainship. Tlokoeng owes its existence to the military support given by a Sotho-speaking refugee group to the Basotho paramount chief in the late 19th century. In 1880 many Basotho sided with their paramount chief in rebellion against a colonial demand to hand in their guns. The tensions were felt in the Cape Colony, and they exacerbated a leadership dispute within a re-constituted Batlokoa chiefdom in the Mt Fletcher area. The dispute was between the deceased chief's heir, Lelingoana Sekonyela, and the regent, Lehana Sekonyela. The outcome was that Lelingoana left Mt Fletcher with a following to join forces with the Basotho paramount chief in what became known as the 'Gun War'. Following resolution of this war, the paramount chief offered land east of the Malibamatso river and north of its junction with the Senqu river to Lelingoana Sekonyela and his (see Map 1, page viii). In due course, Lelingoana established his own hierarchy of chiefs to govern settlements that grew throughout eastern Lesotho. The Batlokoa chieftainship became an integral part of the national chieftainship, but it acquired a distinct statutory identity.

It is this political history of endorsement and dissipation of political affiliations, spanning the pre-colonial, colonial and modern eras, that identified Tlokoeng as an appropriate area for field research and for the study of political culture. Research in Tlokoeng also offered the opportunity for comparative research in view of the work conducted in this area by the anthropologist, Hugh Ashton. Ashton did fieldwork while resident at Malingoaneng during the 1930s, the results of which appeared in the monograph The Basuto in 1952. His work reflected anthropological concern of the time to record the traditions and customs of non-western societies. The Basuto was written on the premise that the Batlokoa residents, through their relative isolation in the mountains, still led a traditional way of life and, therefore, provided the best illustration of Basotho culture for documentation in a monograph. 50 years later, much has obviously changed in both anthropological discourse and in social conditions in the study area. Ashton's premises may be discredited today, but their contrast to the principles of this study would help me to be reflexive about the anthropological enterprise and the inevitable subjectivity of interpreting intangible features of political culture.

While my head was full of ideas about the principles of this study, I was hardly aware of the way in which I was being led into the research by its 'subjects'. Having carried out research previously in Lesotho, I knew the appropriate means to seek residence in a village. I arrived in Mapholaneng bearing a letter of introduction to the ward chief from the chief in whose area I had worked previously. While I was temporarily resident at the

high school in Mapholaneng, the headmaster gave me directions to the ward chief's village and also influenced me on the appropriateness of Mapholaneng for field work. Within the space of two days my plans were turned up side down as I re-assessed the rationale and scope of my research. I had planned to settle in the village of the ward chief because, I thought, I would be able to see at close hand the practicalities of ward administration, and I would be living in the same locality as Ashton and able, therefore, to get a good historical insight into changes in the work and authority of chiefs. My interest in history and a tacit, albeit simplistic, interest in the ethnic heritage of the area were soon outweighed by a training that had emphasised the present and the complexities of modernity in society which Mapholaneng seemed to display.

This village was clearly growing rapidly, and fast becoming the district's second metropole after Mokhotlong, the district capital. It contained 180 homesteads, a high school, a secondary school, four large trading stores amongst others, a police station, a court, a Red Cross clinic, a post office, and a veterinary office. Mapholaneng was also the centre of a division of the ward which was under the jurisdiction of a sub-ward chief, and which included two further territorial sub-divisions under the subordinate authority of two 'headmen' (ramotse). Simply put, I was taken by the question of how a seemingly archaic authority functioned in a context of apparent economic modernisation and growth of a nascent town.

Thus I went to the village of the ward chief with my letter of introduction to request permission to live in Mapholaneng.

I found that he was senile and that his first wife was acting-chief, but daily administration was largely in the hands of the court secretary and a senior councillor. These men gave me permission to settle in the ward and a letter of introduction to the sub-ward chief at Mapholaneng. My efforts to see the sub-ward chief were unsuccessful, but in the meantime I had been directed by the headmaster to a Mr Letlaka Moteetee for assistance in obtaining accomodation. I subsequently found out that Mr Moteetee was an important political figure in the area. He was the local organiser of the Basotho Congress Party (BCP), a Pan Africanist organisation which had been a resistance movement to the BNP government for many years, and an ex-teacher cum trader who had suffered detention and torture for his political activities. Mr Moteetee subsequently became my patron, as a result of which many particular doors opened for me while I carried out fieldwork.

My early days in Mapholaneng were certainly coloured by undisguised political interest in my presence, resulting both from my stated research interests and from my coming from South Africa. I was accosted and seemingly screened on different occasions by a CID detective and the lieutenant of an army patrol while the vistors to my hut were often those who professed BCP affiliations. There was some irony in this introduction. My sentiments were initially in line with BCP ideology, which had nothing but disdain for the chieftainship and espoused its dissolution. Subsequently, however, my views changed as I encountered popular support for the chieftainship; but Mr Moteetee and other BCP sympathisers remained the people upon whom I relied to test my interpetations.

My main concern at the time, however, was my failure to hold with etiquette for strangers newly arrived in a place; namely, to meet and introduce myself to the sub-ward chief. I finally found him at a local shebeen. Subsequent efforts to meet him were no more successful - he was an alcoholic whom I rarely saw again, and he died a few months later of his illness. My early encounters with the chieftainship were limited to peremptory talks with those who carried out business on behalf of this chief while my experience drew derogatory comments from villagers about chiefs in general, mixed with pride for the institution. It was an experience which informed a question that was to become central to my fieldwork: why do villagers often hold chiefs, individually and generally, in contempt, but recoil at the suggestion of dissolution of the chieftainship?

#### Chief and chieftainship

The dissertation addresses this question in the following way: Popular disdain for chiefs stems from individuals' personal grievances about particular chiefs' actions and demeanour which fuel common concern about the ability of chiefs to address their subjects' concerns. Diatribes against chiefs often refer directly and indirectly to ideals about what chiefs were like in the past, and about what chiefs should do now. In other words, disdain for chiefs refers to the present, to real and imagined incompetence, and to injustices perpetrated by individual chiefs, while support for the chieftainship refers to the past and the future. One must recognise that this is not a novel condition; the chieftainship has always been an important institution in Lesotho

and, hence, a subject of intense debate and intervention. However, as I begin to discuss in chapter 2, different agencies have intervened on the basis of different principles with regard to the nature of authority in general, and the role of chiefs in particular.

The history of the chieftainship can be summarised in the following fashion. The colonial authorities sought to define the chieftainship principally as a territorial authority on the basis of imperial demarcation of Basutoland as a geo-political entity. Colonial officials demarcated districts, and sub-divisions within them, and chiefs were accorded places within a territorial hierarchy. For the chiefs party to colonial ambition, notably the immediate heirs of the founding paramount chief, Moshoeshoe I, the chieftainship was to be a dynastic structure based on kinship. A patrilineal concept of authority was to be the basis for placing chiefs in order of seniority according to their agnatic links to Moshoeshoe I. Colonial officials and chiefs colluded in an effort to create a political structure that was consistent with notions of nation and country as dictated by the colonial government. These premises were entrenched by the time Lesotho gained its independence in 1966, but subject to the global trend for nations to be governed by elected governments supported by civil service bureaucracies.

A result of this trend has been continued effort by Lesotho governments to demarcate the chieftainship as a separate limb of local government to be superseded in time by modern state institutions. In contrast, the populace, notably the majority resident in rural areas, has not expressed such a unificatory and

reductionist perspective on the chieftainship. Their concern has been with the question of how chiefs can respond to the many and varied demands upon their position and authority, and to the needs of rural people in a complex modern world. The populace's demand of the chieftainship is that it should be flexible. Their interventions have sought to ensure that the chieftainship is never clearly definable; that it is always coming into being and able to withstand everchanging challenges.

The chieftainship is caught between very different conceptions of what it is and what it should be. Whereas colonial authorities sought to graft it onto a European political concept of territory, the populace emphasised that which is within 'territory' - the natural resources and settlements to which authority was beholden. Whereas chiefs emphasised patrilineality as a root of the chieftainship, the populace emphasised the necessity of grounding this heritage in their daily lives and in their need for natural resources. A central argument of this thesis is, therefore, that despite the efforts of post independence governments to sideline the chieftainship, the rural populace continues to support the chieftainship as a means to withstand interventions which threaten to destroy their particular, albeit changing, relationship to the land. The history of the chieftainship is not, however, one of simple opposition between the rural populace and state functionaries. They are caught up in each other's intentions. They have collaborated in some instances, and have been in open conflict in others. The outcome is that the chieftainship is never moulded into the form desired by a particular agency. Chapters

3, 4, 5 and 6 address these dynamics from different perspectives which are presented in terms of the different, but cross-cutting, relationships between chiefs and the colonial government, between chiefs themselves, and between chiefs and their subjects.

The transformation of the chieftainship has been qualitatively different in the colonial and post-colonial eras. During the colonial era, the chieftainship was built up into a clearly defined structure, with the populace, chiefs and colonial officials supporting this effort though contesting the scope of its authority. This was due to the centrality of chiefs in the political and social order. To colonial officials, chiefs were a relatively effective means of indirect rule. To the chiefs, colonial rule confirmed their status in society. For the populace, the vast majority of whom still relied in part on agricultural livelihoods, chiefs were central to the allocation of natural resources. Ironically, the focus on the structure and boundaries of the institution led to subordination of chiefs' authority to other government institutions as it became one political construct amongst others.

During the post-colonial era the focus of attention has shifted to the duties and rights of chiefs, attended by opposition between state functionaries and the rural populace over the role of the chiefs. This is due to the apparent weakness of the chieftainship in the contemporary era. The statutory erosion of chiefs' authority has given the impression of an institution in decline. For post-colonial governments, this has indicated an opportunity to devalue the chieftainship as a



government institution. For the rural populace, this apparent weakness has clarified the threat of imposition of political institutions which satisfy the government and other external agencies' norms of political and economic order rather than those that prevail within the country, and which are based on international patterns rather than the realities of life in rural Lesotho. Rural residents continue to affirm the chieftainship, as part their attempts to create space within these norms of geo-political order, in order to accommodate the diversity of social and economic demands on late 20th century society.

Chapter 7 examines the broader implications of political organisation and identity in this interaction between local, national and international agencies. The contest over the rural social order is an engagement over appropriate political means to accommodate the diversity of demands upon contemporary society. From the perspective of the government and international organisations, social order is best based upon a notion of nationality that can be integrated into the international political and economic framework of nation states. From the perspective of the rural populace, this order must include institutions which stem from local concerns, and which can then promote local needs in the national and international arenas. It is in this contest of approach that the chieftainship becomes an important symbol of political identity and organisation. On the one hand, the chieftainship can be seen to perpetuate a parochial outlook amongst the rural populace, and to be potentially divisive in terms of promoting regionalism

and, in extremis, politically organised ethnic groups within the nation. On the other hand, the chieftainship can be seen as a means to safeguard rural residents' interests as rural livelihoods are integrated into national and international arenas.

The argument in chapter 7 is that both interpretations co-exist in political practice in Lesotho (within as well as between rural and government circles). Successive governments and political parties have threatened at various times to disband the chieftainship, regarding it as an impediment to development of a modern nation state. The threat has never been carried out, however, because the chieftainship is not simply an objective impediment but the nexus around which Basotho articulate their national identity and the economic circumstances particular to Lesotho. To disband it would not solve the immediate problems of government. Any such move could, however, destabilise society and promote political opposition based on local and regional concerns.

Although the focus of Chapter 7 is on the different demands made upon the rural social order, the underlying intent is to illustrate the social boundaries which people draw to define this order. The boundaries seem apparent from the perspective of an observer. Successive governments have reified the chieftainship such that the political situation seems to be one of the government at odds with the rural populace who are led by chiefs to resist modernisation. That perspective, however, is clear because it is aligned with the macro-view adopted by the government, being urban based and supported by the trend towards

uniformity in the general structure of national governments. The apparent divisions blur when one observes the ways in which the rural populace interacts with chiefs, as is discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6. I argue that the rural populace does not adopt such a reductionist perspective on the chieftainship. The populace uses the institution to assess, and to intervene, in changing circumstances of rural life, thereby denying opportunity to external agencies to impose demands for change that are perceived to threaten their limited means to draw sustenance from the land.

Chapter 8 discusses the future of the chieftainship on the basis of the discussion in the preceeding chapters. Having emphasised the problem of perspective with regard to the chieftainship, I indicate that the institution has been, and continues to be, transformed, but the process has been obscured in the ethnographic literature. This literature has legitimately, if not always consciously, highlighted the role of successive governments and external agencies in this process, but it has often ignored the interventions of rural Basotho, and thus has simplified the complexity of the interactions between different agents that have shaped the chieftainship. In conclusion, I do not deny the role of elites, but I suggest that the future of the chieftainship really depends more on the commitment of the rural populace to residence in Lesotho than on interventions of the government and other external agencies.

The allusion here to the problem of perspective, and to the obscuring of social processes in the ethnographic literature, refers to my search for a framework in which to present my research. By asking, in effect, why the chieftainship in Lesotho

continues to exist, my research confronted the problem of how to understand cultural particularities amidst the globalisation of economy and society. The neo-marxist framework of much South African anthropology since the 1970s was inadequate because the questions I was asking went beyond the political and economic issues it could address.

For much of the 1970s, South African anthropology sought to refute notions of bounded cultural wholes as propagated by apartheid ideology. This was done primarily by negation: by illustrating the changes in, and overlap between, political and economic practice in the supposed ethnic groups as a result of their integration into the capitalist political economy of Southern Africa, and thus demonstrating both the evolution of, and integration into, a cultural context which was more complex and diffuse than that described in the ideology of ethnic enclaves.

This perspective emphasised the integration of people into a global context of capitalism and socialism rather than the diversity of political, economic and social practices in localities, and the diverse ways in which people interpreted the global political economy according to local circumstances. It did not directly address this diversity of expression in view of the danger of suggesting bounded cultural wholes - the objects being negated in the first place. Instead, this perspective emphasised the subordination of locally specific livelihoods and culture to national political and economic concerns. This perspective could only be politically equivocal, as is attested by the way it inspired the populist slogan, 'One nation, one culture', that

was current in South Africa during the early 1990s. In contrast, the trend today is to confront the issue of diversity, in view of events around the world and in South Africa which cast doubt on expectations of national and global integration. For instance, the recent conference on 'Ethnicity, Identity and Nationalism in South Africa', held in Grahamstown during April 1993, brought critical questions into the open:

'Why should there be an ever increasing threat of ethnic division at the very moment when we are about to cast off the shackles of Verwoedian ideology, which took ethnic division and separation as its very heart? Are we treading a slow and tortuous path towards national unity, or are we heading for ethno-regional conflict and partition? Should we be trying to foster the one and forestall the other? Can the experience of other countries help us?' (McAllister and Sharp, 1993:7).

The contemporary context for analysis of political processes, and for deriving conclusions, is not one of theoretical certainty, however, as a result of the influence of postmodernist discourse across the spectrum of scholarship. Postmodernism in anthropology has undeniably helped the discipline to consider the conceptual limitations of the discipline's longstanding focus on cultural particularities (e.g. Barnard, 1993; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Strathern, 1987). One must be more circumspect, however, about the value of the intense debate on the utility of postmodernist discourse, in which outright rejection (Jarvie, 1984; Sangren, 1988) mingles with polemic (Friedman, 1991), doubt (Pool, 1991) and qualified support (Carithers, 1990). In picking a way through this debate

it is easy to lose sight of the object: acknowledgement in ethnographic studies that cultural particulars are representations of the imagination of many agents (including anthropologists) as much as products of material circumstance (see Bourdieu, 1977), and that a reflexive approach in analysis is a useful methodological exercise towards construction of theory (see Roosens, 1989), even if there is no certainty of the outcome at present.

In the South African context, there are a number of ethnographies which have highlighted this object, though not always overtly or with the same degree of commitment to postmodernist discourse (Crapanzano, 1985; Comaroff, 1985; Comaroffs, 1991; Ferguson, 1990; Gordon, 1993; Murray, 1992; Wilmsen, 1989). One must acknowledge in this variation that these studies have illuminated, for South African anthropologists, the quest for coherent theoretical and narrative frameworks, rather than demonstrated an appropriate framework. This study seeks, therefore, its own path through the interstices of theoretical uncertainty; examining who have been the 'authors' of the chieftainship while working towards an understanding of why the chieftainship exists today.

#### Origins and Direction of the study

The analytical premise of this study is that the chieftainship in Lesotho is not as concrete as ethnographers and Basotho have imagined it to be in the past. Accordingly, popular disdain for chiefs and fears about doing away with the chieftainship highlight a struggle to understand the institution as a social

construct which represents intangible, but changeable, ideas and values about social organisation.

By way of illustration, this study looks at authority, political authority to be specific, as it is expressed in the form of the chieftainship in rural Lesotho. Stated in these terms, the object of the study appears tangible. To state 'chieftainship' is to suggest something concrete, and this perception is endorsed by providing an enclosing background - rural Lesotho. Yet, like a photograph that appears only after an image has been turned around between the camera lens and view finder, and then reversed in the process of developing, the object is a reflection and a representation of an image. A chieftainship is not a concrete thing, but a representation of a systematic way in which people organise public facets of their lives. Rural Lesotho is not just a background but a social, as much as a physical, context that is forever changing as a result of the interventions of its inhabitants. Once we try to capture what is being represented - authority - the object becomes even more intangible. Although authority is forever affirmed as necessary to social organisation, its realisation is rarely stable, and its form is forever contested, and such form as may appear is barely in place before being re-fashioned.

The questions which this study asks about the chieftainship stem from previous research into political structures in Qwa Qwa, the government designated 'South Sotho homeland' (Quinlan, 1986). That research looked at the ideology of chieftainship and tribe, the 'tribal paradigm', from the perspective of how it was used in contests for political authority amongst local leaders. My

conclusion was that those who saw in this paradigm a means to wealth and authority in government were in fact heading into a political cul-de-sac. They would acquire statutory positions as chiefs but little authority over the population, and little scope to influence government policy. This conclusion arose from the argument that the material basis for the tribal paradigm, agriculture and residential status defined by membership to a tribe, had become irrelevant to this 'homeland's' population. The residents of Qwa Qwa were completely dependent on access to migrant jobs in the urban centres of South Africa and to the few jobs available in the local industrial parks, and on the patronage of government bureaucrats to facilitate the legal and economic means to secure those jobs.

The Qwa Qwa study led me to consider whether the same argument could be applied in Lesotho. I thought initially that the general argument would hold. The Qwa Qwa study echoed the tenor of anthropological and historical research of the 1970s and early 1980s. The dominant refrain was the marginalisation of agriculture in rural african settlements as a result of development of the capitalist economy and apartheid policies, the ensuing poverty and erosion of local political and cultural heritages as people became subordinate to the demands of first, the colonial, and later, the South African government (Gay, 1980; Kimble, 1978; Mohapeloa, 1970; Murray, 1981; Quinlan, 1984; Spiegel, 1979; Thompson, 1975).

Nonetheless, although the population of Lesotho was similar to Qwa Qwa's in terms of its structural dependence on the South African economy, it still had access to land unlike the latter.



Moreover, anthropological research indicated considerable investment in agricultural livelihoods, and persistent efforts by Basotho to retain their cultural idioms of organising these livelihoods (Gay, 1980; Murray, 1981; Quinlan, 1984; Spiegel, 1979). This suggested that the tribal paradigm might still be relevant to rural Basotho. For example, Murray's (1977) analysis of bridewealth transactions in Lesotho, which emphasised the material reasons for perpetuation of this practice, suggested an important question: if Basotho still regarded this practice as central to their sense of social order, then what of the chieftainship which is bound into this and other practices?

The few publications on the chieftainship were, however, highly ambiguous on this question. Breytenbach (1975) suggested that the chieftainship was gradually being sidelined as an institution of government by modern institutions of the nation-state. Jingoos (1975) suggested that it remained deeply rooted in popular consciousness. Hamnett (1975) and Kimble (1985) suggested that it was an anachronism in view of its internal structural contradictions, and historical interventions which had led to Lesotho becoming a nation-state.

Furthermore, despite my conclusions in the Qwa Qwa study, the evidence indicated that the chieftainship was still a nexus of political contest and, therefore, possibly of more significance in the lives of rural populations than I had argued. Recent research by myself and two colleagues on civil society in South Africa has taken this issue further, to suggest that chieftainships are not incompatible with modernisation (McIntosh, Quinlan and Vaughan, 1994). Agencies such as migrant worker

organisations, for instance, which have been seen as a civic challenge to the tribal paradigm (Delius, 1990; Hirson; 1977; Ritchkin, 1990; Terblanche, 1993), often endorse that paradigm in their structure, aims and discourse. The theoretical problem with this research of the 1970s and 1980s is that it propagated a populist agenda in South African historiography, which was couched in terms of popular resistance to apartheid, and based on the neo-marxist assumption that resistance would take a particular form: that it would tend towards class based resistance which had a rationality that was opposed to seemingly archaic institutions such as chieftainships (e.g Bozolli, 1983; Beinart & Bundy, 1987; Callinicos, 1980). This tendency is not so obvious today, and this study examines why this is the case through reference to the chieftainship in Lesotho.

The study examines the role of the chieftainship in popular resistance, and in attempts by many people to exert some measure of control over changing political and economic circumstances in their localities and in southern Africa. It takes as read that social behaviour is often a form of resistance against imposed constraints on livelihoods, but emphasises what it is that people strive to defend and how, in the process, they change what is being defended. In this case, the object of defence is seen to be people's need for land. The focus is on how people use land, how they re-fashion available resources and how they re-direct their use of these resources. The central argument is that rural Basotho have not always struggled against the hegemony of colonialism and of capitalism, in defence of their need for land, but also against those facets which they 'know' cannot be

moulded to local conditions. What they 'know' is neither absolute nor fixed. The knowledge is accumulated and assessed in relation to current conditions and aspirations to shape future conditions. Where they reject and where they embrace impositions on local society, rural Basotho have created particular expressions of market relationships. They continue to diversify their practices, as in the past, in ways which both support their heritage and which challenge their marginal economic status, but which are also dictated partly by the efforts of external agencies to impose their own agendas.

This interpretation stems not only from the various threads in South African historiography that point towards respect for the diversity of social practices amidst the globalisation of the capitalist political economy. It also stems from the choices I made during field research. The first choice, which was made on the spot rather than with much forethought, was to work in Mapholaneng rather than in Tloha Re Bue where the ward chief lived. Research in Tloha Re Bue would have oriented the study towards analysis of political authority from the perspective of the ward chief's office and in terms of how the hierarchy of authority worked. As I noted earlier, Mapholaneng suggested itself as a better locale for a number of reasons, but fundamentally, because it challenged the idealist and parochial premises of my research. Given the numerous facilities oriented towards consumerism in the village, the role and status of chiefs could hardly be presumed in a situation where agricultural livelihoods and the cultural heritage were bound to be enmeshed in complex ways with these symbols of modern society. The study

would have to acknowledge this complexity if it was to arrive at any conclusion about what chiefs do, and about the value of the chieftainship to its subjects.

The second choice was to do additional research beyond villages up at the grazing posts on the alpine grasslands, as a result of an opportunity to participate in a large, multi-disciplinary research project, the Drakensberg/Maluti Catchment Conservation Programme (D/MCCP).<sup>1</sup> Whereas the village based research highlighted people's dependence on wage incomes and the market economy, the research at the grazing posts highlighted rural residents' dependence upon livestock and the land. In other words, to use a Newtonian analogy, the combined research lead me to see the village as a nucleus into which is drawn, from different directions, the different forces that shape the conditions under which people live. While daily activities in and around Mapholaneng revealed the impositions of external agencies and the broader regional economy upon people's relationship to the land, the work of herders and stock owners revealed the impositions of bio-physical phenomena upon people's efforts to sustain agricultural livelihoods.

This analogy should not be read too literally. It illustrates schematically the many factors which villagers take into account in their efforts to draw sustenance from the land, and from the market economy. The significance of doing research in villages and at grazing posts was that it led to questioning how people fashion resources and how they demarcate sources of sustenance. This questioning led to consideration of the data in terms of a social process, in which people continually re-fashion their

environment through specific practices which support access to and use of certain resources. These practices could then be seen not only as the content of socially constructed spaces. They could also be seen as means by which people demarcate boundaries which then allow them to assess the transgressions of external agencies and, as changing circumstances and knowledge intimate, to perceive opportunities for revision of the way they describe and act upon the world. The study could then begin to see how people authorise their actions, and in turn, how this is expressed in what chiefs do. The study would thus avoid pre-determining the structure of the chieftainship, but would be on a course to see how the institution is continually being re-fashioned by the way people change their relationship to the land and to the market economy.

Field work at grazing posts led to consideration of how to assess bio-physical phenomena like climate, terrain and vegetation on rural livelihoods. The village based research highlighted how people actively transform the land, given the visibility of arable farming and of settlement growth which involve direct intervention to change the landscape. The grazing post research, in contrast, could not avoid the influence of bio-physical phenomena on livelihoods. People regularly voiced concern about hazards like snow, hail and rainfall, and seasonal variation in quality and quantity of forage. Moreover, these concerns were supported by evidence of high mortality, and low survival, rates for livestock. In other words, the study was drawn into considering ecological processes in terms of how people's strategies shape bio-physical conditions which, in turn,

exert a feed-back influence on social practices as those conditions change. That influence is felt in the way this study looks at how Basotho construct their environment as a means to understand how they authorise their actions through the chieftainship. Although the study is more concerned with how people collectively perceive and categorise bio-physical phenomena, the point I want to stress here is the focus on the 'natural environment' and its apparent constraints on people's activities. This is a particular emphasis which I explore in chapters 5 and 6, and which informs my discussion in chapter 7.

### Summary

This introduction has intimated that this study puts aside certain conventions for doctoral theses. The reason is that the study is actually based on research in Lesotho that spans 15 years rather than on the norm of introduction to anthropological methods by way of a couple of years research in a locality and synthesis of data within a prescribed theoretical framework. My interest in Lesotho began in 1979 with independent research in the country for an undergraduate dissertation on reactions within a locality to a Taiwanese agricultural project. That experience led to six months field work in a village during 1981, and a M.A. thesis which attempted to understand at an empirical level, the dynamics of household economic interactions and, at a theoretical level the dynamics of historical change (Quinlan, 1984).

Subsequent work in Qwa Qwa informed, as already noted, the planning for this study. Field work at grazing posts for the D/MCCP which followed initial field research in Mapholaneng

extended the anthropological research into the field of ecology. That experience accumulated as a result of further research in 1991 and 1992 when I organised an integrated research project, 'Conservation and Livestock Management in Lesotho', funded by the University of Durban Westville. This research involved further consideration of the relationship between localised socio-economic processes and broad scale interventions (Quinlan, 1992; 1993a), experimentation with methodologies (Criticos & Quinlan, 1991a; 1991b; Letlema et al, 1993; Quinlan, 1993b), and engagement in different arenas with a variety of empirical and theoretical issues (Deacon, 1993; Criticos & Quinlan, 1993; Petlane & Quinlan, 1993; Quinlan, 1993c; Quinlan, 1994).

This study is, therefore, one component of that experience. It is an attempt to draw together many theoretical and methodological questions which have arisen as a result of that experience during a period in which theory and methodology in anthropology have been the subject of much debate. The result is that initial interest in questions of what are chiefs and what they do, in a society bordering on the 21st century, culminated in an examination of the broader, albeit more intangible, phenomenon of political authority and its idiomatic expressions over time within a country and in a particular locality.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE STRUCTURE OF CHIEFTAINSHIP IN LESOTHO

#### Presentation of structure

In order to overcome feelings of strangeness, an anthropologist's early days of research are often a quest for some semblance of order. Locating oneself within a social framework of family, homestead and village is a priority. Identifying structure in what is to be studied is often the next step, both to allay fears about the need to begin to 'do' research and to get some sort of grasp on the subject matter. In my case, these slight foundations of fieldwork were shaken by my inability to meet the chief at Mapholaneng and by the derogatory comments from people about the chieftainship. The symbolic framework of political authority and social order was not presented as expected. This salutary lesson on naivety helped, of course, as I followed the ways in which informants presented the chieftainship to me.

Shortly after my arrival, I was informed about a problem for the maintenance of social order in a neighbouring hamlet. The matter involved the resident phala (loosely translated as 'village headman'). The position is the lowest in a hierarchy which incorporates 'headman' (Ramotse), various ranks of chief (Morena; e.g. sub-ward chief, district chief) up to the king (Motlotlehi). I discuss this hierarchy more fully later. Phala means literally 'trumpet' or 'whistle', and it describes symbolically the status and duties of the political office. A phala is a minor authority who has two duties: to broadcast



messages of the chief to the village residents, and to maintain the peace in the village.

In this instance, the middle aged phala had recently been censured by his peers and by the councillors of chief Ramorabane Sekonyela at Mapholaneng, all elderly men, for throwing his wife out of the home. He was asked to stand down from the office on the grounds that he could not be respected now that he was a 'single man', and in view of the marital discord with his wife. Another elderly man was appointed in his place by the councillors. Six months later, following interventions by other members of the family and by the councillors, husband and wife were living together again. The public face of the marriage was intact and, as a result, the husband was re-appointed as the phala of the hamlet.

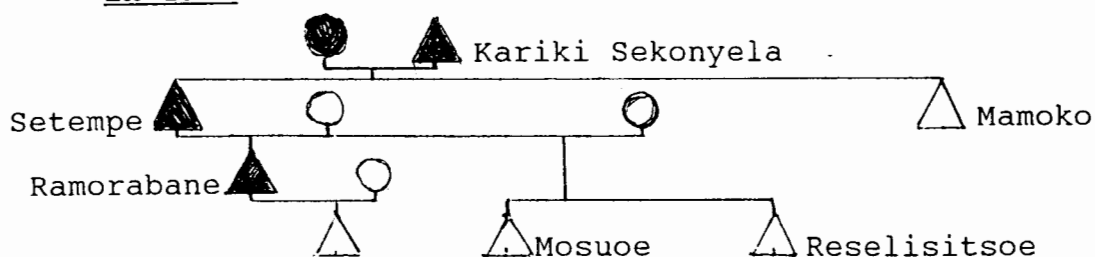
The interventions by the various parties in this case emphasised the structure of authority, that is, the normative procedures and principles by which rural residents govern their settlements. It affirmed publicly-espoused, local values on social order, giving me a grasp on how authority was framed by patriarchal conceptions of society and differentiated in terms of the social status of individuals. The authority of a phala depends on ability to command respect, which is based partly on the trust placed in him by his superior chief or ramotse, but more substantively, on being seen to uphold social norms. This presentation of the chieftainship was tacitly confirmed by the lack of interest shown generally by villagers in the matter. It caused hardly a ripple in Mapholaneng, not only because marital strife is common, but also because the interventions of the

councillors affirmed public values.

Such affirmation was repeated in another instance in early 1987 when, following the death of chief Ramorabane, the issue of succession was openly debated and resolved in Mapholaneneg. However, as witness to the debates and explanations, I was introduced to political undercurrents in the locality which hinted at the way the chieftainship was not simply sustained by adherence to established norms, but shaped by the contemporary concerns of its subjects.

When chief Ramorabane died, he left a male heir who was only three years old. The need to appoint an adult as regent, or 'acting chief', produced four candidates: Ramorabane's wife; one of his uncles, Mamoko Sekonyela, who had been a senior councillor; and the two sons of Ramorabane's father, Setempe Sekonyela, by the latter's second wife (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Genealogical relationships between candidates for the position of 'acting' chief in Mapholaneng sub-ward in 1987



Ramorabane's wife was a contender for a practical reason - to preserve the principle of succession by legitimate male heirs. As a woman she held no primary claim to office. As a woman and mother to a male heir she could only be a regent until such time as her son could be installed as the chief. If she were appointed

as acting chief, her own subsidiary status would ensure that the right of succession of the son would be maintained. Her appointment, as opposed to a male agnate, would also prevent conflict which could possibly arise in the future over her son's genealogical right to the office. Another agnate might contest his status as regent many years later, having got used to being a chief, and seek to usurp the position by casting doubts on the legitimacy of either the wife's marriage to the previous chief or even the parentage of the son.

Ramorabane's wife was soon dismissed by the Sekonyela family on prejudicial grounds, however, the most overt being that she drank liquor too frequently. The accusation was damning, irrespective of its merits. The immediate insinuation was that people would face the same problems with her as they had experienced with both Ramorabane and his father, Setempe, who were regarded as alcoholics. The accusation also cast doubt on her competence as a role model for the heir, and thus raised fears about the latter's future capability. Underlying these doubts were patriarchal prejudices about leadership, and the status and role of women in society.

Ramorabane's uncle, Mamoko Sekonyela, was initially a strong contender. In principle, he had no genealogical grounds to become more than a regent and, in addition, he was an old man who would be unlikely to be in a position to contest the office by the time the heir came of age. Moreover, he was influential, experienced in local affairs and supported by other senior councillors of the deceased chief. These positive characteristics were outweighed, however, by a publicly known accusation of witchcraft against

him, and widespread gossip about his alleged abuse of authority for material gain (that gossip continued after the succession when it was alleged that he has appropriated relief food aid in the wake of heavy snowfalls during October 1987).

The other contenders were Ramorabane's half brothers, Mosuoe and Reselisitsoe. Ramorabane's father, Setempe, had two wives. Ramorabane was the only son of the first wife while the second wife had born Mosuoe and Reselisitsoe. Mosuoe was eventually seen to be the appropriate choice. He was held in high standing as an educated man who held a government job as an Agricultural Officer in the lowlands. He was a legitimate contender as a man, as a close agnate of the deceased chief and, in principle, as an heir to the position after Ramorabane's son. Mosuoe turned down the offer, however, on the grounds that he did not want to sacrifice his career. He would have taken a considerable drop in income to become the chief and, in 16-18 years time when Ramorabane's son would inherit the position of chief, he would be unemployed. Reselisitsoe was, therefore, appointed as 'acting' chief largely by default. His subordinate agnatic status endorsed a position as 'acting' chief. Compared to some candidates, moreover, there were no blemishes on his character. In addition, as one informant noted somewhat acidly, the senior councillors happily endorsed Reselisitsoe because he was young and illiterate, and hence malleable and no threat to their control over the management of affairs.

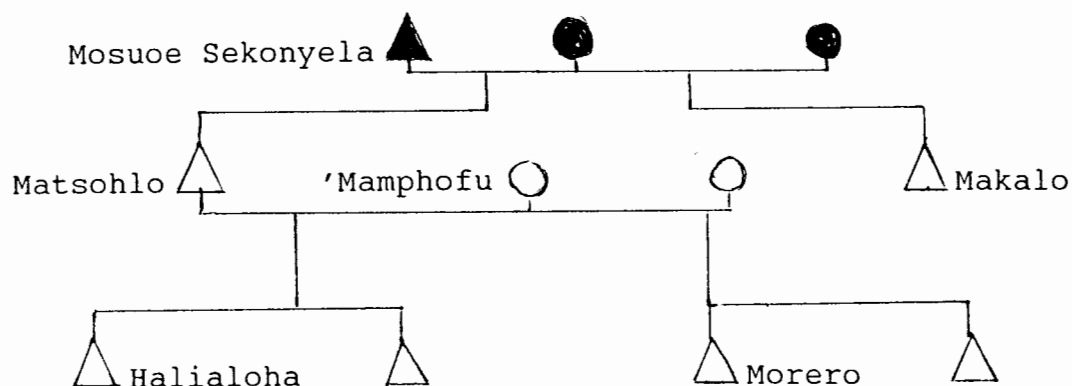
At the time of these events my main informants were people who were antagonistic to the chieftainship, and most of the other village residents showed little interest in the succession. Yet,

a short while later, there was widespread irritation with Reselisitsoe because he had not attended a subject's funeral, and had not sent a representative as etiquette demanded. The common judgement amongst residents was that he needed to start acting like a chief. This event highlighted ambiguities in the normative presentation and explanation of political authority by my informants, and in my own interpretations of events at that time. The succession and people's reactions confirmed a longstanding anthropological explanation of succession to chiefly rule in southern Africa - namely that it is 'heredity modified by expediency' (discussed in more detail later). But the particularities of the events, which I witnessed, cast doubt on the fullness of such an explanation.

To explain the succession in terms of either 'expediency' or, more obtusely, patriarchy, would be to devalue the specificity of the interactions, and to preclude exploration of the possibility that particular practices of an historical moment shape the chieftainship in particular ways. On the one hand, it would draw attention away from the influence of forces other than public norms and values upon the chieftainship. For instance, Mosuoe's rejection of the offer to become regent in favour of his career in the Department of Agriculture alluded to influence of a broader economic and political context in which the chieftainship exists and to which it is beholden. On the other hand, an explanation couched in terms of expediency or patriarchy would be little more than a description of the functions of norms to facilitate action, and ignore questions of why and how particular choices were made.

Although events such as the case of the phala and chief Ramorabane's succession posed more questions than answers, they pointed to the importance of seeing how political authority was expressed and shaped in practice. Regular contact with the Tlokoeng ward chief's office over a period of two years enabled me to observe this process further. During the 1980s, 'Mamphofu, the senior wife of Matsohlo Sekonyela, the senile ward chief at Tloha Re Bue,, was the acting chief. Her position was that of regent in the interregnum between the time when her husband became incapable of administering the ward's affairs and his death, when their eldest son, Halialoha, a married man in his thirties, would formally inherit the position of ward chief (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Genealogical relationships in the Tlokoeng Ward Chief's Office.



'Mamphofu was more than a figurehead. Through force of personality she commanded respect as a chief, while also working hard to maintain the integrity and authority of the office. She was burdened, however, by lack of support from Halialoha and

another son who was often in trouble with the police for various alleged offences. During the mid 1980s she was assisted by two men. One was an 'Executive Officer', a civil servant who had been seconded from the district administration and whose duties were to liaise between government departments and chiefs. The other was Makalo Sekonyela, a half brother of Matsohlo, a gazetted headman and official secretary in the chief's office.

'Mamphofu's authority began to wane in 1987, possibly with her consent. The daily business of the chief's office had been taken over by Makalo and by Morero, the eldest son of Matsohlo's second wife. Morero had replaced the Executive Officer after the latter had been transferred for allegedly misappropriating public funds. Morero was effectively Makalo's understudy, and by 1989, they were the 'power behind the throne'. 'Mamphofu had become a figurehead to Makalo and Morero's administration, and Halialoha had been largely excluded from gaining experience in the administration of the chief's office.

During this period, Halialoha began to assert his claim to authority and, though this was with some justification, his ambiguous status was manipulated on occasion by others. For example, one day during 1987, a wealthy trader wrote out his own grazing permit in front of Halialoha for the latter to sign. This was contrary to regulations and normal practice. Grazing permits record the grazing area and specify the number and type of livestock which can graze in there, and are supposed to be issued in accordance with stipulations on the carrying capacity of the different grazing areas in a ward as determined by the district Agricultural Officer. Normal practice is for chiefs or their

nominated councillors to issue permits according to both official and local assessment of the 'carrying capacity' of grazing land. In this case, 'Mamphofu or Makalo and Morero were the people to whom the trader should have gone for the permit. The trader in question was, however, using the ambiguity in Haliialoha's status and his economic status in the locality to get what he wanted from chiefs, when he wanted.

These events, like those cited earlier, revealed much about the practice of authority, but provided little indication of how to explain the chieftainship in Lesotho. The shifts in loci of authority in the ward chief's office, notably the removal of an 'outsider', the civil servant, and his replacement by a close agnate of the heir, indicated that any explanation would have to account for the culturally idiomatic way in which authority is expressed. An explanation would also have to account for the bureaucratisation of authority which is indicated in the way Morero was being groomed to manage the administrative affairs of the ward with the precepts and demands of the national government in mind. Moreover, the trader's manipulation of Haliialoha highlights the intervention of market forces, suggesting that a chief's authority is subject to modification by many different agencies. It is with these questions in mind that the remainder of the chapter discusses the problems of explaining the chieftainship in Lesotho.

#### What is the chieftainship?

If one were to ask 'what is the chieftainship?' (serena in Sesotho) many Basotho would hesitate to answer, for the way in



which the question is phrased presumes a perspective that many do not share. Few Basotho would adopt such a distanced stance as is implied in use of the word serena which is, indeed, rarely used in conversation. But if one were to ask 'what is a chief?', an answer would be given readily and in a way that indicates the structure of this system of authority.

The chieftainship in Lesotho is described by the people, and by the official record, as as Marena a Lesotho, meaning literally 'the chiefs of Lesotho' (Mazenod, 1984). There are many chiefs in Lesotho, approximately one for every thousand citizens. 1558 individuals were officially recognised as incumbents of the chieftainship in 1984 (Mazenod, 1984), the last time a record was published. Although there are formal distinctions of rank between chiefs (e.g. district chief, ward chief), and between them and headmen (bo ramotse), all are popularly acknowledged by the title morena. Individual chiefs are identified by name for it is the name that relates the person genealogically to predecessors and indicates that the office is an hereditary one. The structure of the chieftainship may be described in turn as a hierarchy of genealogically-related individuals whose status stems from the founding leader of the Basotho nation, Moshoeshoe I. Chiefs are also identified by the area in which they live, which allows description of the chieftainship as a set of offices with jurisdiction over certain settlements, and hence identification of who is subject to which chief. Having located chiefs in time and space, popular descriptions are often elaborated through praise poetry, which is a valued public art, and through stories of what chiefs did, when, where, how and to whom.

It is the popular description which leads to reflection on what one wants to know by asking, 'what is the chieftainship?'. First, to ask the question presumes a place and a time. Were it possible to identify the chieftainship as something which remained unchanged, the question would probably never arise. Popular descriptions of the chieftainship, however, use historical events to illustrate the specific character of the chieftainship at particular times and in particular places, while also giving prominence to certain events in order to indicate changes in form. Secondly, the descriptions inevitably differ because they emphasise 'particular' features at the expense of others. How a chieftainship is described thus becomes significant, not only to identify characteristics which are real and imagined by the record, but also to discern those which are subsumed in the record.

These points simply identify methodological concerns in contemporary southern African historiography. Our concerns are largely with why particular events happened in the history of society, how they influence current developments, and what the future holds in the light of this understanding. In short, we are interested in the processes that shape society in this region. While the past is known to influence the present, how we understand that relationship has proved to be as significant for identifying processes as is exposition of evident and prominent developments. In other words, both the empirical events and what issues and themes underpinned and slanted their recording need to be considered in order to identify social processes.

These caveats guide the discussion here. My aim is to describe

the chieftainship as a social process which will continue to unfold. The chieftainship is not a static entity; it is a social institution shaped, consciously and unwittingly, by people in the course of interpreting and acting upon the world around them. In this case, our focus covers a relatively short span of time and a small geographical area. There has been a chieftainship in Lesotho since the 1840s, and it has been confined for much of this time within the boundaries of the country. Nevertheless, agencies within and beyond Lesotho have shaped the chieftainship, giving it a heritage which stretches back to African societies of pre-colonial times, and across the world to Britain and France, and which incorporates political and economic developments in South Africa.

I start with a stereotypical description of the chieftainship. This description portrays, as I discuss shortly, a pyramid structure with the office of king at the apex under which there are ever larger strata of chiefs and headmen down to a broad base of councillors. This structure is based on a territorial division of authority; small areas administered by headmen are encapsulated in larger and larger territories of succeeding strata of chiefs to the point where the king is vested with authority over the whole country. This is an 'outsider's' view and, as such, it is simplistic. This is not to say that this description is 'wrong'. It aptly reflects the political influence of colonial and post-colonial governments in shaping Lesotho society. However, it obscures the interaction between indigenous and colonial authorities in creating the chieftainship in Lesotho. If we look at this interaction we can see mutual effort

by leaders on both sides to create a hierachial structure of chiefs, but on the basis of different premises and for different purposes. Whereas colonial officials sought to define authority on the basis of territories, in order to facilitate administration of the country according to their precepts of government, the indigenous leaders sought to incorporate this basis within a model of kinship, to emphasise their status as authorities. Political authority was to be structured according to individuals' genealogical position in relation to the founder of the Basotho nation, Moshoeshoe I. There is, therefore, another description of the chieftainship which proclaims a dynastic structure (Hamnett, 1975; Mazenod, 1984).

Both descriptions emphasise the chieftainship as a hierachial structure, but there is an anomaly: Subsumed within both models there are pre-colonial and novel concepts which emphasise both personal relationships between chiefs and subjects, and the subordination of chiefs' authority to the material and symbolic needs of the populace. In other words, there are concepts by which Basotho understand the office of chief as being one aspect of the network of social ties which bind people into a group and through which social and economic activities are mediated. This anomaly suggests description of the chieftainship in terms of a wheel: the chieftainship is the hub of the wheel kept in place by the spokes, which are the relationships between chiefs and subjects. The chieftainship is, in this sense, the focal point of society, around which, and through which, Basotho define the nation, the country, and their place in it. This dynamic is undeniably present today, but it is obscured by other

descriptions of the chieftainship. Its significance will become evident when I discuss the efforts of post-independence governments to integrate the chieftainship with a modern political bureaucracy. These governments have emphasised the chieftainship as a hierarchy of offices in order to align it with the hierachial structure of a modern state. As we shall see in later chapters, that understanding has hindered these governments' ability to govern in the rural areas.

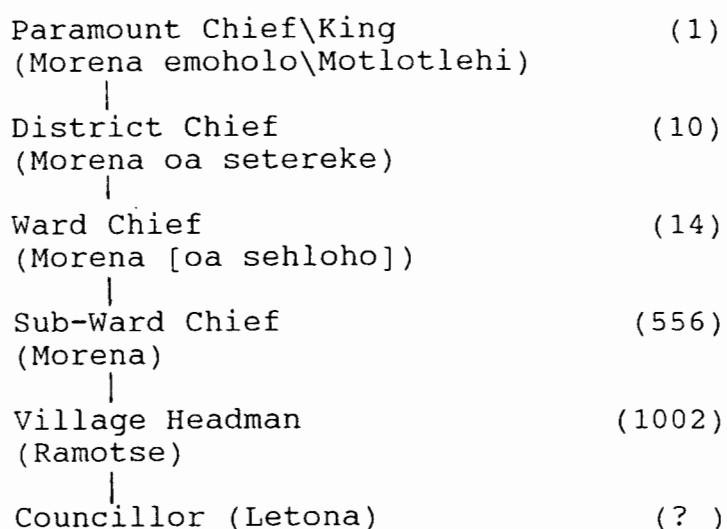
How then to describe the chieftainship of today in Lesotho? Each description reveals significant features and important agencies in its development. Yet no single description is adequate; nor does a combination seem possible without confusion. The descriptions indicate a complex process of political organisation. They point to conflicting notions of what the chieftainship is and what it should be. There is tension between the impetus to define a hierarchy of political authority over and abovethe populace, and that which seeks to keep political authority grounded in citizens' everday concerns and activities. It is this tension which reveals the life and complexity of the chieftainship. The chieftainship is always coming into being, for it has yet to be drawn entirely in the image of any of its makers. This chapter introduces the process by focusing on the effort to create a hierarchy of chiefs and the way this hierachy has been described in the ethnographic record.

### Hierarchies of chiefs

The 'outsider's' description of the chieftainship is illustrated in Figure 3. The numbers in brackets indicate the

approximate number of incumbents in 1984, but they are still applicable because the number of posts is now relatively stable. There is a supreme authority at the apex of the structure which broadens out through different strata of chiefs to a large base of village headmen and, beneath them, to an undetermined but large number of councillors who are advisors to the various chiefs and headmen.

Figure 3: The Pyramid description of the chieftainship



The emphasis is on geographical differentiation of authority. The paramount chief or king has dominion over the whole country. Territorial sub-divisions demarcate areas of jurisdiction of subordinate chiefs, down to a spatially defined unit - the village. This description reflects Lesotho's development as a geo-political entity. Lesotho is a state which occupies a defined area of land. Within the country there are now ten administrative districts: Berea, Butha Buthe, Leribe, Maseru, Mafeteng, Mochale's Hoek, Mochhotlong, Qacha's Nek, Quthing and Thaba Tseka (see Map 1). Within these districts there are

smaller demarcated areas known as wards and sub-wards while numerous villages dot the landscape.

A British imperial hand is evident in these developments. Following the creation of the Basutoland protectorate in 1870, British officials proceeded to establish an administration in terms of territorial units. At the time, this territory was described in terms of three loosely defined areas under the authority of three chiefs, the senior heir to Moshoeshoe I and two of his brothers, and one area governed by a magistrate (Lagden, 1909:462). All were in the lowland regions while the vast mountain interior was simply described as 'very rugged ground' (*ibid*). Later, as colonial services were extended throughout the country, towns or their progenitors, police 'camps', marked core administrative areas which would serve as bases to demarcate districts.

By 1884, when Basutoland became a Crown Protectorate, the borders of the country had been clearly demarcated. By 1904 the interior had been demarcated into seven districts (Berea, Maseru, Leribe, Quthing, Mafeteng, Mhales Hoek and Qacha's Nek). At the turn of the century, Butha Buthe and Mokhotlong were simply small police 'camps' which would later be administrative nuclei for districts that would be demarcated during the 1940s. This practice continued after independence. In 1978 the district of Thaba Tseka was carved out of existing districts, following the growth of a small town, Thaba Tseka, as an administrative centre in the central mountain region for the government and a host of development agencies (Ferguson, 1990:76,80).

The colonial imperative was reflected in the organisation of

indigenous authority. Officials encouraged a form of spatial demarcation by which locally acknowledged senior chiefs were proclaimed as district chiefs and their subordinates were placed in sub-divisions of these areas (wards and sub-wards). Alarmed by the proliferation of chiefs, and by conflicts over territorial claims, the colonial government rationalised the structure during the 1930s (Hamnett, 1975:35-36). A limited number of district, ward, and sub-ward chiefs and headmen were recognised in a government gazette and, thereafter, only these individuals and their heirs were to be accorded official status as authorities. That heritage is evident today. In any locality, people can readily point out the areas under the authority of particular headmen, how these are encapsulated by chiefs' wards and, in turn, the number of wards in the district.

In this description a chief is an authority over a particular territory. Although this is a significant feature of the chieftainship, it is obviously not a characteristic peculiar to the institution. The description defines observable boundaries of political authority but not the authority itself. It emphasises the colonial heritage at the expense of indigenous conceptions of the chieftainship. A closer look at the chieftainship reveals that the colonial description subsumes another description which is based on a patrilineal model of authority that was elaborated by the chiefs themselves. This model originated with Moshoeshoe I who strove to build the Basotho nation into a coherent political entity which could challenge the intrusions of 19th century colonial settlers. Moshoeshoe appointed sons and brothers as chiefs subordinate



to himself, with authority over particular settlements and immigrant populations to his polity. The office of chief was an hereditary authority. Oldest sons inherited the positions of their fathers, and their brothers were appointed as subordinate chiefs to govern smaller communities within the broader community of the oldest sibling.

The chieftainship in Lesotho can be described, therefore, in terms of kinship. The paramount chief is the oldest son of his predecessor in a line which goes back to Moshoeshoe 1. Beneath the paramount chief there is a stratum of senior chiefs emanating, in like fashion, from the four principal sons of Moshoeshoe and some of his brothers. Beneath these chiefs there are others whose predecessors were junior sons of senior chiefs. A full account of this description has to recognise, however, that the hierarchy was as much a response to colonial intrusion as a product of indigenous heritage and, therefore, it was a novel development. Moreover, a full account must recognise the dominance of the colonial authorities in shaping the hierarchy.

This draws us to recognise the ambiguity in the efforts by Basotho to construct an 'indigenous' political structure within the context of colonial domination. For example, this ambiguity is intimated by the lack of concordance between the English and Sesotho terms used to describe the hierarchy (see Figure 3). Morena emoholo (literally, 'big' chief), Motlotlehi (king) and Morena oa setereke (district chief) are close approximations of the English terms, but Morena oa sehloho (literally 'head' chief) does not refer to ward chiefs specifically; it is an address to the senior chief of whatever area is being referred to in a

particular social context. It can be used to refer to the district chief, a sub-ward chief (for which there is no Sesotho term except Morenana [literally, 'little' chief]), or even to a Ramotse. The translation of the word Ramotse as 'village headman' is also potentially misleading. Ramotse means literally, 'Father of a village', but the individuals thus designated are authorities of sub-divisions of wards and sub-wards. They are chiefs in that they have the same responsibilities as their superiors to administer the affairs of the villages in their areas of jurisdiction. The origin and development of these particular ambiguities are explained in the course of the discussion below.

The basis for the 'indigenous' hierarchy is a patrilineal model of kinship which originated in pre-colonial times. It was a model by which people ordered social relationships between individuals, within groups and between groups. Agnatic relationships formed the framework for the transfer of wealth and authority, nominally specified by the link between father and eldest son. Lineages, interconnected through marriages, provided the skeleton for defining individuals as members of a group and for their identity vis a vis other groups. Oral genealogical records which traced male ancestors back to a single legendary ancestor, like branches of a tree to a trunk, provided the structure for identifying clans and the relationship between members of different groups.

The significance of this model for Moshoeshoe was its utility in drawing people into the Basotho polity. In short, the model was people oriented. It defined real and imagined relationships

between the many groups on the highveld and, in the context of colonial intrusion, it could be used to unite those different groups into a corporate entity. Moshoeshoe's half brother, Mopeli Mokhachane, for example, brought his own following into the Basotho fold following the numerous conflicts with colonial settlers during the 1840s and 1850s. Moshoeshoe allowed Mopeli Mokhachane to settle with his people at Mokhetaneng, where he was acknowledged as a chief under the overarching authority of Moshoeshoe's third son, Masopha (Damane and Sanders, 1974:96-97; J.de Miss.Ev.1866, vol 41:46).

Moshoeshoe's skill lay in using his agnates as a nucleus for the corporate body that was to become the Basotho nation. The framework consisted of genealogically-related leaders. The corporate body was built up through combination of different groups under the overall authority of Moshoeshoe. In view of the characterisation of a chief as a father figure, and of his role as a personal leader, it can be said that there was a distinctly indigenous premise to political authority which was the antithesis of the colonial perspective. Humans were the fundamental resource rather than territory. However, elaboration of authority on this premise alone proved to be short lived in the face of persistent colonial pressure. A colonial presence in some form, from the earliest days of the Basotho polity in the 1830s through to the creation of Basutoland and subordination of Basotho to Cape Colony rule in 1869, imposed a different logic upon the kinship model of authority.

Although the patrilineal model helped Moshoeshoe I to draw people into a corporate body, it had little capacity to keep them

there. The model provided a basis for common political identity in the context of external threats. Once people were congregated together and subject to personal leaders, however, there were few constraints to prevent chiefs from leading their followings independently of Moshoeshoe I, in order to satisfy personal ambitions and the economic demands of followers for subsistence. For example, Moshoeshoe I never managed to incorporate Moorosi and his Barolong following, though both leaders were allies against colonial forces (Murray, 1992:15-16). Similarly, Moshoeshoe I often struggled to keep his subordinate chiefs in check. The activities of his nephew, Lesoana, and of his son, Molapo, are cases in point. They were prone to act independently with their own subjects, raiding the Free State and Natal for cattle, and attempting to incorporate people in those territories into their followings (Thompson, 1975:283).

The territorial premise for political authority was slowly imposed through the military and economic domination of the highveld by colonial forces. Between the 1830s and 1869, Basotho fought many wars against colonial forces, and agreed to five separate treaties. The net effect of this conflict was the circumscription of the Basotho polity into a territorial entity - Basutoland. In turn, chiefs came to realise the potential security of territorially defined areas of jurisdiction, while colonial governments used this principle to divide the Basotho polity. At the second Treaty of Aliwal North in 1869, for example, Molapo accepted a status as a chief of a 'reserve' within the Free State, separate from his father's polity (Thompson, 1975:289-290). Similarly, Mopeli Mokhachane was

tempted away from the Basotho fold by the offer of a reserve at Witsieshoek (Eybers, 1918:320,325; J.de Mis.Ev, 1868, vol.43:9).

Throughout this period Basotho were drawn into the market economy of the colonial settlements in ways that contributed to territorial demarcation of the Basotho polity (Germond, 1967:156). Following colonial settlement on the highveld, Moshoeshe I's followers rapidly acquired technical expertise to increase surplus production of crops for trade with colonial settlers (Germond, 1967:439,441,453-454). People were consequently drawn towards seeking secure tenure to land, as much as affiliation to a group, as a basis for survival. This was recognised by Moshoeshe I and others, who attempted to restrict agricultural production and trade amongst their subjects (Kimble, 1978:151-153). Their efforts, however, were short lived because they were counter-productive. Moshoeshe himself encouraged trade as a means to accumulate guns and horses which could be used to defend the Basotho polity (Thompson, 1975:194-195). Moreover, the principle of personal leadership prevented chiefs from obstructing their followers' efforts. If a chief tried to impose restrictions there was little that he could do to prevent a follower leaving the group to join that of a more amenable chief (Eldridge, 1993:148).

By 1870 Basotho had acquiesced to the territorial imperative. Basutoland was clearly demarcated (Molapo's 'reserve' was incorporated into the territory) and colonial officials were sent to establish a government in the new Protectorate. The import of this imperative would, however, take many years to become apparent in the structure of the chieftainship. Initially, the

encapsulation of a population within territorial borders simply created a group for which political organisation had to be developed. Within these confines, Moshoeshoe I's agnates proceeded to elaborate the kinship model of authority to their advantage. An important point here is that they did not have a system that was already in place; they had certain principles which they modified to accommodate the new circumstances.

Hamnett (1975:37-40) provides an apt illustration in his discussion on the 'Laws of Lerotholi'. These 'laws' were written after Lerotholi became paramount chief in 1891, and they are ostensibly a 'declaration of Sotho law and custom'. However, as Hamnett notes, these 'laws' were a means by senior chiefs to codify a system of authority in the image they desired, and to overcome the ambiguities in the kinship model. The rules for succession, for example, coincidentally justified Lerotholi's position as the paramount chief which had been previously contested. The pertinent rule (which is drawn from the 1959 edition of the 'Laws'; Duncan 1960) states that:

'The succession to chieftainship shall be by right of birth; that is, the first born male of the first wife married; if the first wife has no male issue then the first born male child of the next wife in succession shall be chief...Provided that if a chief dies leaving no male issue, the chieftainship shall devolve upon the male following according to the succession of houses.'

The significance of this rule lies the fact that Lerotholi was the oldest son of Letsie I's second wife, and heir apparent because his father's first wife had born no sons. The question

of who would succeed Letsie had been raised hypothetically before Moshoeshoe died, and the latter had tried to stipulate that the heir should be a son born to the daughter of Letsie's first wife. Hamnett (op cit:39-43) goes on to describe similar instances in later years when succession to the paramountcy was open to question by force of circumstance, when different principles had to be applied, and on occasion, when attempts were made to change the 'Laws' to suit the desires of the incumbent paramount chief.

Hamnett (op cit:38) describes the application of the kinship model as 'heredity modified by expediency'. A few principles were elaborated but the model always contained ambiguities that could never be resolved. Hamnett (op cit:25-35) explains these ambiguities by showing that application of the principle of agnatic descent contained two different imperatives, which he calls the 'retrospective' and 'circumspective models'. The former refers to the way Moshoeshoe was seen as a founder of a dynasty, with his four sons forming the basis of cardinal lineages. Taken as fixed points of reference, these lineages determine forever the structure of the chieftainship. In each succeeding generation, the eldest son of each incumbent would inherit the position of chief, and together they would form a closed elite group of chiefs. If these chiefs decided to appoint other agnates or supporters as subordinate chiefs, inheritance to the positions would follow along the same lines as for the principal chiefs. This model expressed in ideal terms the origin of the chieftainship and prescription of authority on the basis of agnatic descent. Having based the chieftainship on a founder,

Moshoeshoe, and his sons, however, the model also contained the seeds for chiefs to use what Hamnett calls the circumspective model. If Moshoeshoe could place his younger sons as chiefs, then other chiefs in each succeeding generation could do the same. The logic of this model is that in each generation a chief acted as a 'new' founder of a lineage. He could place younger sons as chiefs over existing chiefs, including his own brothers who had been similarly appointed in the past by their father, thereby contradicting the retrospective model.

Hamnett's models provide a useful basis for understanding the chieftainship as a structure, and the origins of what is commonly called the 'placing system'. I would argue, however, that he leads us to see the chieftainship in a way which obscures as much as it reveals. To substantiate this point, and to expose the social process by which the chieftainship was created, we need to consider the way in which Hamnett describes the chieftainship. It is my contention that Hamnett, like two other commentators on the chieftainship (Ashton, 1952; Jones, 1951), describes the institution in a way that displaces it from the social context in which it functions. By displacement, I mean that these authors imply that the chieftainship had become fixed into a particular form by the 1950s, and stood above the political economy of the country. This is not to deny that these authors were aware of the interventions of different agents to create the chieftainship, and of the circumstances of the times to which these agents were responding. Their sensitivity to history was subordinated, however, to explanations which limited the agents who were taken into consideration, and which



compacted the social process, in order to present the chieftainship as a finished product of history. In taking issue with the analytical orientation of these authors, I want nonetheless to show that their work raises questions about understanding the chieftainship which can be used to cast a different light on how the chieftainship was created.

There are two features of Hamnett's analysis which concern us here. The first is his focus on the elite of Basutoland society, notably senior chiefs and the colonial government, as the agents who created the chieftainship. The second is that he compresses political events to illustrate the contemporary form of the chieftainship. For example, he moves rapidly from the tensions in the early days of the chieftainship to insert the interventions of the colonial government in 1930s and '40s which openly imposed the territorial component of chiefs' authority. This leads him to take for granted the territorial component of chiefs' authority. The result is an illuminating view of the chieftainship, but there are a number of discrepancies.

In 1938 the colonial government formally began to rationalise the chieftainship through statutory proclamations. The number of chiefs was reduced, and the statutory authority of chiefs was subsequently curtailed and made subordinate to the colonial government (Ashton, 1952:186; Hamnett, 1975:35). The placing system had previously led to a proliferation of chiefs as incumbents attempted to place succeeding generations of heirs into positions of authority. The proclamations were a means for the colonial government to clarify territorial areas of jurisdiction, to specify the number of these chiefs in these

areas, and to subordinate the authority of chiefs to colonial institutions. However, as Hamnett (1975:35-36) has argued, colonial consultation with senior chiefs meant that:

'At its worst, the 1938 legislation had the unanticipated and unintended effect of giving the major chiefs carte blanche to reconstruct the political system to their own liking.'

Through the advice of the 'major chiefs', individuals whose genealogical ties were closer than others to Moshoeshoe I and his immediate heirs were confirmed as authorities, thereby reaffirming their status as senior chiefs. Other chiefs and headmen whose genealogical status did not dovetail with this rendition of the patrilineal model generally lost their legal status as authorities. Intwined with his insights into the placing system and the colonial interventions, Hamnett infers (rather than substantiates) the introduction of the territorial model of authority. For example, he describes the placing system as:

'...the system whereby Moshoeshoe and his successors and senior subordinates appointed members of their own agnatic kin to chieftainship positions over local groups within their territorial control' (1975:25). Likewise, he asserts that 'Now, political authority in Lesotho is, in principle, territorial' (1975:30).

Hamnett's analysis presents the chieftainship as a history of the elite in which the kinship and territorial models were ultimately synchronised. The effect is affirmation of the 'outsider's' description of the chieftainship, but this is an image of its form and not really of its content and, therefore, one must begin to question what Hamnett's analysis really

reveals. The thrust of his analysis is to show that the chieftainship was shaped into a more coherent form than it had in the past as a result of the combined actions of senior chiefs and colonial officials. The possibility of a neat synchronisation of the kinship and territorial models seems unlikely, however, in view of the different premises of their creators, and the ambiguities in the kinship model. In addition, Hamnett's own argument that the political system was re-constructed points to a re-creation of political authority, which suggests new tensions and contradictions as much as resolution of old ones. Finally, as much as institutions may be shaped by elites in society, it is improbable that something so central as the chieftainship in Lesotho could be constructed without significant interventions by its subjects.

Having cast some doubts on the scope of Hamnett's analysis rather than its general validity, one must begin to assess the source of these limitations. Hamnett elaborates a trend set by Ashton (1952) and Jones (1951) who focused on the judicial process behind the creation of the chieftainship. The bias in this approach is its propensity to focus on elites because they are the agency which stands out in the judicial documents. Furthermore, the role of elites had been a particular concern, indeed, a fear of the colonial government which Ashton (1952:309) alluded to, at a time when Jones had been employed by the government to analyse particular political developments that followed the rationalisation of the chieftainship.

For example, Jones (1951) made detailed examinations of the infamous episode of liretlo - the 'medicine murders' which

followed the interventions of the late 1930s and 1940s. Ashton (1952: 307-314) reiterated much of Jones' analysis and included data from what appears to have been Jones' initial report (Jones, n.d.).<sup>1</sup> Both authors highlighted the judicial process and the social context in terms of the concerns and actions of senior chiefs. They argued that that these murders were linked to the rationalisation of the chieftainship, which undoubtedly created tensions amongst the chiefs. The murderers included senior chiefs. Thus their arguments were plausible. Their analyses also suggested a fratricidal conflict, a re-organisation of the pecking order within the hierarchy which occurred when the colonial authorities brought into the open their territorial demands of the chieftainship. By suggesting that the murders were really expressions of an internal dispute over ranking of the incumbents within the chieftainship, as opposed to conflict over the form of the institution, Ashton and Jones implied that the murders were a dramatic finale to re-construction of the chieftainship. Accordingly, both authors laid the basis for Hamnett's later study; guiding it to presume the form of the chieftainship, but towards more detailed analysis of the internal structural tensions.

Ashton's and Jones' analyses play down, however, the fact that the murders were carried out in a culturally idiomatic way and involved ordinary people who were often victims. If these factors are taken into account, the episode suggests not only a re-organisation of the pecking order vis a vis the dominance of colonial authority, but also a re-assessment and re-assertion of indigenous notions of authority, albeit in a violent way. The

fact that they continued for nearly a decade, and that disputes over chiefs' territorial boundaries and over inheritance to office are still common, suggest that the colonial interventions did not resolve the contradictions between the kinship and territorial models, let alone the ambiguities in the former model.

These doubts about the presentation of the chieftainship as a completed product of history demand re-assessment of the theoretical perspective which informs it. Hamnett's (*ibid*) characterisation of the reproduction of the chieftainship as 'heredity modified by expediency' coincides with the perspective of Comaroff (1978) on Tswana chieftainships, the principles of which were seen as applicable to other African social institutions by Kuper (1982). This perspective explains the reproduction of social institutions as a dialectical process between the rules for social order and the circumstances in which they are applied. Hamnett, Comaroff and Kuper espouse a common argument, which is that this process indicates a struggle over social institutions, that is over their form, to maintain the integrity of the rules irrespective of the political and economic circumstances of African society which have changed markedly.

This kind of explanation is synchronic. The emphasis is on why a social institution such as the chieftainship in Lesotho retains a coherent form through time, despite occasional and marked change in the circumstances which the institutions were originally designed to address. The explanation views the process as akin to the arc of a pendulum. Modifications to the institution are indicated by distinguishing different points

through which the pendulum passes. The continued existence of the institution, in a form broadly recognisable as similar across time, is governed by the limited arc of the pendulum's movement that is of consistent nature.

Thus Hamnett's explanation of Lesotho's chieftainship, in terms of retrospective and circumspective models, is really description of the opposite ends of a pendulum within which the chieftainship moves, sometimes emphasising one orientation, sometimes the other. Comaroff adopts a slightly different approach in his illustration of how conflicts over succession to office are ultimately resolved. In his view, choice of a particular individual to be a chief is legitimated after the event by changing the status of the new incumbent if necessary, so that it accords with the principles of hereditary used by society, and by showing as a result the illegitimacy of the other contenders' status. The argument that the politics of succession is a question of correspondence between the status and ambitions of interested parties and society's rules is really description of how an institution is moved from one point to another in a fixed arc.

The assumption in this type of explanation is that an institution has definite limits within which modifications are tolerated. Kuper's (1982) essay, which focused on bridewealth to illustrate the dialectic between rules and circumstance, stretched the limits of this assumption even further. His argument was that there are ambiguities within the rules which people exploit. The way they are exploited, to emphasise one or other interpretation of the rules, indicates the changes that

occur. The thrust of his argument was that institutions change in a series logical shifts to keep them consistent with, and useful for people to respond to, changing circumstances. Kuper's analysis suggests a break with the pendulum analogy; it suggests that there is subtle change in the nature of an institution such that, eventually, it may share little more than name to earlier forms. What Kuper does is to draw attention to that part of the political process wherein people refer as much to the circumstances as to the rules for social order in their effort to maintain the structural integrity of an institution. His argument begins to illustrate the limitations of others' arguments, but falls short of making a break with them.

If we pursue Kuper's understanding of the process, the argument which can be made with equal validity is that the process implies not only change within prescribed limits but also a fundamental shift, however subtle, from one state to another. However much people may believe and act in ways to suggest that the chieftainship is as it always was, the placement of a new person and realignment of political affiliations produces an order and political dynamics that are different to those which existed previously. The implication is that in every situation where the rules for social order have to be publicly re-affirmed, people recognise the lack of correspondence between the rules and circumstance. Consequently there is overt and latent concern that there will be ever greater discrepancies in the future.

Therefore, I argue that Hamnett (1975), his predecessors (Ashton, 1952; Jones, 1951), and Comaroff (1978) have all emphasised one aspect of the dialectic, namely the struggle over

social institutions which emphasises their history and people's efforts to sustain that heritage. They have downplayed the other aspect of the dialectic, namely the struggle for social institutions which emphasises present circumstances and people's concern to shape the institution so that it will be relevant into the future. Furthermore, Hamnett's and Comaroff's renditions of authority emphasise the way in which it is invested in the chief through reference to history and principle, and downplay the way authority is also determined in the interactions between chief and subject. The point here is that they privilege principle over circumstance, and as a result do not explore fully the complexity of circumstance.

With regard to the chieftainship in Lesotho, I argue that 'expediency' in the implementation of principles should be seen as a struggle for the chieftainship in terms of finding a person and re-aligning political affiliations that are appropriate for society to address the future. Simply put, the demand is 'the best man for the job'. There is of course no inherent requirement that people will be explicit about this concern, or that the 'best' decision is ever taken, or that 'the best man' will be chosen. Social and economic inequalities in society may result in a choice of someone suitable only to the interests of a minority. Contingent factors are significant, moreover, in that they express the 'interests' of people concerned, that is, their perspectives and actions to ensure personal and society's capacity to address the future. The critical points, however, are that this aspect of the dialectic demands recognition that a social institution is never a finished product of history, and



that ordinary people are as much agents in the shaping of the chieftainship as are the elites of society.

The dialectic, let alone the points above, cannot be demonstrated easily, in view of the multitude of issues which lie behind 'principle' and 'circumstance'. This dialectic was intimated in the three illustrations, cited at the beginning of the chapter, of the practice of political authority in Tlokoeng ward during the late 1980s. Nonetheless, these cases provide no more than clues for an appropriate direction for subsequent analysis which is pursued in the following chapters.

To summarise, these cases highlighted the situational and temporal specificity of chiefs' authority, intimating that the chieftainship is a dynamic institution whose form and content is still being shaped even though its form has become more coherent since the late 19th century, as Ashton (1952) and Hamnett (1975) have demonstrated. In making the obvious point that the analysis needs to consider the contemporary as well as the historical context, I emphasise the dialectic in the construction of the chieftainship, and this precludes any understanding of the chieftainship as an institution which has been produced and reproduced according to a pattern determined in the past. While there is a pattern in terms of persistent expression of certain criteria of authority, the attempted integration of the territorial and kinship models points to contradictions rather than resolutions in the form and content of the chieftainship. In addition, the cases cited at the beginning of the chapter indicate that the chieftainship is not only a creation of the elites in Lesotho but also of ordinary people. In other words,

there is a need to question what has happened, and what is happening, at the interface of intent to create a particular political order and the multitude of conflicting interventions to achieve this aim.

I have set out the argument in the manner above in order to get beyond the rather dated literature on the chieftainship in Lesotho, and to place this study in the realm of contemporary, political and theoretical concerns of anthropology in South Africa noted in chapter 1. In particular, there are strong parallels between this study and a recent historical work by the Comaroffs (1991) on the interactions between pre-colonial Tswana chiefdoms and the vanguard of the colonial settlers, notably, missionaries. Their study was an exploration of how political and economic institutions were not only re-constructed as a result of colonial domination, but also how they were re-fashioned over time as a result of the interaction between coloniser and colonised. Included in their study was analysis of the interplay between kinship and territorial constructs of authority amongst Tswana chiefdoms (op cit:136, 146, 151, 161-162, 166). It also suggested that the upheavals of the Lifagane at the beginning of the 19th century caused both disruption of established political discourse, and efforts to reconstruct earlier arrangements (op cit:168). Furthermore, it outlined how local territorial constructs were contested and ultimately re-fashioned following the intervention of colonial agencies (op cit:203, 290-292). Their study was, however, part of a broader project by them on colonialism: in short, 'a study of the colonization of consciousness and the consciousness of

colonization' (op cit:xi). This study has a narrower focus than the Comaroffs' work, but like the latter, it seeks to understand the role of the colonised as agents, as much as subjects, of the history of southern Africa.

#### Point of departure

Ethnographic description of Lesotho's chieftainship has alluded to, but obscured a dialectic which can be broadly defined as a struggle over, and a struggle for, the institution. The former struggle has been well documented in the ethnographic literature, for it is a reflection of the interventions of colonial officials and senior chiefs which have been most visible for observation. The struggle for the chieftainship is less visible, however, for it is to be found in the interactions between the rural populace and chiefs, notably those in the lower echelons of the hierarchy. The important corollary is that while the struggle over the chieftainship focuses on maintenance of the formal structure of the hierarchy by reference to history, the struggle for the institution focuses on its re-creation by reference to the present and the future.

Acknowledgement of the struggle for the chieftainship requires analysis of the broader economic and social context in which the chieftainship exists. This is an obvious point, but analysis cannot simply account for this context in terms of general forces such as the market economy and the state, when the rural populace clearly intervenes as well on the basis of their understanding of these forces. The implication of this point is that the chieftainship is subject to the contemporary concerns of the

rural populace. I argue that the rural populace continually re-assesses what chiefs do, and acts to keep the chieftainship relevant to its needs, as the circumstances of rural life change. The rural populace's continuing struggle to ensure that the exercise of authority reflects their changing needs means that the chieftainship is never fixed, but always coming into being. The following chapters illustrate this point.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE MAKING OF CHIEFS IN MOKHOTLONG

##### Chiefs, the colonial government and subjects

Ethnographic descriptions of the chieftainship have highlighted the actions of elites to create and to sustain the institution. This bias hides a complex history of interventions by different agencies. Although the interventions of elites, notably colonial officials and senior chiefs, cannot be ignored, they must be seen in relation to the interventions of their subjects, if analysis is to avoid the mistake of presenting the chieftainship as an institution whose existence has been determined only by elites.

In order to correlate the interventions of different agencies, I analyse the relationship between chiefs and the colonial government, between chiefs, and between chiefs and subjects. This chapter focuses on the first two sets of relationships. By looking at how criteria of authority were expressed in different ways and at different times in these relationships, I draw out the key elements of the relationship between chief and subject with which these agents were grappling. My aim is to examine the history of the attempts to combine the kinship and territorial models of authority, in order to reveal general features of the relationship between chief and subject for further examination in subsequent chapters. This analysis is based on the history of the chieftainship in Mokhotlong.

### The making of chiefs in Mokhotlong

The 'placing system' aptly describes Lelingoana Sekonyela's appointment as a chief in what was later to become Mokhotlong district. As I noted in chapter 1, Letsie I granted Lelingoana the right to occupy land east of the Malibamatso river and north of its junction with the Senqu river. In the 1890s, Letsie's successor, Lerotholi, despatched a brother, Rafolatsane, to settle on land south of the Senqu river but near to Lelingoana. Both appointments marked the initial steps towards extension and consolidation of political authority by Moshoeshoe's heirs. By placing Lelingoana, they honoured an ally and extended the paramount chief's influence into the interior of the country, at a time when Basotho were beginning to occupy this land. Rafolatsane's placement highlights their efforts to consolidate their presence in the mountains. However, one must acknowledge that these steps were informed by political uncertainties of the time.

Those uncertainties are recorded in the oral history of Tlokoeng ward. My discussions with elderly residents in the ward, on the history of Batlokoa settlement in the region, produced a common explanation about the placement of Lelingoana and Rafolatsane. Ironically, the explanation of why Rafolatsane was placed near to Lelingoana inverts that of Lelingoana's placement in the first place.

On the one hand, it was said that Lelingoana was placed as a barrier against possible encroachment by Zulus into Lesotho. There is some justification for this reasoning. Although the internal constitution of Basutoland took place in a time of

relative peace, there was still turmoil in the Cape colony and Zulu rebellions against colonial rule in Natal were only just coming to an end (Beinart & Bundy, 1987). On the other hand, it was said that Rafolatsane was placed to prevent collaboration by the Batlokoa with the Zulus. This explanation is also plausible if one recognises that in use of the word 'Zulu' the oral history refers to Nguni-speaking people from which the Zulu nation evolved, and more broadly, to Nguni people whom Basotho distinguish as a different ethnic group. The eastern mountain region borders on Natal, from where refugees fled during the course of the rise of the Zulu state and subsequent colonial interventions (Thompson, 1975; Lye & Murray, 1980; Heard, 1976). There were also scattered settlements of Bathepu, an Nguni-speaking people, in the area during the late 19th century, according to chief Thabo Matete and other residents of Mateanong, a village in the eastern part of Mokhotlong district near the junction of the Mokhotlong and Sangebethu rivers.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Batlokoa group originated amongst Nguni-speaking people, and that heritage was espoused, after Lelingoana's placement, by his followers through association of particular clan affiliations of Nguni origin with particular settlements (Ashton, 1952:200).

The explanations allude to important political considerations at the time, from which we can discern the initial criteria by which political authority was established. On the one hand, the placement of Lelingoana and Rafolatsane established the presence of the Basotho paramountcy in the eastern mountain region through which a hierarchal pattern of authority was introduced. The authority of Lelingoana and Rafolatsane stemmed from being

accredited senior chiefs supported directly by the paramount chief. This gave them access to large areas of land, which attracted followers over whom they needed to establish subordinate authorities. On the other hand, the sequential placement of Lelingoana and Rafolatsane reveals the process by which political boundaries were drawn in reference to followers and their leaders. Having incorporated the mountain region within the ambit of a Basotho geo-political entity, there was a moment of contradiction in allowing the re-birth of a Batlokoa political grouping, but this was offset by the placing of Rafolatsane and his followers. A similar scenario occurred earlier and further south when Letsie 1 despatched the son of a councillor, Thlakanelo, to control settlement and reportedly to prevent 'Baputhing immigrants from establishing themselves independently' (Germond, 1967:429).

In summary, three criteria of authority guided the establishment of the chieftainship in the Mokhotlong area; the colonial circumscription of Basutoland, the notion of hierarchy in terms of patrilineality, and the political organisation of people by reference to their particular leaders. The interplay of these criteria marks the process by which political authority was constructed. How people expressed these criteria, re-defining them and re-moulding them as circumstances changed, marks the attendant process by which particular attributes of the chieftainship came into being. However, we must recognise that the criteria outlined above were not uniformly present during the early days of settlement in the mountains.

For instance, the early demarcations of loci of authority



cannot be read simply as territorial demarcations. Although the Senqu river distinguished the settlements under the authority of Lelingoana and Rafolatsane, the oral record of Rafolatsane's placement suggest that the notion of territory was subordinate to personal allegiance to chiefs. Similarly, given that territorial areas of jurisdiction had yet to be defined within Lesotho at the time of Lelingoana's placement, then clearly, other criteria informed use of the Malibamatso river as a marker of Lelingoana's authority. The criteria which were most significant can be discerned from the conditions under which Lelingoana was placed in the mountain region. While Lelingoana's placement as a subordinate authority to the paramount chief introduced the criterion of hierarchy, it also affirmed pre-colonial criteria of what it was to be a chief. A chief was the pivot on which people identified themselves politically as members of a group. Accordingly, political authority was based on the personal relationships which a chief established with his followers. This meant that when Lelingoana arrived in the mountains his authority depended more on his capacity to command allegiance from people than on proclamation of his right to administer a particular area.

This basis of authority is illustrated in an episode which occurred shortly after Lelingoana settled in the mountains. According to Mapholaneng residents, the environs of this village used to be occupied by a Makhelokoe group prior to Lelingoana's arrival. These people were under the patronage of chief Joel, a brother of the paramount chief, Letsie I. They rejected Lelingoana's authority, which led to conflict and, eventually,

to their expulsion from the area. Reportedly, Joel later led a force to challenge Lelingoana but turned back before engaging with Lelingoana's forces.<sup>2</sup>

In this case, Lelingoana's formal status as a delegate of the paramount chief carried little weight in his dealings with these people. The central issue was whether they would identify themselves with Lelingoana, and thus affirm his status as a chief. By choosing to resist Lelingoana, they distinguished themselves as a separate group (which is perhaps, the reason why they are identified as 'Makholokoe' by present day residents of Mapholaneng). Once the political boundary had been drawn, Lelingoana faced a critical challenge to his future as a chief. If he acquiesced to the resistance, he would establish a precedent for others, including ambitious followers, to deny him his status. There was also the possibility that he would become simply a leader of one of a number of independent groups under different chiefs. Such action would have been tantamount to giving up the opportunity which the paramount chief had given him to become the senior authority in the region.

In choosing to use military force against the group, Lelingoana resolved that crisis, but he also drew a clear political boundary by indicating that settlers in the region would have to express allegiance to him if they wanted to settle there. Joel's response, irrespective of its failure, confirms the nature of the political context at the time. By choosing a military option, he sought to contest Lelingoana's ability to be the patron of settlers in the mountains.

While these events highlight the means used to create

political organisation within the Basotho polity, its corrolary should not be forgotten; namely, rejection of people who would not identify with the political and economic aspirations of chiefs and settlers. For example, Lelingoana allegedly revelled in decimating the Bushmen population in the Maluti mountains (Wilson, n.d.:5). A missionary report (Germond, 1967:418) notes:

'Until recently, the mountains were uninhabited. The Bushmen, whom the Basuto on their arrival from the northward found in possession, were gradually driven to the most difficult country, till in 1871, the last remnant were, in retaliation for repeated cattle thefts, destroyed by Jonathan and Joel Molapo, grandsons of Moshoeshoe, who then as now, lived in Northern Basutoland.'

Lelingoana only arrived in the mountains in the 1880s. Therefore, it is probable that he simply continued the genocide of those Bushmen who, having survived the depredations of Joel and Jonathan, had retreated into the far reaches of the area he had come to occupy.

Various developments following Lelingoana's arrival illustrate the centrality of patronage, and its expression in terms of kinship. The central variable was command over people rather than territory, as is illustrated in village names, for it was through settlement that chiefs established control over use of the land and its constituent resources. For example, Lelingoana's village, Malingoaneng, means literally 'where Lelingoana's people are'. Similarly, the names of many villages throughout Lesotho have a prefix, 'Ha', followed by a personal name, indicating how the kinship model was applied in practice.

The nucleus of a village would be an original homestead established by a man and his wife/wives. In time, sons would establish their own homesteads in that place and, with immigration of friends and affines, the hamlet would grow into a village. Authority in the hamlet was defined in relation to the founder who would be regarded by the other residents as the 'Father' (Ramotse) of the settlement, and whose name would identify it.

Elevation to status as a chief depended on popular acknowledgement of the person's capabilities as a leader, and on the support of established chiefs such as Lelingoana. Again, a paternalistic ethos prevailed as Rafolatsane and Lelingoana established their authority by the standards of the day. For instance, as people came to settle in the mountains, Lelingoana appointed his sons as chiefs and sent them with small followings to establish villages in the main river valleys. Similarly, he allowed a re-constituted Batlounge group to settle in the lower part of the Khubelu valley and acknowledged its leader as a chief under his overall authority (that area is known as Khatleli, the name of the original leader of the immigrant group). As each community grew and new hamlets were established, these chiefs would appoint their own kin and councillors, or acknowledge village founders, as subordinate authorities. In each case, the subordinate authorities were 'fathers' to their own subjects, and Lelingoana was the paternal figure to all who acknowledged his authority.

The personal character of authority is also reflected in changes in village names. For example, there is a village which

used to be known as Ha Thakatsilo but which is commonly known as Likomeng (literally: 'where klipspringer are') today. Thakatsilo was a son of Lelingoana who was appointed chief of this community after Lelingoana moved from there to establish Malingoaneng. The lineage of Thakatsilo subsequently died out and authority over the settlement was transferred to another descendant of Lelingoana, Qaqailana, who lived in the area. Once he became chief over this village along with others in the locality, the area became known as Qaqailana, and it is still known by this name today.

The criterion of territory was a latent factor in this pattern of settlement and authority. Its emergence was a slow process, as is illustrated in an agreement by Lelingoana, at the behest of the paramount chief, Lerotholi, to grant the area between the Malibamatso and Matsoku rivers to chief Joseph Molapo at Leribe, for use as grazing land by the latter's subjects (JC, 1946:2-3, 14). The critical issue in this case was the source and purpose of the request. Following the circumscription of Basutoland, Basotho were compelled to move into the interior as their population grew. When Joseph requested grazing land from Lelingoana, he was reacting to a common problem. As the population grew in the lowlands, so more land was turned over to settlement and cultivation with a consequent decrease in grazing land. The request for grazing land in the mountains was, therefore, symptomatic of the pressures of population growth.

It is also probable that Joseph's formal status influenced the agreement. Joseph was the senior descendant of the cardinal lineage established through Moshoeshoe's son, Molapo. In a

context where Moshoeshoe's heirs were elaborating the kinship model of authority, this meant that Joseph was nominally the most senior chief in the country after the paramount chief. Taking into account the system of patronage which governed the practice of authority at that time, Lelingoana would have courted political disaster by refusing Joseph's request, but would have helped his own career by acknowledging his position as a client of the Basotho paramountcy.

Furthermore there would have been little reason for Lelingoana to reject the request. He had a large area to the east of his own settlements, which could be used as grazing land as the need arose. Moreover, the matter did not involve any question of jurisdiction over settlement and followers. Like other unsettled valleys, the Malibamatso/Matsoku area was simply a place for building of grazing posts to be used by herders during the summer months. The land could be used by any person, but they had to get permission from the relevant chief, whose duties included management of grazing resources. Lelingoana's followers were not prohibited from using the land but, in the future, they would have to get permission from Joseph. This did not mean that they had to change allegiance to Joseph, for their status as subjects was determined by their residence in a village and not by the location of their grazing posts. Equally, there would have been little reason for Joseph to deny use of this land to Lelingoana's subjects, for it covered a large area for what would have been, at the time, relatively few people and livestock. Yet, when the district of Mokhotlong was created in the 1940s, after longstanding recognition that the Leribe chief controlled use of

this grazing land, the Matsoku river was used by colonial officials to demarcate a district boundary.

The territorial model of authority became apparent as the colonial government established a visible presence in the mountain region. This occurred with the establishment of a police camp on the site of present day Mokhotlong town in the early 1900s (Jones n.d.:1). The police force was placed under the authority of the District Commissioner at Qacha's Nek. This meant that this region became part of Qacha's Nek district, but at the time the categorisation was nominal rather than substantial. The district had no clear boundaries, and there does not seem to have been any attempt by colonial officials to interfere with local efforts to construct a chieftainship.

The chiefs, however, recognised the tacit change in the formal relationship between them. At the time, one of a chief's duties was to send stray stock to his superior. Lelingoana would have been the chief to whom his subordinates sent the stray stock, and as a senior and relatively independent chief he would have retained them. There is evidence (JC, 1946:2), however, that Lelingoana began to send stray stock to chief Makhaola, the principal chief at Qacha's Nek. The evidence is admittedly very scant, but it seems probable that Lelingoana's nominal inclusion into Qacha's Nek district was used by the paramountcy to begin delineating the relative status of the chiefs in the region. Lelingoana and Rafolatsane stood on a par with Makhaola, in terms of being subordinate only to the paramount chief. Makhaola was senior to the other two chiefs, however, by virtue of being a son of the deceased paramount chief, Lerotholi. As a client of the

paramount chief in a context where the kinship model of authority was commonly accepted, Lelinogana would have been susceptible to claims that he show his allegiance by paying tribute.

The next shift in loci of authority occurred in 1925 when the paramount chief, Griffith, decided to place his heir, Seeiso, as a chief in Mokhotlong, and as a superior to Lelingoana and Rafolatsane. At first glance, this decision illustrates the process by which the kinship model was used to construct the chieftainship. The consequences, however, reveal the ambiguities of, and constraints on, the process. The placing was couched in the familiar phrase, bokhina pere. This means literally 'to knee-halter a horse', and referred to common political practice for appointing new chiefs amongst others.

The phrase encapsulates metaphorically different dimensions of the practice. It refers to the new chief (the horse) who, if he is to be a chief, must be tied to a particular locality (a knee-halter prevents a horse from straying). It also indicates that those people who appoint the new chief, and those people amongst whom he is to be placed, determine the scope of the appointee's authority (one puts a knee halter on a horse to limit its scope of movement but, at the same time, to allow it to graze). The phrase also indicates that the chiefs who accept the placement are providing for the welfare of the new chief. Accordingly, the allusion is that the new chief exists on their sufferance and, therefore, is not necessarily senior to them. Likewise it refers to the possibility that the new chief is not necessarily a permanent appointment (a knee halter is a temporary constraint). Finally it also refers to the need to provide a



space in which the new chief can draw sustenance (a horse needs an area to graze).

The ambiguities in bokhina pere virtually ensured that Seeiso's placing would be contested. The contest would be a muddled affair, spanning many years and incorporating new developments and re-interpretations of past events. The contest was to hinge on the status of the chiefs relative to each other. The different criteria of authority would be re-fashioned and elaborated in different ways.

The formalities of Seeiso's placement projected an image of a hierarchy defined according to the principle of agnatic descent. The paramount chief legitimately placed his heir as a chief over two other chiefs. In addition, chief Makhaola presided over the ceremonies as might be expected given that he was the incumbent senior chief in the region. However, the formalities obscured deep divisions between the chiefs. On the one hand, neither Lelingoana nor Rafolatsane was prepared to accept Seeiso's placement. On the other hand, Jones (n.d.:1) reported that the paramount chief deliberately placed Seeiso in this unfriendly environment with a view to promoting another son, Bereng, as his heir to the paramountcy.<sup>3</sup>

After Seeiso had settled near the police camp, neither of the two chiefs relinquished villages under their control. By refusing to fulfil the requirements of bokhina pere, the two chiefs virtually prevented Seeiso from being a chief except in name. Seeiso controlled only the village he established. Without a broad base of subjects, he could not mediate their need for land. Without such access to people and land, he could not control land

use and settlement. Without a basis for exercising patronage, he could not earn an income and affirm his status as a chief.

Seeiso was caught in an impossible situation. He was a proclaimed chief and heir to the paramountcy. He had to live up to that status which meant distribution of largesse to the followers who supported him. However, Lelingoana and Rafolatsane actively prevented him from building up a basis upon which he could exercise patronage. In 1928, for example, the paramount chief ordered Rafolatsane and Lelingoana to remit stray stock to Seeiso rather than to Makhaola (JC 1946:2). It subsequently transpired that neither of the two chiefs obeyed the order. In face of these problems, Seeiso fell into debt and became an irritant to the colonial officials. In 1931, indeed, the colonial authorities had to intervene in Seeiso's personal affairs, and instruct him to sell some of his livestock (Jones, n.d.:3).

In the meantime the colonial government was beginning to translate the kinship model into their terms. The initial step was to categorise chiefs like Lelingoana and Rafolatsane as 'sub-chiefs' (JC, 1946:2), on the grounds that 'chiefs' were the senior living agnates drawn from the four cardinal lineages of Moshoeshoe's heirs (Ashton, 1952:187). Lelingoana objected to this categorisation. The paramount chief sought a compromise by stating that Lelingoana would continue to be categorised as a chief, out of respect for his old age (he was reportedly born in the 1840s, Wilson, n.d.:1), but his successor would be regarded only as a sub-chief (JC, 1946:4). This was a compromise of the moment, but it also illustrates the collaboration between the senior chiefs and the colonial government in creating the

chieftainship. The intervention had little immediate effect, however, for it addressed the colonial government's perception of the chieftainship rather than the reality of the structure in the area. Although the re-categorisation of Rafolatsane and Lelingoana bolstered Seeiso's formal status relative to them, it did not affect their ability to deny him the means to consolidate his position.

Distinctions in status amongst these authorities were confused, at this time, by the application of different criteria of authority. Seeiso was regarded as the most senior chief by the paramountcy and the colonial government. That status would also have been nominally acknowledged by the local populace, given common recognition of the principle of agnatic descent as a determinant of status. However, the inclusion of the category sub-chief complicated the distinctions. From the perspective of the colonial government and paramountcy, Seeiso was the chief (morena), Rafolatsane and Lelingoana were sub-chiefs (marenana) and their subordinates were headmen (ramotse). In local parlance, however, every authority would be called morena out of respect for their position, and terminological distinctions would be made by reference to the history of settlement in the region. For example, a person who controlled several settlements within Lelingoana's sphere of patronage would be identified as ramotse in relation to Lelingoana. But this person would be identified as morena in relation to his own subordinates who would be regarded either as ramotse if they were empowered to act like a chief, or as phala if they were simply village headmen empowered to keep the peace in a village.

The contestants in this struggle were well aware that the central issue was their status relative to each other. Seeiso would have to wait until the 1930s, after Lelingoana and Rafolatsane died, before he could secure any advantage from the colonial intervention. Rafolatsane died in 1932 and Lelingoana in 1934. The demise of these chiefs initiated a period of further shifts in loci of authority. On the one hand, Seeiso pursued with some success the general strategy that his forebears had followed since the death of Moshoeshoe. On the other hand, Mosuo Sekonyela, Lelingoana's heir, adopted different tactics to his father, and eventually succeeded in curtailing the interventions of Seeiso. A critical factor in the contest was the continued intervention of the colonial government.

Following the death of Rafolatsane, the colonial government recommended that Seeiso's area of jurisdiction be enlarged, and this was supported by the paramount chief (Jones, n.d.: 3). The decree probably would have been difficult to implement had Rafolatsane not died without an immediate heir. The lack of an evident heir led to a succession dispute amongst Rafolatsane's agnates and followers which indirectly served Seeiso's interests.

Rafolatsane's senior wife, 'Makori had no sons. His second wife, had born two sons, but both had predeceased Rafolatsane. The third wife had born a son, but he was reportedly crippled and unambitious (Ashton, 1952:198). The dispute began over inheritance claims to Rafolatsane's property which required resolution of who would inherit the latter's position. Eventually, 'Mankata, the widow of Rafolatsane's eldest son, was

chosen to be the chief. The rationale for this choice is not recorded and any explanation is, therefore, speculative. It seems, however, that the principle of agnatic descent was applied, but in a convoluted and contradictory manner. This can be surmised from the post facto statement of the paramount chief's court, which authorised 'Mankata's appointment, and which stated: 'Mankata you are a Rafolatsane and therefore the stock are yours and being Rafolatsane, you must feed, clothe and plough for his widow, 'Makori" (Jones, n.d.:4).

Once Rafolatsane's surviving son by his third wife had recused himself, there being no binding reason why an heir had to become a chief, attention would have turned to Rafolatsane's oldest, but deceased son, as the married agnate through whom the line of succession should proceed. At this point, the lack of any progeny from that son and 'Mankata would have meant that 'Makori could have been appointed as the chief, if there were grounds to believe that she might bear a son, irrespective of the genitor, on the grounds that any child conceived by her would still be regarded legally as a child of her deceased husband. We can only surmise that 'Makori was beyond child bearing age and, therefore, 'Mankata, as a younger woman and potential bearer of an heir, was a legitimate choice as chief according to the principle of agnatic descent.

Although the succession dispute had been formally resolved, the decision was ambiguous in that it did not really justify why 'Mankata was more appropriate than 'Makori as choice of chief. As a result the conflict continued in the locality. 'Mankata moved to establish her village close to Rafolatsane's old

village which led to fighting between her supporters and those of 'Makori (op cit:44). The episode is popularly known as "'Mankata's rebellion", during which several people were killed. This led to 'Mankata being tried and sentenced to prison. Her place was taken by a nominee of the paramount chief who acceded to apportionment of a bokhina pere area for Seeiso, thereby giving him a basis on which to become a chief in practice.

Following the death of Lelingoana, Seeiso attempted to substantiate his superior status to Mosuoe by using both customary principles and colonial institutions. He demanded that Mosuoe provide firewood and arrange for his fields to be ploughed (Jones, n.d.:6; JC, 1946:20). Seeiso also seems to have got Mosuoe's name deleted from some of the tax receipts (JC, 1946:19). By demanding tribute from Mosuoe, Seeiso sought to demonstrate his senior status relative to Mosuoe, as well as to improve his material status by acquiring goods and labour. By changing names on tax receipts Seeiso secured more income for himself and reduced Mosuoe's, because at the time, five per cent of all tax collected in an area was set aside for distribution amongst the tax collectors, and the chiefs to whom the tax payers were subjects. According to Ashton (1952:208), the monies collected would be apportioned out to all the authorities according to their status relative to each other. In other words, Seeiso was using a colonial institution to redefine residents as his subjects rather than Mosuoe's.

Mosuoe responded by refusing to comply with Seeiso's demands and then by taking the matter, along with a complaint about being regarded as a 'sub-chief', to the Resident Commissioner (JC,

1946). The outcome was ambiguous. Mosuoë was assured that no rights had been taken away from him, and that 'he was looked upon by the Government as being of the same status as his father and that the only change that there was was merely verbal' (op cit:58). The principal concern of the Resident Commissioner appears to have been to assure himself that Mosuoë acknowledged Seeiso as his superior, and once assured, he did not seek to intervene further.

The dispute was subsequently complicated by the efforts of the colonial government to re-constitute the chieftainship along territorial lines, and to extend its presence throughout the country. In 1938 the colonial government published its New Native Administration Proclamation and appointed an Assistant District Commissioner to Mokhotlong camp (Jones, n.d.:1) In addition, the colonial government recommended that Seeiso be granted a larger area in which to be a chief (op cit:3). In 1939 government representatives met with Seeiso to work out who should be gazetted as authorities. Although the Proclamation included a demand that the authorities be recognised by the people, the government did not consult with residents (op cit:14). As a result the chieftainship in the area was re-constructed. Both Seeiso and Mosuoë benefited from this re-construction, but in different ways.

In 1936, Seeiso, Lerato Rafolatsane (the deceased chief's third wife who had become nominally acting chief of the area following the demise of 'Mankata) and Mosuoë governed the population of the Mokhotlong area. They had 19, 17 and 89 subordinate authorities, respectively, under them (op cit:12).

Following implementation of the 1938 proclamations, these three chiefs had under them respectively 31, 12, and 26 subordinate authorities (Ashton, 1952:191; Jones, n.d.:15). The statistics have to be treated with some caution. They show that Seeiso used the proclamations, and the Rafolatsane dispute, to consolidate his position by expanding his base of subordinate authorities. He appointed followers to subordinate positions of authority and allowed them to do likewise.

For example, by 1939 Seeiso had placed fourteen followers as headmen over existing headmen. One of these appointees, his kinsman, Matlere, subsequently appointed younger brothers (born of different wives of their common father) to positions as subordinate headmen. In addition, Seeiso acquired a large number of settlements to the east of Rafolatsane's domain, whose headmen came under his authority (Jones, n.d.:15). The decline in the number of authorities under Rafolatsane rule indicates the way in which this bastion of opposition to Seeiso diminished as Seeiso's influence increased.

One cannot, however, assess the drastic reduction in Mosuoe's area in the same fashion. The large number of authorities in the Batlokoa area are testimony to the colonial government's concern to rationalise the chieftainship. Seen in these terms the proclamations achieved the desired effect in the Batlokoa area, but they did not weaken Mosuoe's position in relation to Seeiso. Two factors are relevant in this case.

First, Mosuoe, unlike Seeiso, stood at the apex of an established hierarchy which had been built by his father along the lines set by Moshoeshoe's heirs. Therefore, he was in a



strong position to use the proclamations to modify the hierarchy along these lines, and he did so by appointing sons to gazetted positions of authority. While this no doubt created some tensions in the Batlokoa area, Mosuoe's actions accorded both with established political tradition and the formal conditions set by the colonial government. In contrast, Seeiso was a relative new comer who was imposed on an existing political order and whose presence and actions had stirred opposition. Unlike Mosuoe, Seeiso was struggling to build up a broad subject base, and this was only possible at the expense of many existing authorities.

The second factor was the difference in the size of the tax paying populations subject to the authority of these two chiefs. There appears to have been roughly equal numbers of tax payers (approx 9,000) in the Batlokoa area and south of the Senqu river (Ashton, 1952:191; JC, 1946:40). With the reduction in the number of officially recognised authorities, the income capacity of those who were retained in the Batlokoa area improved markedly. In effect, the reduction in the number of authorities increased Mosuoe's own income and that of his selected subordinates, thereby creating conditions for support from the latter. If one recognises that Mosuoe was re-organising his hierarchy of subordinates in a context where he had established command over the entire population, the net effect would have been consolidation of the hierarchy as a whole. In contrast, Seeiso did not have an equivalent tax payer base. When he took over control of many of Rafolatsane's former subjects, he acquired 2,809 of the 4,285 tax payers (JC, 1946:29). While this gave him a sound financial basis, it was comparatively small, and

made smaller still as he increased the number of subordinates in his quest to establish a political base.

In summary, the re-construction of the chieftainship in 1939 highlights the re-alignment of the different criteria of authority. Seeiso established his own hierarchy along the lines that Lelinogana had done many years before, but this was only possible with the support of the colonial government. In contrast, the colonial interventions enabled Mosuoë to consolidate his hierarchy and to present it as dynastic structure in the image of Moshoeshoe's model. In the process, he drew a very clear boundary to distinguish his following from those of his neighbours. In effect, he endorsed a separate political identity for his subjects as a Batlokoa constituency and for himself as their leader. Coupled with the fact that he had a stronger financial base than Seeiso, in terms of the proportion of tax payers to chiefs and headmen, Mosuoë's subordinate status to Seeiso was nominal rather than substantial.

Late in 1939 the paramount chief died and Seeiso inherited the position. Then Seeiso died suddenly in 1940, and his subjects in Mokhotlong came under the control of the regent, 'Mantsebo, who appointed Matlere as her representative in the area (Jones, n.d.:9). The contest appears to have subsided following these developments and the distractions of the Second World War, though at some stage during the war Mokhotlong was demarcated as a district.<sup>4</sup> The dispute surfaced again in 1944 when the regent revived the bokhina pere claim (JC, 1946:4). Despite Mosuoë's objections to her delegates who came to negotiate the matter, she unilaterally instructed the latter to demarcate an area. Mosuoë

took the matter to court along with all the other issues which had been a bone of contention since Seeiso's arrival in Mokhotlong in 1925. He appealed against what he saw as the dissolution of the agreement between Lelingoana and Letsie I, whereby Lelingoana had been made a senior chief. The point of this argument was to show that the regent had no right to interfere with Lelingoana's legacy. Mosuoe argued that Lelingoana had been a chief accountable directly to the paramount chief and, therefore, that he had held the same status as the principal sons of Moshoeshoe, whose authority was never impaired by attempts by the paramountcy to place other chiefs in their areas. He also appealed against his official status as a sub-chief and against the demarcation of a bokhina pere in his area. In addition, he challenged the authority of the Seeiso chieftaincy to demand tribute from the Batlokoa chieftaincy (JC, 1946).

Having lost his appeal in both the paramount chief's court and in the Judicial Commissioner's court, Mosuoe finally won the case in the Basutoland High Court at the end of 1946 (CC, 1946). The criteria of authority were again articulated in a novel fashion during these proceedings. There were three main threads in this process. First, Mosuoe's three arguments clearly rested on, and sought to promote, his political status as leader of a particular political grouping within the Basotho nation. Secondly, the territorial model was an overt factor in court deliberations, given that it had become the basis for colonial description of the political order in the country. Mokhotlong was a district. Topographical features, such as rivers, demarcated boundaries of each chief's domain. The categories of paramount chief, chief,

sub-chief and headman could be readily described in terms of district, ward, sub-ward and village to explain the structure of the chieftainship. Thirdly, Mosuo's case was heard in a context of deliberate intent by the colonial government to subordinate chiefs to its rule by means of establishing British precepts of government, notably the separation between the executive, legislature and judiciary.

The basis of colonial government influence lay in the proclamations which differentiated the administrative authority of chiefs on the basis of territory from their judicial authority on the basis of distinctions in rank. The former basis subordinated chiefs to the District Commissioners while the latter enabled the government to subordinate customary law to the British judicial system. These changes were introduced through the establishment of a national treasury in 1946, amidst revision of chiefs' judicial authority and reduction of the number of chiefs who were entitled to adjudicate cases. Previously, as Ashton (1952:224) described, chiefs and headmen presided over their own courts (makhotla). They arbitrated petty disputes, heard civil transgressions of customary law, and could punish offenders by meting out fines which formed part of their income. There was a structure for appeals which was defined by the hierarchy of chiefs, at the apex of which was the paramount chief's court. This structure was separate to the colonial judiciary, but was linked to the latter by the District Commissioners who exercised both administrative and judicial authority, and adjudicated criminal cases.

Ashton (ibid) states that these colonial reforms of the 1940s

reduced the number of officially recognised courts from approximately 1300 to 121. In Mokhotlong, the number of recognised courts was reduced from 72 to 10 (Jones, n.d.:19). The reforms did not prohibit chiefs and headmen from continuing to hold their own courts, but they distinguished the few chiefs who would be entitled to punish offences and mete out fines, which would be remitted henceforth to the treasury, from the many chiefs and headmen who would be able only to arbitrate disputes. In principle, the informally recognised courts formed the lowest stratum from which cases could be sent on appeal to the officially recognised courts. The chiefs' courts were divided into two tiers, with those of district chiefs standing above the others. Cases could then go on appeal through these courts to the paramount chief's court. This structure was integrated into the colonial judiciary through establishment of a Judicial Commissioner's court above the paramount chief's court. Colonial legal officers presided over the Judicial Commissioner's court, which took over the judicial functions of District Commissioners. Thereafter cases could go to the High Court and ultimately, in principle, to the House of Lords in England.

The re-structuring of authority was not so coherent in practice. On the one hand, the reforms created a ponderous judicial procedure. Cases had to be heard at the informally recognised courts before they could be heard at the formally recognised courts. This procedure proved to be unsatisfactory because it implied that the lowest courts could still exercise judicial authority, when in fact they could only mediate disputes. Given that these courts could not impose any sanctions,

litigants inevitably took their cases to the formally recognised courts (Ashton, 1952:229-230; Jones, n.d.:20). On the other hand, the two tier structure for the formally recognised courts effectively placed chiefs and headmen on the same level as judicial authorities. This meant that cases could come before the court of one of Mosuo's subordinate chiefs, for example, and then go on appeal direct to the district chief's court, even though they should go via Mosuo according to local norms.

The reforms diminished the authority of the chieftainship in relation to the colonial government, but they also promoted two subtle distinctions in that relationship which would be significant in Mosuo's case. First, the reforms emphasised government as the exercise of administrative authority. Secondly, they refined the colonial government's description of rank amongst the chiefs. The old distinction between chief, sub-chief and headman was superseded by categorisation in terms of paramount chief, district chief, chief and headman. Although the reforms confirmed Mosuo as a subordinate to the position of district chief, they did not specifically define the authority of the one relative to the other, and thus left room for manipulation of the definition of the category 'chief'.

The paramount chief's court decision ignored these undercurrents and, not surprisingly, affirmed the authority of the regent to demand a bokhina pere area. The Judicial Commissioner's court took Mosuo's arguments at face value in an attempt to reconcile proclaimed indigenous concepts of authority and the constitutional reforms of the colonial government (JC, 1946). This court's decision against Mosuo was clearly based on

the colonial demand to distinguish forms of authority. The court rejected the argument about Lelingoana's and Letsie's agreement because there was no written record. The court rejected Mosuo's appeal against his categorisation as a 'sub-chief' on the grounds that it had been only for 'administrative purposes and that as far as his rights over the people of the Batlokoa tribe was concerned, these rights were untouched' (op cit:6). The court also rejected the appeal against payment of tribute to Seeiso on the grounds that it was an administrative issue which was beyond the ambit of the court, and re-iterated this rationale in rejecting the appeal against the bokhina pere demarcation: '...this Court comes to the conclusion...that (the bokhina pere area) having been taken by the Paramount Chief in his administrative capacity in accordance with custom, again this Court is not prepared to interfere. It is not the function of Courts to interfere with matters that have been dealt with by executive or administrative authority provided that such action is in accordance with the law itself' (op cit:9).

This particular emphasis in the court's judgement, irrespective of its elision of 'administrative' authority and 'custom', inadvertently established grounds for the High Court to find in Mosuo's favour. First, the judge found legal grounds to admit the circumstantial evidence of the agreement between Lelingoana and Letsie. Secondly, and more importantly, the judge dispensed with the sub-chief and bokhina pere issues by outlining the limits of administrative authority:

'We are dealing here with powers vested in the Paramount Chief which involves the exercise of a personal discretion: the

Paramount Chief must decide where and how much to take, when powers involving the exercise of such a discretion vests in any person or body of persons...then the exercise of such powers can never be delegated - Halsbury's Law (vol. 25, p.526). If therefore the Paramount Chief did have a right in the present case of demanding a knee-haltering area - of which I have grave doubts in view of the agreement - even then it was absolutely irregular and illegal to attempt or pretend to delegate these powers as was the case here purported to be done according to the evidence of those witnesses who were present at the taking. On this ground alone the appeal was bound to succeed for no evidence of any custom suggesting that such powers can be delegated would ever be substantiated in view of the very definite principle of law' (CC 1946:7-8).

Although the High Court judgement was based on a technical point (Ashton, 1952:202), it reflects the ambiguities of the constitutional context at the time. Even as it expressed the subordination of the chieftainship to colonial precepts of government and officials' efforts to entrench objective criteria of authority, it also endorsed particular, intangible, values about the relationship between chief and subject. Subsequently, Mosuoë was recognised as 'Chief of the Batlokoa, Malingoaneng, in the Mokhotlong district subordinate to the Chief of Mokhotlong' (*ibid*). He retained the contested bokhina pere area, and confirmed his position as an authority of a particular constituency in a defined area. As if to confirm the consolidation of his authority, amidst the tensions which the colonial interventions of the previous decade had fuelled, there



were no reported 'medicine murders' in the Batlokoa area, although there were many south of the Senqu river in which a number of chiefs and headmen were implicated (Jones, n.d.:31).

In other words, Mosuoe's fortunes in and beyond the courts highlight the dialectic of authority as outlined in chapter 2. If we were to continue discussion of the history of the chieftainship in Mokhotlong, it would confirm this process. The theme of re-constitution and change would be apparent. For example, in the 1950s there was no clarity as to whether Seeiso's area belonged to the district chief or the paramount chief (Jones, n.d.:9). The contest over the relative status of the district chief and the ward chief continued, though in a different arena. Matlere attempted to use his authority as de facto district chief to influence the appointment of district court presidents as a means to challenge Mosuoe's authority (op cit:24). In a different vein, the events of the 1940s included the appointment of women to positions of authority more frequently than in the past, amidst concern among some chiefs such as Mosuoe (op cit:29-30). This development would be a study in itself; even though one can discern in it attempts to sustain principles of agnatic descent on occasions where no heir to a position was immediately apparent, the development highlights a modification to the patriarchal basis of the kinship model which, in relation to the status of women, is a process which can be traced back to pre-colonial times (Eldridge, 1993: 126-139).

#### Conclusion: The dialectic of authority

The history of the chieftainship in Mokhotlong shows that the

territorial and kinship models of authority have only been superficially integrated. Despite efforts to make them correspond with each other, their re-interpretation over time has drawn out new dimensions of, and possibilities to define, authority. As circumstances have changed, the constituent features of these models have also been re-interpreted in a new light. Inevitably, the models remain in tension with each other. Nonetheless, the efforts to integrate these models reveal the key elements of the process.

The key element of the territorial model is settlement as a physical construct. The colonial government demarcated chiefs' authority on the basis of the location of villages and people. In contrast, for chiefs, settlement was a social construct that expressed the identity of a group over which a chief had authority. While the colonial government's perspective was designed to define the relationship it wanted between itself and the chiefs, the perspective of the chiefs was rooted in a concern to define the relationship between themselves and their subjects. These perspectives were inevitably in conflict; the colonial imperative was to demarcate boundaries of authority while the chiefs' imperative was to define the locus standi of authority from which it could be elaborated. The key element of the kinship model is distinction in social status. Although the principle of agnatic descent was commonly acknowledged as the means to distinguish status, it was interpreted in different ways. The colonial imperative was to differentiate authority through hierarchal divisions, with the effect of placing the colonial representative of the British monarchy at the apex. In

contrast, the chiefs' imperative was to confirm their positions at the centre of their subject groups. Even though the placement of agnates in subordinate positions established a hierarchy, it also expanded the social boundaries of the group in a way that always indicated the centre whence the group originated, namely the senior chief.

These divergent imperatives inevitably inspired the continual contests amongst chiefs in Mokhotlong, and confused the grounds on which they were fought. On the one hand, the contests were attempts to clarify the relationship between chiefs and the colonial government, and here the emphasis was on differentiation of authority into divisible forms. On the other hand, the contests were attempts to clarify the relationship between chief and subject, and here the emphasis was on coalescence of authority around the personage of a chief. The result was that the relationship between chiefs became the focus of conflict, for it was the nexus of these opposing dynamics.

The ethnographic and legal record deals primarily with this relationship, given its prominence in historical events. The problem with this record lies in its propensity to emphasise one part of the dialectic over the other. In other words, the record focuses on the relationship between chiefs and the relationship between chiefs and the colonial government, at the expense of looking at the relationship between chief and subject. Downplayed in the analyses of commentators, and by the protagonists themselves, are chiefs' subjects as agents in the history of the chieftainship. The foregoing discussion has indicated their significance, though not in any detail, given the preliminary

need to draw out their presence from the shadows of the written record. All that has been shown, thus far, are indicators of that significance.

First, a longstanding thread in the history of the chieftainship is that the office of chief was defined as much by the personal ties established between chief and subject as by birthright. This is a function of the kinship model which obviously expresses personal relationships as well as putting them into an order. The written record emphasises birthright in order to illustrate the contests between chiefs as conflict about status relative to each other. However, the underlying imperative in these contests, to locate the chief at the centre of a group, shows that there was equal concern with the question of how a chief acquired status in relation to his followers. The means was a familial one; the chief had to be seen to be a patriarch and to act in a paternal way towards his subjects.

Secondly, one can discern in the contests between chiefs in Mokhotlong ambivalent attitudes to what a chieftainship should be. While there were obvious efforts to define the chieftainship on the basis of historical precedents, there were also efforts to define the chieftainship on the basis of contemporary needs and economic circumstances in the rural areas. On the one hand, the accumulation of precedents over time enabled chiefs and the colonial government to refine their conception of the chieftainship, as an institution with permanent features that would be endorsed in each generation and so enable it to exist throughout time. On the other hand, the way in which chiefs sought to define political boundaries through their subjects

indicates a conception of the chieftainship as an organic entity, whose survival depended on its ability to adjust to the changing needs of its subjects.

## CHAPTER 4

### CHIEFS, SUBJECTS AND SETTLEMENT

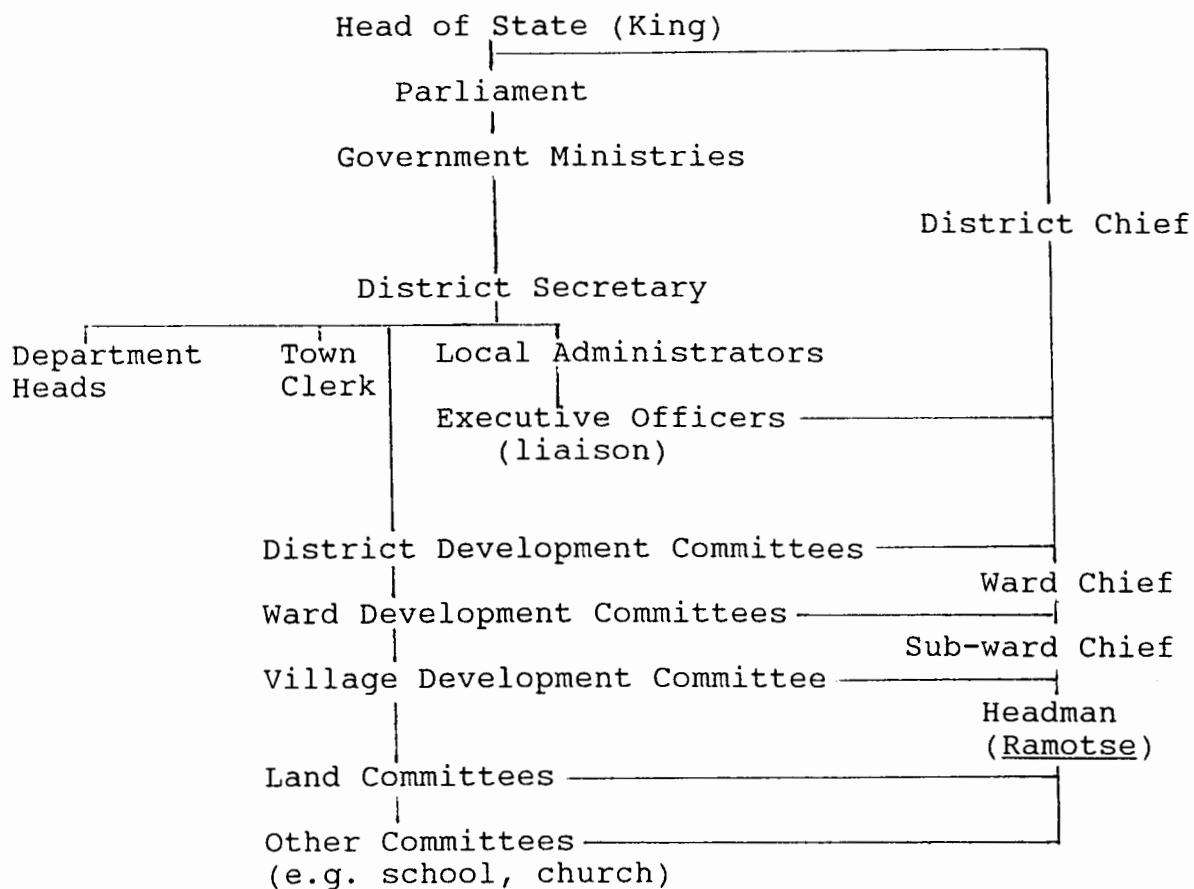
#### The struggle for the chieftainship

The struggle over the chieftainship is, as we have seen, largely about creating an appropriate political order for administration of the territory of Lesotho as a whole. We have also seen that the chieftainship cannot be understood without taking into account the struggle for the institution. The previous chapter examined historical dimensions of this dialectic. This chapter introduces its contemporary dynamics by exploring the two concluding points of the last chapter in more detail - the expression of kinship in the construction of chiefs' authority, and the capacity of the chieftainship to adapt to changing circumstances of rural life. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, 'settlement' and 'land' have figured prominently in the construction and re-construction of the chieftainship. This chapter examines the issue of 'settlement' in the contest over how the population should be identified in relation to chiefs. Chapters 5 and 6 pursue the issue of 'land', notably the people's need for agricultural land, given that this is the material basis of chiefs' authority. 'Settlement' and 'land' are closely related, but they are discussed in separate chapters for the sake of clarity.

Having indicated that the chieftainship is not a finished product of history, I argue that common descriptions of the chieftainship need to be assessed. The point is that there is clearly a dialectical process in the exercise of authority in

rural Lesotho which is not captured in the common descriptions. Any analysis of contemporary Lesotho must acknowledge the political tensions which still exist in the rural areas. This tension is indicated in the schematic presentation of the structure of government in Figure 4. It includes local government structures which will be discussed shortly.

Figure 4: The structure of government in Lesotho



Although Figure 4 retains the colonial image of the chieftainship, it points to the ambiguities which still exist in the exercise of political authority in the country. In the first instance, Figure 4 poses an obvious question; is the structure of government a single integrated structure or a dual structure?

The Figure shows that the chieftainship still exists as a distinct institution, but it can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, the chieftainship appears to have been sidelined by modern institutions of government, giving the impression that it is an archaic form of authority. On the other hand, the chieftainship appears to pervade all levels of society, suggesting that it is still politically significant particularly at local levels of society. However one interprets Figure 4, the presence of a dialectic cannot be ignored. The question to be answered is how this dialectic reflects the past, and continues to stimulate further modifications to the construction and exercise of authority in the rural areas.

#### The management of settlement

Villages are the most common form of settlement in Lesotho. There are a few towns, notably the eight district centres and the capital, Maseru. The majority of the population maintains de jure residence in villages although many people, particularly men, spend most of their lives working in South Africa and in the urban centres of Lesotho. In 1986, for example, Mokhotlong district had a de jure population of 80,343 people, of whom only 3,983 lived in Mokhotlong town while the remainder were spread throughout the approximately 688 villages and hamlets in the district (Bureau of Statistics, 1988).<sup>1</sup>

The social and physical nuclei of a village are homesteads. Homesteads often consist of two or more buildings, a kraal for livestock and a small vegetable garden/orchard (jarete). The buildings are either thatched, stone rondavels or stone/brick,



and corrugated iron-roofed rectangular houses of which one is used as a 'kitchen', and the other(s) as sleeping quarters. Homesteads are often the residences of nuclear families but in many villages, kin, affines and neighbours share food and co-operate with daily chores. This pattern of residence arose from the general trend, noted in the previous chapter, for sons to build their own homesteads close to those of their parents. For example, one of the villages on a hill near Mapholaneng consists primarily of agnate descendants of its founder, Kalia Alotsi, a renowned follower of Lelingoana, and his sons who built their homesteads on that site.

This heritage is still evident in many villages. Where chiefs and headmen have settled with followers in the past, their living descendants are often to be found in the same village or in neighbouring villages. It is this proximity of kin to each other which substantiates the patriarchal framework of authority. A married man is nominally the head of his homestead which is identified by his name. Although wives are usually the homestead managers, given the absence of many husbands on migrant work contracts, few have the freedom to make decisions with regard to trade in livestock, purchases of expensive commodities, and choice of crops to cultivate. Agreement from husbands is necessary or, as is often the case, approval from the kinsman in whom the husband vests authority over his affairs during his absence from home (e.g. father, paternal uncle, brother). Likewise, in cases where a married son stays on at the homestead to support a widowed mother, the latter is nominally the head of the homestead in her husband's name. When she dies, the son

becomes the homestead head which will then be identified, in time, by his name.

Many villages are substantially larger than they were in the past such that kinship is less visible as a framework for the social order. Mapholaneng, for example, is a conglomeration of several hamlets which have merged as a result of their expansion, but which are still identifiable as distinct localities on the basis of concentrations of descendants of their founders, and according to the names of those founders. Old residents of the village still use these names to identify the homes of other residents, but many residents simply use the name Mapholaneng. Moreover, the village is expanding rapidly through the influx of many young couples who have no close kin ties to established residents.

The superimposition of other forms of social and economic networks upon that of kinship is evident through Mokhotlong district. There are many schools and churches, for example, as a result of intensive missionary work by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society, now constituted as the Lesotho Evangelical Church, and by various orders of the Roman Catholic church. Church and school are often closely linked (Ellenberger, 1938). The primary schools in many villages were established by evangelists with the support of villagers. According to oral reports, there was occasional resistance from the chiefs. Mosuo Sekonyela, for example, reportedly resisted villagers' efforts to build a school in Malingoaneng.

There are many secondary schools in the districts. Mokhotlong has six, three of which are in the Tlokoeng ward; one

in Mapholaneng, one in Mabuleng and the third at Ha Makhoaba. Some of these schools, such as the one in Mapholaneng, provide boarding facilities, but many students find accomodation in the surrounding villages, either with kin or in rented huts leased by villagers. Qualified Basotho teachers, paid by the government, and volunteers paid by agencies such as the American Peace Corps and the International Voluntary Service, work at these schools. The government and Aid agencies provide financial assistance, but the schools are administered by Boards of Governors which usually consist of locally respected and influential individuals such as priests and traders.

There is also a network of institutions to address civil order, health and the agricultural economy, which are based in the district administration of the national government. In Mokhotlong town, there are various departments under the authority of the District Secretary, municipal offices under a Town Clerk as well as facilities which include an airport, a hospital, a police station, an army garrison, a prison and a government woolshed. Beyond Mokhotlong the infrastructure is relatively lean. Mapholaneng is the only other place in the district where there is a concentration of equivalent facilities: a police station, a post office, a Food Management Unit warehouse from which food aid to schools is distributed, a Livestock Improvement Centre (LIC) which offers stock marketing and veterinary services, a court and a red Cross clinic. Beyond Mapholaneng, within Tlokoeng ward, there is one other police station at Letseng La Terrai, two clinics (at Linotsing and St Martins, respectively), and a LIC at Lehlala. In addition, there

are Postal Agencies which are located in the villages of chiefs and headmen.

Agriculture is a principal emphasis of the government's activities. Police work is concentrated on controlling livestock theft, though there are detectives and traffic police in Mokhotlong town. For a brief period in 1988 Mapholaneng boasted a traffic policeman but the absurdity of this appointment was soon realised and the officer in question was transferred back to Mokhotlong. LICs are being promoted in order to improve the livestock economy. The centre at Mapholaneng, for instance, is run by two technical assistants who provide veterinary services, arrange for farmers to purchase breeding livestock through the Ministry of Agriculture, and hold stock auctions for local buyers and for the national abattoir. In addition, there are 21 dip tanks and 10 government shearing sheds located throughout the district. These facilities are supervised by officials of the Ministry of Agriculture. Individuals who live near dip tanks are hired on a permanent basis to manage their use, and casual labour (shearers, sorters, packers) is hired between the months of November and February when shearing sheds are in full use. There is also, in principle, an arable farming extension programme. However, between 1986 and 1989, there was only one extension officer in Tlokoeng ward. In 1988, a 'home economics assistant' was based in Mapholaneng to provide advice to women on how to improve household diets. There is also a network of commercial institutions in Mokhotlong district, which reflects the population's dependence on the wage incomes of migrant workers. Again, they are concentrated in Mokhotlong town which has a

number of franchised outlets for South African chain stores in addition to locally owned shops, a South African trader's store, a wholesale warehouse, an agricultural co-operative store, two hotels, an agricultural bank, a commercial bank and two petrol stations. Beyond Mokhotlong there are numerous traders' stores. There is only one Fraser's store, at Tlokoeng village, which is an outlet of a well known trading company in Lesotho which was originally established by Scottish traders, but is now owned by a South African company (Danziger, 1979). The majority of the stores are owned by Basotho entrepreneurs, but some, such as two large stores in Mapholaneng, are supported by South African partners. These enterprises sell manufactured goods which are trucked in from South Africa. There are also many formal and informal enterprises ranging from tailors' shops, furniture workshops and saddleries, which conduct business daily, to butcheries and shebeens which operate intermittently.

It is not, therefore, surprising that kinship is not always visible as an organising framework of rural social order, and that it is irrelevant in many instances. Villagers are materially integrated into a market economy and politically subject to agencies of the modern nation state. However, neither the state nor the market predominate in the rural social order. They are undeniably important forces of change to the social order, but they have yet to dictate the dynamics of settlement in villages. The means by which residential and commercial sites are acquired in the villages reflect the challenge of the state and the market to the authority of chiefs.

Basotho have an inalienable right to residential sites and,

prior to the 1960s, individuals would simply approach the relevant chief or headman in whose area he/she wished to stay for permission to build a home. Since the late 1960s, however, site allocation has been in the hands of Land Committees. Today, these committees also deal with arable land allocations as a result of the 1979 Land Act (Land Act, 1979) and the 1980 Land Regulations (Legal Notice, 1980a). The Land Committees are a means for the state to exercise its authority in villages. They are based on the territorial areas of jurisdiction of chiefs and headmen, but, in each area the residents may elect individuals to serve on the committee for a term of three years, and the chief/headman need not necessarily be a member. Individuals who wish to build a homestead must approach the relevant committee, fill in the appropriate forms and, following confirmation of title to the land by the Ministry of Interior, they may build dwellings. Built into this protocol is an attempt by the state to restrict the authority of chiefs over site allocation. The bureaucratic process nominally places site allocation under the authority of government departments. The election of Land Committees provides a platform for rural residents to participate in the management of settlements and, if necessary, to contest the decisions of chiefs and headmen.

In practice, however, the Land Committees are no more than a minor modification to established procedures. They are elected bodies, but they are invariably chaired by chiefs and headmen, while the other members are usually men rather than women. Furthermore, the functioning of the committees depends largely on the incumbent chief or headman. During the late 1980s few of

the committees in the environs of Mapholaneng gave any impression of functioning as formally required. Although meetings were scheduled on a regular basis, chiefs and headmen in the area acknowledged that members often did not attend.<sup>2</sup> As a result, they usually made the decisions in consultation with their councillors irrespective of committee membership. The committees simply ratified the decisions when they did meet.

Site and field allocations are complicated by the 1979 Land Act. Although this Act governs all land transactions, its ramifications are only beginning to be realised and acted upon in the rural areas. The Act is ignored by many who establish their homes in small, remote villages because it is largely irrelevant to their needs. Usufruct principles of land tenure guarantee right to a residential site, and most individuals expect the homestead which they build to be their home for life. In larger villages like Mapholaneng, where facilities encourage settlement growth and attract entrepreneurs, people are beginning to recognise the Act as a statutory mechanism which introduces private property rights to land and, as importantly, potential market opportunities. Accordingly, more people in these centres are beginning to refer to the Act in their land claims.

Site purchases are common in Mokhotlong town and in Mapholaneng. The common factor is growth of these settlements as commercial centres for the district. In Mapholaneng, for example, a number of professionally qualified people such as the District Military Officer and teachers, who do not live in the village and who do not expect to live there, have built houses as a form of

financial investment. They have recognised that Mapholaneng is likely to become a town and, therefore, that their properties will increase in value. In the meantime they let out their houses whenever there is an opportunity to do so. In short, the Act is used with discretion by rural residents.

Lost in current practice is the intention of the Act to facilitate settlement planning. There is no formal planning procedure in Mapholaneng even though the village has been designated as a 'rural centre' by the government (Agrar- und Hydrotechnik, 1988). Individuals can build homes and establish businesses virtually wherever they wish. The Land Committee does not think in terms of 'town planning'; it simply fulfils the bureaucratic functions demanded of it. It intervenes only if a site application involves the appropriation of fields or use of natural resources, such as river sand and water in the case of brick-making works. In other words, the committee defines settlement management in 'traditional' terms, in the sense of upholding chiefs' authority to mediate their subjects' usufructory rights to land and its constituent resources.

There is potential for dispute in these circumstances but little to impede any person, particularly an entrepreneur, from acquiring a site. Purchase of commercial sites effectively overrides principles of usufruct and the local norms of authority. The Land Act is an opportunity for entrepreneurs to act independently and according to their own interests. For example, in 1990, there was some dispute in Mapholaneng when Sehloho, one of the two richest traders in the village, obtained a site on the main road through the village at a point opposite



the store/bar complex of his main rival, and in front of the local court and a number of other shops. His rival's business attracts most of the passing traffic to the extent that all buses that go through the village stop next to this complex. By acquiring a strip of land between the road and the court, Sehloho sought to tap into the concentration of trade in that locality. There was a year's delay before he built a restaurant because of objections from neighbouring shop owners. The dispute revolved primarily around the boundaries between the different sites which meant that the objections of Sehloho's competitors had little chance of success. The land was vacant and, therefore, available to anyone who wished to acquire it. Furthermore, site boundaries are often not well defined and when they are, they are recorded in the original application forms which are not kept in the village. In addition, there is no formal 'town planning' policy which could be used to regulate site acquisitions.

These circumstance suggest that the state is only the nominal authority in managing rural settlement, but that it establishes the conditions for market forces to challenge the authority of the chiefs. A closer look at settlement issues confirms this impression. The state addresses settlement as a 'development' issue to be managed largely by the rural residents themselves. To this end, the state encourages the establishment of a hierarchy of 'Development Committees' which are based on the territorial jurisdictions of chiefs and headmen, and constituted by rural residents.

### Development' Committees

In each area governed by a sub-ward chief or headman, there is a 'Village Development Committee' (VDC). This committee consists of elected residents from the area, but it does not necessarily need to include the local chief or headman. A VDC is formally responsible for improving services in its area by initiating projects through funds raised by villagers, by identifying needs for submission to the district administration, and by co-operating with government officials who come to the area to assist with projects. Project proposals are submitted to the relevant 'Ward Development Committee' (WDC) which, in principle, consists of elected ward residents. In turn, the WDC submits proposals to the 'District Development Committee' (DDC) which, in principle, includes elected members as well as the District Secretary, the district chief and, as observers, the district heads of government departments. The DDC is responsible for assessing project proposals and for authorising the relevant government departments to carry them out.

The formal structure outlines a democratic process, similar to that of the Land Committees, in which rural residents are identified as citizens with rights of representation and access to government services. The chieftainship is ostensibly sidelined in favour of elected bodies and professional personnel. Moreover, the problem of lack of infrastructure in many districts is seemingly mediated by the participation of rural residents in 'development'. The system works in Mokhotlong to the extent that there are many VDCs which meet regularly and initiate projects. However, the structure of authority is no challenge to that of

the chiefs, for three overlapping reasons. First, the de facto situation whereby the state has neither the infrastructure nor the personnel to provide more than a general presence means that settlement issues remain largely in the hands of the rural populace, as they have been in the past. Secondly, the constitution of the VDCs and the WDCs are manipulated by chiefs and villagers. Thirdly, the state's approach to settlement as a 'development' issue actually distances state agencies from rural residents.

In the first instance, the government's reliance on VDCs reflects a lack of infrastructure and finance which minimises the potential of VDCs to shape the rural social order as intended. Coupled with the proclaimed emphasis on 'development', the committees are reduced to proposing and carrying out small projects. The VDCs in Mokhotlong work primarily to encourage building of hygienic toilets ('Ventilated Improved Pit Latrines'), and to improve village water supplies through the assistance of the aid-funded Village Water Supply Unit. This unit provides technical expertise, pipes and equipment, subject to the VDCs' organisation of villagers to dig trenches between springs and tap outlets. In short, financial restrictions dictate a limited functional role for the VDCs.

Secondly, this role is endorsed by villagers. 'Development' is something which is seen as extraneous to the rural social order; as a councillor of the chief at Mapholaneng exclaimed: 'my father did not have this development, so what do we need with it'. To most villagers, VDCs are a means to extract material benefits from a parsimonious government which exists

beyond the world of village life. They support VDCs, and where possible, they elect people who, they believe, know how to deal with the government. During the 1980s, for example, the residents of Mofulaneng, an area of Tlokoeng ward which is governed by a headman, regularly elected a retired police detective who had worked in Mokhotlong. In 1986, after the military coup, they elected a man who had been a cabinet minister in the defunct BNP government. Although the BNP was never popular in Mokhotlong, particularly in Tlokoeng ward, the man's political affiliations were regarded as irrelevant; his legal training and his knowledge of 'government' were regarded as useful attributes.

In contrast, few 'village headmen' (liphala; sing. phala) serve on the VDCs, even though this would seem appropriate given that the system is manifestly directed at improving material conditions in villages. A phala is, however, primarily a messenger for a chief or headman who is formally responsible for the welfare of his subjects. The lack of representation of liphala on the VDCs reflects the way these committees are constituted according to local norms of authority. It is a rare VDC that does not include the chief or headman of the area, as the chairman, and some of his councillors. The Mofulaneng VDC of 1986 included both the acting headman (a cousin of the gazetted headman who worked in Maseru) and his babeise/bewys writer (an appointee who records livestock transactions: see chapter 6). At Mapholaneng, the elected VDC included the chief as chairman, one of his two main councillors who was also the stock pound master, and six other men who were regarded as his

councillors.

Patrilineality and patriarchal expression of kinship are also evident in the constitution of VDCs. It is explicit in the Mofulaneng VDC where, prior to the election of a new committee in 1986, a cousin and senior agnate of the acting headman had been on the committee and, thereafter, having resigned because of work pressure as a school inspector, continued to be an informal advisor to the acting headman and to the committee. Similarly, patriarchal values are expressed during elections. Chiefs and headmen are regularly elected. Men and women attend the elections, but men are elected. The only woman in Tlokoeng Ward who was on a Development Committee during the late 1980s was 'Mamphofu Sekonyela, the acting ward chief, and it was her political status which enabled her to be elected to the chair of the WDC (there were two women on one of the three Land Committees in the Mapholaneng sub-ward).

The way the VDCs are constituted is repeated with the WDCs. In principle, a WDC consists of elected persons and is an intermediary body in the system. Accordingly, one would expect it to be a platform for democratic representation in the district administration, and to mesh partisan interests in VDC project proposals with broader plans for the ward as a whole. However, given the system's technicist focus on 'development', WDCs reflect the way rural residents have manipulated the intent and functions of the VDCs. During the late 1980s the Tlokoeng WDC members were all men with the exception of 'Mamphofu Sekonyela. The members were 'elected', but in terms of being nominees of various VDCs, Land Committees and chiefs and

headmen. On this basis, the WDC fulfils its limited 'development' role of passing on project proposals to the DDC.

The DDC in Mokhotlong also consists of 'elected' individuals, including members of the Tlokoeng WDC, but few villagers know who they are or how they were elected. It has a rotating chair which alternates between the Tlokoeng ward chief and the district chief. It is managed by the District Secretary. The fate of project proposals depend on his assessment, and those of the various government department heads, of the administration's capabilities to carry them out. In other words, the DDC is far removed from the world of village life. The DDC nominally integrates principles of political democracy with practical demands of bureaucracy but, in practice, public accountability is minimal. Instead, the DDC concentrates authority in the hands of civil servants who are not formally accountable to the populace in terms of the structure of the various 'development committees'. Moreover, due to its particular focus on 'development', the DDC emphasises a top-down and restricted approach.

This system of authority serves commercial interests. This became apparent in Mokhotlong district during 1986-87 when a small hydro-electric project was started in Tlokoeng ward. The WDC and the DDC played no part in local interaction with the contractor, Spie Batignolle, a French multi-national company. Negotiations on numerous issues, ranging from compensation for use of fields for the work site to labour recruitment and pay, were restricted to the site engineer, the Tlokoeng ward chief and Ministry of Labour officials in Mokhotlong. For instance, Spie

Batignolle originally conceded to a demand by 'Mamphofu Sekonyela for labour to be recruited at her office in Tloha Re Bue. Her concern was to promote employment of ward residents and to demonstrate the authority of the chieftainship. Subsequently, a compromise was reached following communication difficulties between the work site and the chief's office, an hour's drive apart, and irritation in Tloha Re Bue over having large numbers of men hanging around the chief's office in the hope of work contracts. Thereafter, permanent labour was recruited on the work site at the discretion of the contractor, and casual labour was recruited at the chief's office. This compromise enabled the site engineer to minimise involvement of the chief's office in the management of labour. In addition, the site engineer negotiated directly with the Ministry of Labour on various labour problems that arose (e.g. strikes over pay and working hours), and he was able to circumvent bureaucratic intrusions once he was familiar with Lesotho's laws on labour rights which offer little protection to workers.

In other words, the government's technicist perspective on development played into the hands of Spie Batignolle. There was little that the government, the chiefs and residents could do to broaden the contractor's specific short term interests given the structure of local government. Only after the project had been completed did the WDC and the DDC act, and then, not surprisingly, in a manner consistent with the logic of these institutions. Having been told repeatedly that development signified products, local residents questioned the project's provision of electricity only to Mokhotlong town. The Tlokoeng

WDC and the DDC subsequently negotiated the laying of a transmission line to Mapholaneng, but it serves only the police station and the Post Office. Ironically, the local resident who benefited perhaps the most from the project was a local entrepreneur. He obtained permission from the ward chief to start a brick-making business, using river sand, on a site just above the weir for the hydro-electricity plant. The weir traps a lot of sand. This sand is exposed above the water for much of the year, allowing easy access to the raw material.<sup>3</sup>

#### Conclusion: Differentiation of authority

Current management of settlement in rural Lesotho highlights a process of differentiation of authority. On the one hand, the government intervenes to exercise its authority and to subordinate the chieftainship, but in a way which actually minimises its presence in rural settlements and leads to affirmation of chiefs' authority to manage settlement. On the other hand, however ineffective the government's interventions, they create opportunities for consolidation of the market economy in rural settlements which does challenge the authority of chiefs. With regard to the first point, there are similarities with the colonial interventions to subordinate the chieftainship as I discussed in the previous chapter. The colonial government's efforts to categorise different facets of chiefs' authority is replicated in the post-independence governments' efforts to impose objective criteria for 'development' and democratic representation in rural local government. This is a theme which recurs in other aspects of the interaction between the government



and the rural populace, and it is taken up again in chapter 7.

The immediate issue in question is the challenge to chiefs' authority from the consolidation of the market economy in rural Lesotho. Not only does it involve chiefs' subjects directly as agents, but it also reduces the scope for chiefs to control settlement in the future. Therefore, not only are there indications that the authority of chiefs is being re-fashioned by their subjects but also, that the people's need for land is being expressed in novel ways. Having indicated that the relationship between chief and subject is being re-moulded in concert with the changing circumstances of rural life, I address the details of this relationship in the following two chapters.

## CHAPTER 5

### CHIEFS, SUBJECTS AND LAND

#### The need for land

People's need for land is an important aspect of the relationship between chief and subject, because that need and the land has been the material basis of the chieftainship. The focus of this chapter, however, is not simply on how chiefs and villagers negotiate access to and use of land. Although land is a physical prerequisite of this relationship, it is not an immutable variable. Land is defined as a resource in particular ways by its users at any one point in time, and it is re-defined over a period of time. Moreover, land is divided into numerous different resources according to its constituent features and the perceived utility of those features for sustenance. The potential of land to be a source of sustenance changes as people use it in relation to the constraints and opportunities of changing economic, demographic and political conditions. Furthermore, the significance of land to rural Basotho is always changing as they assess and act upon the world around them.

There are, accordingly, two processes which analysis must take into account. First, the definition and re-definition of land as a resource indicates how the relationship between chief and subject is both defined and modified. Secondly, as Basotho re-define land, as a resource in relation to regional and global economic forces, they create new conditions for use of the land. In other words, they transform both nature, as they understand it, and the political relationship between chief and subject.

This is the struggle for the chieftainship, and within in it is a struggle to find appropriate ways of securing access to land, and of using it.

The discussion in this chapter is limited to residential and arable land and does not include grazing land, which is covered in the following chapter. The division is artificial for, as we shall see, the logic of usufructory land tenure specifically rejects rigid distinctions between land categories. I leave discussion on grazing land until later primarily because it is impractical to present the analysis in a single chapter. This separation is also necessary to emphasise the different political and economic dynamics with regard to arable and residential land, on the one hand, and grazing land, on the other. Generally speaking, there is a process towards private tenure with regard to arable and residential land, as opposed to maintenance of communal tenure for grazing land. Nonetheless the one process is not divorced from the other. Moreover, these general trends affect not only the availability of the land's constituent resources, but also the way people categorise these resources and, in turn, how they define the relationship between chief and subject.

I do not address arable and residential land in as much detail as grazing land. The aim of this chapter is to highlight critical issues and to provide a basis for a more comprehensive analysis in the following chapter. I have taken this decision partly in view of the direction of my argument in this thesis and partly in view of the empirical evidence on society in Lesotho. In particular, there is a large corpus of ethnographic literature

on arable farming and village life in Lesotho, as is indicated shortly, but very little on the pastoralist heritage and the livestock economy. The arguments in this chapter are based on that literature as well as on my own field research, and this has enabled me to present it in a shorter form than might otherwise have been necessary. Moreover, rather than re-iterate an area that has been well documented, I propose only to indicate current trends for purposes of documentation and to outline the foundations of my argument in this chapter. In the following chapter, I illustrate the argument more fully through a detailed analysis of the livestock economy.

#### Indication of need: An ecological crisis in Lesotho

Heavy snowfalls blanketed eastern Lesotho during October 1987. Villages were isolated for several weeks. Subsequent food and fuel shortages lead to deaths, mainly amongst the aged and amongst herdboys stranded at grazing-posts. Many livestock also died, possibly 20-30% of the district herd.<sup>1</sup> The government responded with aid, initially in the form of helicopter transport to retrieve corpses and to bring food to schools, and later by co-ordinating a campaign to prevent famine. Food, bales of fodder, and paraffin were distributed. This was followed, as the time for maize planting passed, by distribution of seeds (wheat, barley, beans and potatoes) and provision of government tractors and ploughs.

The campaign was successful in that a large tonnage of goods was distributed throughout the district, but there were also many disputes. Government officials were extremely distrustful of the

chiefs, who were given the task of distributing aid goods delivered to their areas of jurisdiction. This suspicion led to many delays in the provision of relief. Both government officials and chiefs incurred the ire of villagers on account of incidents such as officials selling paraffin meant for free distribution, and chiefs appropriating aid goods for themselves. Donors also attacked the national government for inefficient management of transport needs. They pointed out, for example, that army helicopters were withdrawn at critical times.

This crisis was followed by floods in January and February 1988, which damaged crops and destroyed fields in river floodplains. The government stated that it would assist farmers, and this generated high expectations in view of the assistance given the previous year. Chiefs were required to submit reports to district officials in order to obtain compensation for affected villagers. In some cases chiefs took the initiative to compile reports; in others they were lobbied by villagers. The lack of response from district officials led to disenchantment, however, followed by antagonism against chiefs and government officials.

Although organisational and welfare concerns were overt reasons for disputes during these crises, they reveal the dichotomy between chiefs and the government. The military government illustrated its lack of authority in the rural areas by relying on chiefs to distribute aid goods, whilst the lack of co-operation between chiefs and district officials indicated a contest for authority. In drawing this tension to the surface the crises also indicated their material causes. In the first

instance, the crises demonstrate the importance of agriculture to rural residents as well as their limited capacity to recover from such crises. By highlighting this dependence on the land the crises indicated the terrain of the contest between chiefs and the government.

The fundamental social dynamic is that the rural population depends primarily upon the remitted earnings of migrant workers for its material survival. Agriculture is supported by investment of this income and, though secondary to the latter, is a vital component of individuals' survival strategies. In other words, agriculture has the potential, varying in degree from place to place as well as inter-seasonally within any one locality, to provide some security to rural residents. The ways in which people express this material concern and attempt to harness this potential have been the subject of much analysis, because it is a common feature throughout much of rural southern Africa (Gay, 1980; Keegan, 1986; Murray, 1981; 1992; Spiegel, 1979; Sharp & Spiegel, 1990). The aspect of this dependence in focus here is the way in which the relationship between chief and subject is expressed as one dimension of individuals' efforts to attain some security through agricultural livelihoods.

Events such as the 1987 snowfalls were a dramatic illustration of the need for land. The subsequent conflicts point to the political significance of land to Lesotho's citizens and to the government, thereby indicating that land is not an immutable variable in the relationship between chief and subject. In other words, the ecological crises highlighted a struggle over the significance of land, which demands, in turn, analytical

sensitivity to how people construct 'land' as a resource. Furthermore, the ecological crises indicated that this struggle is both an agent of, and subject to, the transformation of nature in Lesotho.

The point here is that land is neither simply a physical variable nor simply a social construct. There are natural forces such as snowfalls and floods which highlight the fact that Basotho must take account of environmental conditions in the way they construct land as a resource, but the social relationships which arise from, and express this consideration reflect a process of transforming nature. In short, analysis demands sensitivity both to the way people collectively define the environment and to the influence of natural forces on their definitions (Benton, 1989; Grundmann, 1991). The ecological crises outlined above highlight this dual feature of ecological processes, which has been described as a question of how people both 'work in the environment' (because humanity is dependent on its constituent phenomena to survive), and how they 'work the environment', (that is, they transform it by means of progress in technology to harness resources) (Crompton & Erwin, 1991). These crises are, however, extreme illustrations. In the following discussion, I focus on the more subtle and less visible dynamics in the everyday life of Basotho villagers and chiefs.

#### Land as a resource

The pre-colonial ethos of land as a common resource is the basis of land tenure in Lesotho, and of chiefs' authority. In

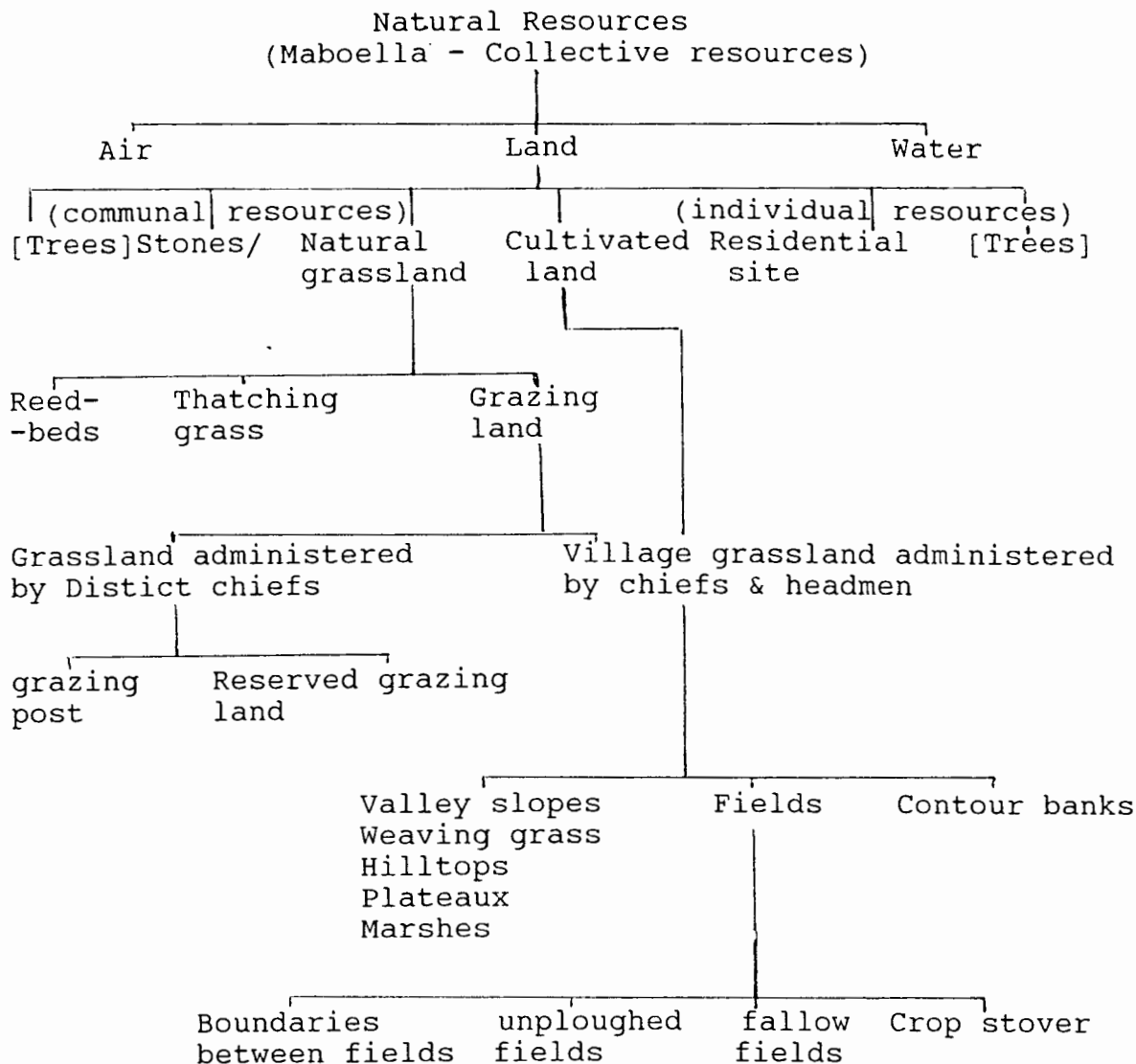
principle, individuals hold usufruct rights to land and its constituent resources, and chiefs authorise these rights. These rights have been modified and elaborated over time (Kimble, 1978; Quinlan, 1984), but the principle is still very evident in the relationship between chief and subject. Figure 5 illustrates the rudiments of this principle and the relationship. It should be noted that Figure 5 presents the current model of resource classification, and it should not be read, therefore, as if the model has existed unchanged for many years.

All natural resources are, in principle, for the use of all. The practice of usufruct entails functional gradations between communal and individual rights of access to these resources. These gradations have been accentuated during the last 150 years by the integration of arable farming and of sedentary settlement into the pre-colonial pastoralist heritage. The integration of arable farming and pastoralism has involved re-evaluation of resource categories and refinement of the usufruct principle.

Trees, for example, are now private property in specific circumstances. Likewise, fields have become virtually the private property of individuals, but as I discuss shortly, their use is still governed by collective need for livestock forage and the occasional utility of fields to provide it. Within this framework, chiefs occupy a central position. As is illustrated in Figure 5, the role of chiefs as trustees of all natural resources is overtly expressed in the way some resources are categorised directly in reference to chiefs.



Figure 5: Sesotho classification of natural resources



Source: Field data and modification of Shoup (1987:26-27, Tables 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3).

NB: There are various categories of fields, tenure of which also varies, though many categories are no longer substantive features of the land tenure system in practice today (see Quinlan, 1984).

However one represents the Sesotho model of society's ecological relationship to land, one cannot ignore the fact that it is continuing to evolve in relation to changing material circumstances of rural residents. There is a process of multi-

layered differentiation of the resource categories themselves, of rights of access and use of resources, and of chiefs' authority over resources (Sheddick, 1954; Quinlan, 1984; Shoup, 1987). This differentiation may be described as an artefact of circumscription, the antecedents of which can be traced to the mid-19th century when the Basotho polity was transformed into a territorially demarcated nation. Basotho were free, however, to occupy the interior of the country given that land was readily available. Yet, by the early 20th century, Basotho were no longer masters of that environment, able to spread out and to shape the countryside as desired, but subject to the consequences of their containment. Since that time Basotho have had to contend with a history of population growth and expansion of settlements which has reduced acreages available for cultivation, and has led to encroachment onto available grazing land. The material constraints on land and individuals' efforts to derive security from land continue to change the practice of authority over land. In particular, current circumstances show a growing distinction between two facets of chiefs' authority: the authority to arbitrate access to land and the authority to control its use.

#### The struggle for arable land

Put boldly, individuals' right of access to arable land is now of little value to many young adults. There is such a shortage of land for cultivation that many do not expect to acquire more than their residential sites. Such pessimism stems from evident and increasing landlessness throughout Lesotho, even though there is no uniform pattern because of local and regional

variations in ecological and demographic conditions (Gattinara, n.d.; Gay, 1980; Hamnett, 1973; Murray, 1981; Quinlan, 1984; Spiegel, 1979).

Landlessness is acute in the eastern mountain region partly because there is less land on which it is feasible to grow crops than in the lowlands. The need for land is visible; the many abandoned and deeply eroded fields on steep slopes are testimony to the consequences of challenging ecological constraints, whilst the apparently successful cultivation of hybrid wheat at 2700 metres above sea level (masl), though admittedly on gentler slopes, is evidence of the effort to transcend perceived ecological limits. In a different vein, demographic trends highlight the social consequences of this need. Mapholaneng, for example, is growing rapidly through influx of young couples who have no intention of acquiring fields. Their stated interests are uniformly similar; Mapholaneng has the facilities to support lives governed by dependence on migrant wage incomes. Relatively good transport to, and from, Mapholaneng is a common reason for residence in the village. There is direct access to Mokhotlong town and the airport, and to the lowlands and South Africa, on a road which was regularly maintained in the 1980s, and which was being tarred in 1994, such that it is used by an increasing number of buses and taxis. Mapholaneng is also a rare place in the mountain region with its relative abundance of retail and service amenities.

Today's young adults have good reason to turn their backs on crop farming. They are the generation which bears the brunt of their parents' and grandparents' futile efforts to stem

landlessness. Apart from the gross shortage of arable land in relation to the size of the population, gradual imposition of private property rights to arable land has begun to negate individuals' usufruct rights. Fields can be inherited and leased but, as yet, they cannot be sold. This is a marked departure from the embattled days of the 19th century when Basotho unequivocally rejected private property rights to land in favour of a system of usufructory tenure. Mobu hase lefa (land is not paid [for]) (Asthon, 1952:149) is an old maxim which lost its original significance during the 20th century as the migrant labour system began to dominate rural livelihoods (Quinlan, 1984:76-84, 133-146). For much of this century young migrant workers have supported their landholding elders through wage remittances on the basis of vested interest in the land (Murray, 1981; Spiegel, 1979). In expectation of returning to rural life, and in a context of increasing land shortage, the migrant workers established legitimate material grounds to take over these landholdings. The informal practice of inheritance grew from this material interdependency and is aptly expressed in the Sesotho phrase ho ja lefa (to inherit - literally: 'to eat the debt'). Inheritance of fields was eventually recognised by the Basutoland National Council, a government assembly, in 1947-48 (Sheddick, 1954:60,168). Subsequently, the practice was legally sanctioned through revision of the Laws of Lerotholi (ibid; Laws of Lerotholi, 1959, sections 6,11-13 [in Duncan 1960:116]).

Official acceptance of field inheritance set a precedent for the privatisation of arable land, the ramifications of which are still unfolding. The changes within society were set in motion

not only by acceptance of inheritance per se, but also by a seemingly innocuous stipulation in the laws. Field inheritance is nominally governed by the stipulation that the heir(s) live in or near to the homestead of the deceased. This stipulation would have been appropriate when it was made, for it reflected the material and cultural heritage of rural life. As we saw earlier, sons generally settled near to their parents' homesteads, while patriarchal attitudes readily accommodated the material interdependency between young and old. Although the stipulation affirmed Sesotho values of kinship, it also laid the basis for change in their expression.

First, the stipulation elevated the institution of the 'family council' (lekhotla la lelapa) above that of chief in the matter of distributing fields. 'Council' is a bit of a misnomer, for in the course of daily life it refers simply to a loose network of elder agnates (men and women) who maintain the social bonds between kin, and who may be called upon occasionally to manage rituals that express these bonds (Sheddick, 1954:20-21). The name refers primarily to the group formed by these individuals when they meet to distribute the estate of a deceased agnate (Hamnett, 1975:45- 52; Poulter, 1981:107). Prior to legitimization of field inheritance, the 'council' informally mediated transfer of homesteads and fields to heirs through discussion with, but subordinate to the decision of, the relevant chief. Subsequently, the chiefs' authority was superceded by the 'council's' authority over individual estates. Access to land became subject to individual interests amongst a network of co-residential kin rather than to chiefs' assessment of these interests in relation

to those of other village residents.

The basis for this 'council's' new found authority was the stipulation which linked a deceased's fields to his or her homestead. The homestead was part of a person's private estate and so, by extension, the fields fell within the ambit of the 'council's' ability to authorise distribution of that estate. The stipulation itself, however, compounded another process by which private property rights had been extended to the land on which homesteads stood. In principle, the residential site was only held on a usufruct basis while the buildings upon it were private property. In the context of pressure on land, however, property rights to homesteads became a means for Basotho to extend those rights to the sites and to enlarge those sites. The results are visible today in the way residential sites are often demarcated by their occupants as bounded areas, sometimes as much as quarter of a hectare around the homestead proper, rather than as space occupied by dwellings.

This development was stimulated by the efforts of colonial officials to encourage horticulture along the lines of the European cultural heritage of 'gardens' (Sheddick, 1954:78-79). Today, the demarcation of residential sites is justified on the basis of the 'right' of an individual to have a jarete. The term is derived from the Afrikaans word jaart, which means 'yard' as in the yard outside a house, and refers to land set aside near the homestead to grow vegetables or fruit trees. Jarete became a land category during the 1930s when the horticultural campaign was started (Agric. Dept., 1934:10; 1936:8). Individuals were encouraged to grow fruit and vegetables on residential sites with

remarkable success, stimulated by collapse of the agricultural economy during the world recession and the drought of 1932 and 1933 (Agric. Dept., 1937; 1945; Murray, 1981:14-15; Stutley, 1960:99; Sheddick, 1954:78-79). Subsequently, a common practice was to construct protective fences around these 'gardens' and, in many instances, around the entire homestead.

When the Laws of Lerotholi were revised to allow inheritance of fields, 'gardens' were also included as attachments to homesteads. Although the Laws maintained the fiction of usufruct rights to this land - '(the individual) shall be entitled to use of such land as long as he or they continue to dwell thereon', and deprived only if 'land [is] required in the public interest' (quoted in Hamnett, 1975:139) - private property rights had been extended beyond the dwellings to the land. Today, these de facto rights have been entrenched by the 1979 Land Act through which title deeds confirm individual tenure of residential sites and fields.

There is, therefore, an historical process leading towards de facto privatisation of land in a way which reduces both the probability of young adults acquiring fields and the acreages that they might conceivably acquire. This process is still being contested as villagers assess its ramifications. The case study below illustrates these dynamics. It refers to a network of kin who have been fortunate to be heirs of a relatively large landholding. Nonetheless, it is patently clear that the current heirs will have little to pass on to the next generation.

### Case Study: Maliehe's fields

In 1977 Motisilane Maliehe died at his home in Ha Meta, leaving a landed estate of eight fields. His heirs were his three surviving sons; Makhetha, the oldest son, who lived in Mapholaneng six kilometres distant, and Kikine and Khosi, both of whom lived in Ha Meta. As the eldest living agnate, Maketha became the 'father' of Maliehe's kin in the area, with implicit authority to preside over distribution of his father's fields. He duly exercised his authority and laid claim to the fields for subsequent division amongst kin. At the time, Makhetha already had a field in Mapholaneng while his two brothers had fields in Ha Meta.

Khosi disputed Makhetha's claim and, with the backing of the phala of Ha Meta (who was also chairman of the local Land Committee), he took the matter to court. The case was heard in Mapholaneng, where the court president ruled against Makhetha on the grounds that none of the parties had the government forms which indicated title to fields. No party had substantial evidence to support their claim, but Khosi had a better claim to be the heir in terms of the Laws of Lerotholi. Khosi had argued that he lived in Ha Meta close to his father's homestead and, therefore, that he was a more legitimate heir than Makhetha who lived in Mapholaneng, which was not even in the sub-ward of the chief who had jurisdiction over Ha Meta.

Mokhoabe, Makhetha's eldest son, then took over the matter as he felt that his father lacked the strength and knowledge to proceed with litigation. He arranged for his father to call a meeting of the 'family council', as was his right as 'father'



of the family, to discuss allocation of Motisilane's fields. Khosi and Kikine refused in writing to attend this meeting, but this did not deter Mokhoabe. He had written proof that his father had attempted to carry out his moral obligations to kin. At the meeting, Makheta divided the fields amongst himself, his brothers and his three married sons (his fourth son was still a boy) [see Figure 6].

Figure 6: Division of fields amongst the heirs of Motisilane Maliehe

		39m	Khosi
		?	130m
	15m	Makheta	
20m		Mahoabe	
20m		Teboho	
32m		Makheta	
?		Kikine	
24m		Teboho	
24m		Motisilane	
	199m		
39m	Makhoabe		Khosi
		44m	
130m			320m

Mokhoabe then lodged a claim for the necessary forms in order to register title to the fields. Once he had completed this administrative procedure, he took the matter to court on his father's behalf. This time Makhetha won the case on legal and moral grounds. He had the necessary title deeds and he had given

a proportion of the inheritance to his brothers. In particular, the president noted that Khosi had been given a generous proportion commensurate with his needs as a married man with several children.

In 1980, Khosi appealed to the Central court in Mokhotlong, supported in principle by his brother Kikine. This court wasted no time, however, in rejecting the appeal in view of the local court transcripts and the title deeds. Khosi then appealed to his sub-ward chief who reportedly claimed not to be familiar with the details of the case (but who would have authorized the title deeds), and so passed the matter to the Tlokoeng ward chief, Matsohlo Sekonyela. Again, Khosi was unsuccessful because, as both Makhetha and Mokhoabe commented, the chiefs could do nothing against a civil court ruling and obliged, therefore, to ignore Khosi's appeal.

The Land Act had been passed by this time and new forms were issued for registering title to fields. By August 1980, Makhetha and his sons had obtained most of the necessary forms under the 1979 Land Act to certify their title to most of the fields. Kikine tried in the meantime to take Makhoabe's field which led the latter to take him to court. Although Makhoabe did not have all the necessary documentation required by the Land Act, the court president found in his favour. Subsequently, title to all fields amongst the respective heirs, with the exception of Motisilane(jun), was confirmed after Mokhoabe had persuaded the chairman of the Land Committee at Ha Meta to stamp and sign the title deeds. Motisilane (jun.) was still awaiting confirmation in 1988 after having re-submitted new forms for

approval, following a fire at the local court which had destroyed records of his previous application.

The family feud continued throughout the 1980s. In 1982, Kikine died and his wife subsequently brought the title deeds for his fields to Makhetha, reportedly on the basis of a wish by her late husband to get rid of the fields as a means of getting out of the feud. Since then, Makhetha has kept the fields, giving a share of the harvests to his sister in law. He has not attempted to re-register the fields in his name for fear that this would provide Khosi an opportunity to contest the claim.

In 1986, Khosi reportedly came to Makhetha to resolve the dispute, and as a gesture of goodwill, said that he would help cultivate Makhetha's fields. At harvest time, however, Khosi reaped the entire crop without the knowledge of Makhetha, and kept it on the grounds that he had carried all the costs of ploughing, sowing and harvesting. Makhetha and Mokhoabe might have pursued the matter had it not been for the fact that the harvest of that year was particularly poor and, therefore, not worth the effort. Instead, the feud continued to simmer. In the meantime, Mokhoabe and his younger brother Teboho, who were the wage earners of the family, established material grounds to inherit from their father by paying the costs of cultivating their father's fields and those of Kikine, in addition to their own.

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The way Makheta and Mokhoabe pursued their claim to fields

and, in particular, their comment about the inability of chiefs to intervene, suggest a general decline in the authority and status of chiefs. However, such a perspective is presumptuous even if the evidence indicates reasons for popular disdain of chiefs. Chiefs and villagers are caught in a process in which authority over land is very much contested, and the relationship between chief and subject is being re-constructed as circumstances change. The critical position in this argument is that it makes no sense to isolate chiefs' authority in relation to arable land, when the historical evidence indicates that this authority must be located within a broader cultural and economic context. The privatisation of land, for instance, may be a material process which subverts cultural constructs of usufruct, but it is linked to the latter, such that it is an integral part of the evolution and expression of land tenure in Lesotho. Likewise, as much as the foregoing discussion demonstrates empirical changes in the character of land categories, each is linked to the other. There are subtle gradations, rather than absolute distinctions, between the land categories as people assess the consequences for relationships amongst themselves.

Change to these relationships is not simply determined by material imperatives which would imply distinct transformations of the relationships. Rather, the change is dependent upon culturally mediated recognition of these imperatives as well as individual efforts to dictate limits. These efforts are only partially successful because, in the process, the imperatives become part of the cultural idiom and the limits are inevitably modified in response. In short, while the authority of chiefs

over access to arable land is diminishing, it is also being reassessed and re-constructed in relation to chiefs' authority over other resources. This dynamic cannot be illustrated fully here, for to do so requires detailed discussion of other resource categories, particularly grazing land, and the uses to which they are put, and this task entails detailed description of the pastoralist dimension of rural livelihoods.

The dynamic can be introduced, however, in anticipation of further discussion of it in the following chapter. I outline below recent developments in the use of crop stover, which is commonly used as winter forage for livestock. The point in question is that while this illustration suggests erosion of chiefs' authority, like the Maliehe case study above, it also highlights the importance of broadening one's perspective before judging the matter. Livestock are often seen as antithetical to crop farming in market-based farming enterprises, but this is not the case in Lesotho. Basotho have integrated not only these two facets of farming, but also market production of livestock with a pre-capitalist rationale for rearing livestock. Generally, livestock are kept, during the summer, at grazing posts in the remote alpine valleys away from villages in order to protect the crops. The village is the basis on which the divisions between arable land and grazing land and remote grazing post, are built.

Moreover, the village continues to be the reference point for modifications to the transhumance system, which will be discussed in the following chapter. The dynamics of this process are indicated in recent changes in the use of crop stover from harvested fields.

Communal access to crop stover for use as winter forage for livestock is one of the longstanding principles of usufruct in Lesotho. Throughout Mokhotlong district, however, farmers often reap the crop stover from their fields and store it at their homesteads to feed their own animals. Farmers in the district informed me that this has been a common practice since the mid-1970s, and that chiefs have not tried to stop it. They rationalise the practice on the grounds that the welfare of their animals is threatened during winter by decline in the quantity of grazing in village environs as a result of extensive use of village grazing lands by the increasing number of animals kept in villages during the summer months. They defend the practice on the grounds that the crop is legitimately the private property of the farmer and so, by extension, the stover also belongs to the farmer.

This practice is, on the one hand, a practical response to changing ecological conditions. As settlements expand, the establishment of bounded residential sites and cultivation of more land in village environs leads to encroachment upon the grassland that can be used for grazing livestock. Faced with the conflict of choice between growing subsistence or fodder crops on limited landholdings in a context of human poverty, appropriation of crop stover is a functional compromise. The practice is, on the other hand, a logical corollary of the privatisation of arable land. As individual property rights to crops are extended to the land on which they are produced, so communal tenure of one part of the crop becomes less tenable.

There are, clearly, ecological and economic determinants of

change in agricultural practices which challenge the established order, but the functional compromise of farmers with regard to crop stover, and the collective acquiescence by chiefs and villagers, suggest that there is an internal logic to the land tenure system which can accomodate apparent contradictions. That logic is revealed in the way the removal of crop stover (and the practice of land inheritance) accentuates people's need to use resources in particular ways. By removing crop stover from fields, individuals are making direct reference to their collective interest in livestock as a foundation of social relationships in rural areas. Not only are livestock central to ritual exchanges but, as we have seen, they are also the medium by which the status of chiefs relative to each other is expressed.

This is not to deny the usurption of communal interests in crop stover, but it is a warning against seeing this practice in isolation, and only on the basis of individual material interest. The empirical situation is one of contest for land which has resulted in various resolutions that are governed by specific circumstances. Individual appropriation of crop stover suggests that a resolution to the problem of finding forage for livestock has been found quite quickly, but there is no guarantee that it will become a permanent solution. In other instances, resolutions are still being tested. This is evident in the variety of 'gardens' to be seen in the mountain region. In some villages, there are communal 'gardens', that is, a fenced area which has been set aside for collective use by village residents, while residential sites are demarcated only by the occupants'

dwelling. These 'gardens' are often inspired by Aid agency projects to establish horticultural co-operatives but, in view of the contest for land, they can also be seen as an attempt to preserve principles of usufruct. In other villages, like Mapholaneng, there are both 'traditional' type homesteads, which have no demarcated boundaries and whose occupants cultivate separate 'gardens' granted by the chief, and other homesteads which are bounded by fences and contain large 'gardens' that affirm the occupants' claim to the total area.

These visible conditions obscure a history of contest, as is illustrated in the case study of 'Maliehe's fields', in which resolutions are forever being tested. For example, the board of the primary school in Mapholaneng has been involved in a long dispute over the fields which had been allocated by chief Kariki Sekonyela to help feed the children. Throughout the 1980s Kariki's successor, Setempe Sekonyela, and the latter's successor, Reselisitsoe, attempted on various occasions to re-allocate the fields, on the grounds that there were individuals in Mapholaneng who had no fields with which to support their families. To date, the school board has managed to prevent loss of its fields largely on the grounds of 'public interest' and use of the fields as 'gardens' for horticulture.

In contrast, Hamnett (1975:82-84) records a case in which a woman claimed rights of inheritance to two residential sites and gardens but was dispossessed of one garden by the chief. The courts initially rejected the woman's claim. Later, the courts of appeal first upheld the claim on the grounds that a 'garden' could not be categorised as arable land and hence, was not



subject to norms of usufruct. The third court finally rejected the woman's claim on the grounds that the chief was acting in 'public interest' and also, that since the woman could not live at both sites, she could not by rights lay claim to both 'gardens'.

There are no doubt many other cases which would highlight the apparent ambiguities of land tenure in Lesotho. But they are only ambiguities to the outsider. Basotho are clearly aware that these 'ambiguities' reflect variable human categorisations of resources which can be manipulated. And they are manipulated, but always in relation to each other. Categories such as residential sites, gardens and fields are modified as a result of individuals re-assessing their material interests and proclaimed cultural guidelines for expression of these interests. These dynamics are apparent. What is not so apparent, and possibly what many Basotho are not so conscious of, is the change in the form of the relationship between chiefs and villagers.

One cannot deny that chiefs no longer have the authority they used to have with regard to access to arable land. One must also recognise, however, that the general trend towards privatisation of arable land and its products is being expressed on the basis of patriarchal precepts, as is illustrated in the Maliehe case, and in reference to a heritage of usufruct land tenure and collective interest in livestock, which are foundations of chiefs' authority. Therefore, despite the fact that chiefs are being displaced from centre stage with regard to the allocation and use of arable land, this does not necessarily mean that their status and authority is in decline. The potential for this to be

the case is evident in view of increasing landlessness amongst the young adults of today. As the possibility of acquiring fields diminishes, and as transport and consumer facilities improve in rural areas, there is potential for decline in the relevance of chiefs to people whose lives are increasingly oriented to jobs and the consumer market economy of the late 20th century. There is, therefore, a substantive basis for popular disdain and criticism of individual chiefs, but such judgement rests on viewing in isolation specific developments in land tenure in Lesotho. As I have noted, the apparent erosion of chiefs' authority with regard to arable land cannot be seen in isolation from people's interest in, and need for, livestock and their concomitant demand for communal access to resources that sustain those livestock. Accordingly, the following chapter continues the current discussion, but focuses on the pastoral heritage of Basotho.

## CHAPTER 6

### CHIEFS, SUBJECTS AND LIVESTOCK

#### Erosion of chiefs' authority?

Chapter 5 indicated the importance of exploring the relationship between society and nature in Lesotho in order to understand political authority in the rural areas. That chapter left us with two issues which still require elaboration. First, there are indications of erosion of chiefs' authority in relation to their subjects in matters pertaining to access to, and use of, land for arable farming and for homesteads. Secondly, the discussion intimated that this apparent erosion of chiefs' authority must be assessed in relation to people's need for livestock, and the concomitant need for communal access to resources that sustain livestock. The argument in this chapter is that the apparent decline in chief's authority with regard to arable land is compensated by people's reliance on chiefs to uphold collective access to, and need for, natural resources in general, and for those that sustain livestock in particular. People's pre-occupation with livestock is central to the way land categories are defined in relation to each other and to broader economic circumstances of life in rural Lesotho. Chiefs are the pivot on which villagers assess possibilities for, and constraints on, meeting their need for livestock.

What is in question here is the interaction of rural residents with a changing political and physical world, and its effects upon chiefs' authority in Lesotho. Chapter 5 revealed shifts in the relationship between chief and subject, which could be seen

as responses to external factors such as population growth and dependence upon migrant wage incomes. The discussion touched on the way these factors are mediated in a culturally specific way by Basotho, but nagging questions remain about this explanation? Are the practices only adaptive responses to imposed conditions? Are Basotho driven by cultural prescriptions alone in their efforts to mediate imposed conditions? The underlying theme of the argument is that Basotho certainly do adapt, and they often use cultural prescriptions to adapt, but they also initiate change. Livestock, like land, are a material resource, but Basotho pre-occupation with them is a particular imperative which originated in pre-colonial times and which has been sustained to the present day (Ashton, 1952; Ferguson, 1990; Kuper, 1982; Murray, 1981). Chiefs are central to Basotho efforts to retain established practices, to modify them, and to develop new practices that enable them to derive sustenance from the land and livestock.

#### Chiefs and the livestock economy

The central role of chiefs in the livestock economy is palpable. Access to summer grazing areas beyond village environs is governed by district chiefs, from whom stock owners obtain permission to build grazing posts. Subordinate chiefs authorise the transhumance system by controlling use of grassland within their areas of jurisdiction. Throughout the summer months chiefs are responsible for ensuring that stock graze neither on cultivated fields nor on grassland which they have reserved for winter grazing. Chiefs may also prohibit grazing in areas that

are badly degraded for as long as they feel is necessary. Chiefs are also responsible for controlling the number of livestock in the villages during the summer, and they can demand their removal to grazing posts. Their responsibilities are reduced during the winter months, for then the emphasis is on protecting only specified areas from further degradation by livestock. With the onset of spring chiefs must decide when to restrict grazing in village environs, and when to order the removal of the majority of livestock to grazing posts.

Generally speaking, chiefs carry out their duties assiduously and with the co-operation of villagers. Their authority is visibly demonstrated at the twice weekly gatherings of stock owners, usually men, at chiefs' homesteads to conduct the business of livestock management. Trade in livestock, registration of brands, impounding of livestock, their retrieval, and care of stray animals, are all carried out under the auspices of the chief. This business is usually supervised by men who occupy positions that represent the chiefs' duties (chief's secretary, pound master, 'babeisi'/'bewys' [stock transfer certificate] writer, grazing land supervisors [batsoari ba maboella]). There are standard procedures with which all are familiar such that the interactions are often relaxed, though contained within norms of social etiquette of respect to the chief. The chief's secretary records the various transactions, assisted by the babeisi writer, and collects trespass fines, while the pound master arranges for release of impounded animals. In addition, the secretary arranges for distribution of the fines, 70% of which are paid out to the grazing land supervisors,

who are men appointed by the chief to enforce grazing restrictions, and the remaining 30% is sent to the national treasury.

Likewise, the legitimacy of chiefs is clearly expressed in the way decisions are made to restrict winter grazing. Chiefs make the decision, usually in October, on the basis of debates amongst stock owners at public meetings which are held at chiefs' homesteads. The debates revolve primarily around the welfare of livestock in relation to prevailing ecological conditions such that many factors are voiced and considered: the condition of village grassland in relation to the alpine grassland used during summer; spring growth of grasses relative to current and forecasted spring rainfall; the strength of new born lambs and kids in relation to the quality of forage for ewes and (goat) does, and prevailing climatic conditions (angora kids, in particular, are very susceptible to changes in temperature, to hail and to cold rain); villagers' need of cattle to plough the fields in relation to rainfall which determines the start of the ploughing season (often early November). Although there are government regulations on use of grazing land, these are usually regarded as just one factor amongst the many others to be considered (Legal Notice, 1980b; 1982; 1986).

These indicators of authority highlight a community of purpose and understanding amongst stock owners and chiefs. This 'community' is so apparent that it begs questions about its dynamics. There are, however, two characteristics which demand attention. On the one hand, this 'community' is characterised by defensiveness amongst chiefs and villagers. There is collective

concern about deterioration of grazing land, and about the difficulties of rearing a variety of livestock with different survival and regenerative capabilities in a harsh environment. On the other hand, there is evident tension between the relatively rich and poor stock owners over government interventions which are seen generally to favour the former. The discussion below traces out these dynamics for elaboration in later sections of the chapter.

### Collective interest in Livestock

Basotho have integrated market-oriented rearing of livestock with their pre-colonial pastoralist heritage. The outcome is a remarkable diversity of livestock, to which are attached a range of economic and cultural values, and from which Basotho derive a variety of uses. Cattle are the basis of the pastoralist heritage, but today, as is indicated in Table 1, the national herd is dominated by merino sheep and angora goats.

Table 1: Size of the National Herd

Year:	1955	1970	1975	1980	1985
No of animals					
Sheep	1,339,019	1,655,128	1,519,700	1,043,561	1,391,625
Goats	654,800	973,767	834,600	784,346	978,013
Cattle	408,144	551,520	502,400	593,929	524,675
Horses	102,001	109,703	100,300	101,123	110,438
Donkeys	48,855	89,711	92,700	85,238	111,726
Mules	4829	4092	?	?	?

Sources: Colonial Report, 1957:46; Bureau of Statistics, 1970: Tables: 4.1111, 4.2121, 4.2432, 4.4111, 4.6111, 4.7111, 4.8111; Bureau of Statistics, 1982, Tables: 1.1.1, 2.1.1, 3.1.1, 4.1.1, 5.1.1, 6.2.1; Bureau of Statistics, 1987, Tables: F.14, F.17. No statistics of the mule population were recorded after 1970.

Cattle are still, perhaps, the most important animals in terms of cultural values. They are the medium for bridewealth transactions; they form an integral part of many rituals (e.g. use of black skinned beasts in funeral rites); and, as Ferguson (1990) has recently argued, they occupy a unique place in the imagination of Basotho men concerning the nature of rural society and rural livelihoods. They are a medium for economic transactions, be it for hire as draft power or, as is becoming more common, a source of income through sale at auctions to the national abattoir. Furthermore, as Murray (1977) has argued with regard to the persistence of bridewealth, cattle are the medium through which rural residents can obtain a portion of migrant workers' wages, while also enabling the latter to invest in rural society prior to their retirement.

The preponderance of sheep and goats reflects the importance of Lesotho as a wool and mohair producer for international markets. In addition, they are the common consumable and trade commodity. Sheep, in particular, are often slaughtered to provide food at social gatherings. They are bartered in exchange for services (e.g. payment of secondary school fees), and there is regular trade in sheep to local butcherries. They are also a medium for use in rituals. For instance, the liver of sheep is an important ingredient in some medicines prepared by healers (lingaka). Since angora goats were introduced in Lesotho at the turn of the century (Ashton, 1952:134; Phororo, 1979:100), pure white specimens have become central to some healing rituals.

Horses and donkeys are vital means of transport in rural areas. The donkey has a humble status as a beast of burden, but



the horse has become a popular cultural and status symbol. The blanketed Basotho horseman is a much marketed image of Lesotho. Male social status is enhanced by ownership of a large imported horse, rather than the locally bred 'Basotho pony', and endorsed partly through popular interest in locally organised races. In Mokhotlong district, for example, informal race meetings are organised at various times of the year and at various localities. The horse is also a medium of exchange in bridewealth payments.<sup>1</sup> Also, a boy's status as an adult is confirmed, after his initiation, by his maternal uncle who is formally required to give him a horse, a blanket and, in days gone by, a rifle.<sup>2</sup>

Although Basotho find much value in this diversity of livestock, it presumes flexible management strategies. The critical problem for Basotho owners is that the economic and ecological contexts for rearing livestock have outgrown the original logic of the transhumance system. That system emphasised adherence to known ecological limits in order to ensure the survival of livestock; the alpine grasslands were used during the warm summer months, and allowed to regenerate during winter and spring when livestock were grazed on the accumulated forage on the relatively warmer, lower sub-alpine grasslands in village environs. Not only is it difficult to rear animals in a country with climatic extremes, but the different survival capabilities of livestock species and breeds have required stock owners to develop different management techniques if their value is to be realised.

The outcome has been re-assessment of known ecological limits, and subsequent modification of the transhumance system. During

the last 20 years stock owners have established 'winter' grazing posts in the intermediate valleys between villages and the summer grazing areas. These grazing posts are situated in the relatively warm sub-alpine valley grasslands and are usually no more than three or four hours walk from villages, thereby allowing rapid removal of livestock to the villages whenever the weather deteriorates. As a result, livestock movement patterns have been changed. In the past most livestock would be taken to the summer grazing areas in November, once ploughing had begun, and brought back to the villages once crops had been harvested during April/May. Only the rams and (goat) bucks would be kept in the villages, collectively under the care of an appointed villager, and allowed to cover the ewes and does upon their return in autumn. Now, stock owners must consider carefully the different capabilities of livestock to survive seasonal climatic and natural hazards in their efforts to re-define the ecological limits for livestock rearing.

Most livestock are sent to the summer grazing areas during late December/early January. During April/early May the animals are usually brought down to the 'winter' grazing posts. Stock owners who have large herds occasionally leave hammels at 'summer' grazing posts for the duration of winter in view of their ability to withstand cold, and if there are expectations that winter forage supplies will be inadequate in the winter grazing areas. Most stock owners keep ewes and does at the 'winter' grazing posts for June and part of July, where they are covered by rams and bucks brought up from the villages. As the weather deteriorates, cattle and donkeys are brought back to the

villages, followed by ewes and does, and lastly by hammels and horses. Once the weather begins to improve in August, horses, ewes and hammels are returned to the 'winter' grazing posts, followed by cattle. As long as the weather continues to improve, stock owners will allow the ewes to bear their lambs at the 'winter' grazing posts, and bring up donkeys and cattle that are not in daily use in the villages. Goats are generally kept in the villages until their owners are certain that there is little likelihood of inclement weather to which new born kids are very susceptible. This is the general pattern today but, between August and September, stock are moved back and forth between the villages and the 'winter' grazing posts according to changes in climate and in the availability of forage in village environs.

Underlying these changes is a gradual division between the minority who are relatively wealthy stock owners and the majority who are relatively poor stock owners (this differentiation is discussed in detail later in the chapter). The former often keep their sheep and goats permanently at grazing posts rather than in villages on the grounds that forage supplies in village environs are inadequate for their needs. It is the majority of poor stock owners who move their different animals regularly between village, and 'winter' and summer grazing posts because they can ill afford any stock losses. It is this majority who tend to rely on the chiefs to extend winter grazing periods and to ignore government stipulations, in opposition to the minority of wealthy stock owners who tend to support the government's interventions. The current state of play is that there is discernible opposition between chiefs and government officials,

with the authority of the former being upheld by the majority of villagers but challenged indirectly by a minority of wealthy stock owners. To understand these dynamics, the historical roots of the tensions between the different agents need to be outlined.

#### Historical roots of current political tensions

Colonial programmes emphasised livestock production over grassland management with a view to stimulating a market economy. During the first decade of this century, the colonial government sought to improve the quality of livestock in Lesotho by importing Angora bucks, Rambouillet rams and Arab stallions (Colonial Report, 1909:33; 1911:8; Phororo, 1979:73,100). Efforts to improve cattle breeds were curtailed by the East Coast fever epidemic which swept across South Africa between 1907 and 1910, and led to the prohibition of cattle imports into Lesotho (Colonial Report, 1911:8). The attempt to promote mutton production through the Rambouillet breed soon gave way to interest in wool production which had its origins in the 19th century (Ashton, 1952:134; Germond, 1967:469).

By the late 1920s wool and mohair were the most important agricultural exports of the country (Murray, 1981:14), supported by various means to promote a market economy in livestock. Catalonian Jack donkeys were reportedly introduced in 1918 (Ashton, 1952:112) as stud animals to produce mules capable of carrying heavy loads of wool over long distances to traders. According to informants, stock owners in eastern Lesotho used to travel via Namahali Pass in the north to traders in Witsieshoek,

and via Sani Pass to traders in Himeville. The first dip tank was constructed in 1905 as a forerunner of an intensive campaign begun during the 1920s to eradicate endemic sheep scab (Phororo, 1979:92). By 1935 the parasite had been virtually eradicated from the national herd (Colonial Report, 1920:6; Phororo, op cit). The government introduced grassland management programmes during the 1930s, but the emphasis still remained on livestock production. Projects included the first attempt to institute regular auctions of livestock (Mokitimi, 1988a:1), continued import of stud animals (Agric. Dept., 1938; 1939; 1940), a major ecological survey of the alpine grasslands (Staples and Hudson, 1938), introduction of rotational grazing and stocking rate controls (Agric Dept, op cit), and construction of shearing sheds (Mokitimi, 1988b:9).

This emphasis continued in the 1940s and 1950s. Market co-operatives were established in 1948 (Mokitimi, 1988a:1). Classing of wool and mohair in terms of international standards, and training of personnel, became priorities during the 1950s (Colonial Report, 1952:33). A training scheme to develop veterinary services was started (op cit). A co-operative banking union for farmers was established in 1957 (Colonial Report 1957:51). Stud animals continued to be imported, a scheme to promote breeding of Brown Swiss cattle was started, and two horse stud farms were established (Colonial Report, 1954:42; 1959:49). Not all of these schemes were successful. Livestock auctions collapsed in 1956 (Colonial Report, 1957:46). The market co-operatives reportedly suffered from lack of capital, a shortage of government shearing sheds, and competition from traders

(Colonial Report, 1954:45). Wool and mohair buyers occasionally rejected the stated quality of the produce, which was supposed to be packed according to an internationally recognised classing system, because of the prevalence of cross-breed rams and bucks amongst people's herds (Colonial Report, 1958:51; 1959:49).

Furthermore, the attempt to modify grassland management methods (e.g. rotational grazing, stocking rate regulations) does not appear to have been successful (Phororo, 1979: 153). The lack of success was due to their subordination to the effort to improve livestock production. For instance, rotational grazing schemes were linked to the dipping programme. The intention was that the dip tanks would form nuclei for demarcated grazing areas and that grazing patterns would be modified by controlling use of dip tanks (*ibid*). This intention seems, however, to have been lost in the effort to demonstrate the advantages of dipping to improve survival rates, and in stock owners' recognition of the utility of dips to this end. Likewise, the logic of stocking rate controls, to impose externally assessed objective criteria, was contradicted by the emphasis on livestock production and by reliance on chiefs to implement the measures. On the one hand, the controls were somewhat contradictory in a context where Basotho were being encouraged to accumulate livestock. On the other hand, it was unrealistic to implement controls which were based on a different logic of conservation to that of the local land tenure system, and to expect the agents of this system, the chiefs, to subordinate the latter to the former.

Moreover, the disposition of chiefs to uphold the local system had actually been endorsed by government rationalisation of the

chieftainship during the 1930s and 1940s, discussed in chapter 3. Control over grazing had been the responsibility of the chiefs' courts. Trespass, damage to crops, and flouting of chiefs' edicts on grazing areas were subject to fines paid in livestock to the chiefs. Likewise, stray stock were held by the chief and, unless claimed, some would become his property while the rest would be sent to the relevant senior chief. Rationalisation of the chieftainship simply standardised the procedures in ways which endorsed this aspect of chiefs' authority, even though the chieftainship as a whole was subordinated to the authority of colonial government officials and institutions. Although chiefs' judicial authority was restricted, chiefs were given the responsibility to ensure systematic branding of stock and to record ownership through issue of livestock transfer certificates. Stock pounds were introduced and became a means for formal distinction between chiefs and headmen. Operation of stock pounds, and appointment of pound managers, were restricted to gazetted chiefs. However, there are still some gazetted headmen who manage pounds on the basis of the local status of their predecessors as chiefs. In addition, following the establishment of a National Treasury in 1946, a standard rate of fines was introduced and chiefs were responsible for the collection of monies and their remission to the Treasury.

The colonial government's interventions up to the 1930s, and subsequent contradictions in its livestock programmes, indicate some reasons why livestock production took precedence over grassland management in the development of Lesotho's livestock

economy. These factors alone, however, do not explain why and how chiefs' authority in relation to their subjects was upheld, and actually reinforced as a result of their subjects' enthusiastic, though qualified, acceptance of the imperative to increase livestock production and to establish a market economy in livestock. To argue that economic incentives provide the answer, on the basis of the decline in the population's general capacity to sustain itself from farming, would not be very convincing, particularly in view of the discussion in chapters 4 and 5 which has highlighted how intrusion of the market economy in rural areas has eroded aspects of chiefs' authority with regard to settlement and arable farming. A full explanation has to consider why this was not the case with regard to livestock rearing. And this question leads to consideration of the specific ecological dynamics that the colonial programmes stimulated.

It is reasonable to deduce, in view of the lack of necessary data (e.g. stock densities) for that time, that the consistent and relatively successful effort to improve livestock production would have generated greater investment in the welfare of livestock. Although there is no evidence to suggest overall improvement in survival rates, even through to the present day, investment in the welfare of livestock would have increased the number of animals in villages during the summer (e.g. prized horses, stud animals and milch cows and calves). Furthermore, the growing economic importance of sheep and goats would have generated concern to ensure optimal survival of offspring. This would have stimulated, as is evident in the current form of the livestock transhumance system, retention of ewes, lambs, does and



kids in villages for as long as possible following their delivery in early spring, in order to prevent mortalities due to cold weather and to increase their size and strength before removal to the summer grazing areas (mortalities due to cold weather during summer rains and to predation by jackals and eagles have always been hazards for young livestock). Accordingly, there would have been more intensive use of grazing land in village environs during the spring. In turn, on the basis of probability, more livestock would have survived the summer months, such that more stock would have made use of winter grazing in village environs, even if mortalities and consumption of livestock during the harsh winters continued to curtail gross survival rates.

In other words, improvements in livestock production would have altered the seasonal and intra-seasonal concentrations of animals in specific localities which, in turn, would have had an effect on forage availability. For instance, one indication of this process is given in the oral record from stock owners in Mokhotlong district. There were, reportedly, few if any angora goats in the district prior to the 1940s. Since then, however, angora goats have become common components of individuals' herds. Many stock owners try to build up a flock of goats to take advantage of the occasional high prices for mohair. Goat herds are usually smaller than sheep herds for, despite the economic incentive to produce mohair, stock owners acknowledge the greater difficulty of rearing goats compared to sheep. In view of these variables, the ecological condition of the grassland would have been affected by the presence of goats in the district for the

last 50 years, by their particular foraging patterns, and by their contribution to increased density of livestock in villages during winter and spring.

According to the oral record, moreover, the demand for mules decreased with the increase in the number of wool sheds throughout the country, because there was less need for pack animals to transport wool and mohair over long distances to traders. Instead, demand for donkeys increased, to carry commodities and loads like maize to mills within localities, as more shops and services were established to meet rural residents' dependence on migrant wage incomes. As a result, there are few mules today in the country. Indeed, the government no longer compiles statistics on the mule population. Many people own donkeys, however, and assuming that the figures in Table 1 provide an imperfect but approximate indication of trends, there has been a marked increase in the donkey population.<sup>3</sup> Again, the demographic changes in the mule and donkey populations would have affected the condition of grassland and the management strategies of their owners. Mules would have been used mainly at specific times of the year but, as hardy animals, they would probably have been kept most of the time on the alpine grasslands. In contrast, the utility of donkeys to meet everyday needs would have led to greater concentration of donkeys in villages throughout the year. Furthermore, since Basotho recognised that donkeys are less hardy than horses and mules, their owners would have been disposed to return donkeys from the summer grazing areas to the villages as soon as winter threatened.

If we accept this analysis of the ecological dynamics which

underlay the colonial interventions, then we have a reasonable explanation of why the authority of chiefs in livestock management was endorsed, indirectly, by the government emphasis on livestock production and, directly, by the standardisation of livestock controls in village environs. As Basotho diversified their livestock holdings to take advantage of market opportunities, the need for greater control over livestock and use of communal resources would have been felt. Chiefs, as the legitimate authority over management of these resources, would have remained central to the management of livestock.

More significantly, by endorsing the authority of chiefs with regard to control over livestock in villages, the colonial interventions gave chiefs responsibility over the critical nexus of economic and ecological changes wrought by the transformation of the livestock economy. The village was the critical nexus because it was the weakest link in the matrix of social, economic and bio-physical conditions that supported investment in a variety of livestock. On the one hand, given the harsh climate, it was the place in which animals had to be concentrated in order to ensure survival and regeneration of herds. On the other hand, the entire edifice of the stock owners' and officials' interests in promoting livestock production would have crumbled if there had not been adequate definition of authority to manage livestock in village environs. In the absence of effective intervention by colonial officials in grassland management, and on the basis of the colonial government's endorsement of chiefs' authority over the management of livestock in villages, the chiefs were the obvious authority to which people would have turned. Having

established these historical antecedents, we are closer to understanding not only current tensions in rural society in Lesotho, but also why the chieftainship is still upheld by the rural populace as a legitimate form of political authority.

#### Current tensions over livestock and grassland management

We can now turn to the underlying tension in the 'community' between chief and subject, which is manifest in the friction between the relatively wealthy and poor stock owners. The overt cause is the current form of government interventions in the livestock economy. Government policy is to concentrate livestock production in the mountain region, with an emphasis on grassland management, and arable farming in the lowlands. 'Range Management Areas' (RMAs) have been created throughout the mountain region and, in 1990, the area above the 2750masl contour in eastern Lesotho was proclaimed a 'Managed Resource Area' (MRA). Tension has become apparent in a number of ways. For example, there has been opposition to the RMAs since they were introduced in the late 1980s, and the form and the manner in which they were established is being continually modified in the light of experience. In a different vein, a plan to impose a grazing tax in 1989 was shelved in the face of popular opposition. There has yet to be opposition to the MRA but, as I discuss shortly, it is likely to generate opposition. At present it exists only in name and is still subject to government consideration of its role within the broader policy.

The RMAs owe their name and existence to a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programme which

began during the early 1980s. A 'Range Management Division' was created, with USAID funding, within the Ministry of Agriculture, and it is staffed by Basotho and American personnel. The RMAs have been designed, as one USAID ecologist stated, on the basis of livestock and 'range' management programmes in native American reservations (A.Dobb, personal communication; Quinlan, 1993c).<sup>4</sup>

Each RMA includes alpine grazing areas and villages. Each RMA is the basis for grassland and livestock management programmes that are restricted to the residents who live within the circumscribed area. The RMAs were demarcated initially on the basis of topographical divisions in the landscape. This rationale met with opposition from those stock owners who found themselves excluded from grazing areas which they used to use. In response, the Range Management Division now attempts to incorporate locally acknowledged boundaries between areas even though these are loosely defined. There is a propensity for residents of one locality to use adjacent grazing areas as a matter of expediency. Moreover, stock owners tend to maintain the same transhumance route between village and grazing post year after year. It is this propensity which government officials now take into account in the design of RMAs, though it remains subordinate to the underlying logic of the policy for territorial division of the grassland.

Government officials (e.g. American-trained, Basotho ecologists) manage the RMAs, supported by American staff. These officials establish Wool and Mohair Growers' Associations within each RMA, which are the basis for 'community' participation in management (Artz, 1994). The aim is that these associations will

take over the management of their respective RMAs. In addition, the government intends the Village Development Committees to play a broader supervisory role in the management of grasslands (Lesotho National Livestock Task Force, 1990). In the meantime the Associations are the medium through which stock owners are educated about livestock and grassland management techniques. Members of the associations are elected to management committees which carry out business such as collection of membership fees, arranging for hire of stud animals and general management of members' interests in producing and marketing mohair and wool. Through these arrangements, rotational grazing and breed improvement schemes have been established in the RMAs. Each RMA is divided up into grazing areas, and stock owners are required to move their stock to the different areas according to prescriptions laid down by government officials, and to keep stock within defined carrying capacity levels in each area.

Three features of the RMA programme lie at the root of tensions in the villages. These are the rotational grazing schemes, the management structure, and the territorial logic of RMAs. First, the rotational grazing schemes promote differentiation between the minority who are wealthy stock owners and the majority who are relatively poor stock owners. Secondly, the management structure also promotes this differentiation, as well as substitution of the authority of chiefs by government officials and, indirectly, by wealthy stock owners. Thirdly, the territorial logic of RMAs imposes criteria for resource management which take little account of the history and evolution of local management practices.

Before elaborating this argument, it is necessary to outline the dynamics of wealth differentiation in livestock. Most rural Basotho own some livestock but few own large herds. It should be born in mind that statistical data on the characteristics of livestock ownership for the country as a whole are inadequate, as was noted earlier. The government's current policy to concentrate livestock production in the mountain region is undoubtedly generating changes in the general pattern, but as yet statistical illustration is impossible. Nonetheless, the few studies which have been conducted in the mountain region indicate general characteristics of livestock ownership and provide a basis for the following discussion. Table 2 presents the findings of three surveys conducted in the mountain region and a fourth, broader survey of the whole region. Although the surveys are of different magnitude and probably vary considerably in sampling technique, the findings do indicate the propensity for livestock ownership as well as intimating differentiation of stock holdings amongst stock owners.

Table 2: Percentages of households owning livestock in four sample surveys of the mountain region

Area:	Thaba Tseka	Sehlabathebe	Tlokoeng	Sange-bethu	Mountain zone
Date:	1976(a)	1985(b)	1988(c)	1988(d)	c.1980(e)
% house-holds owning:					
Cattle	54	64	61	52	82
Sheep	37	42	45	59	55
Goats	29	30	32	35	44
Horses	60	41	45	41	57
Donkeys	32	38	42	6	28
Mules	2	-	1	-	-

Sources: (a) Jensen (1976:3), sample survey in Thaba Tseka Mountain Development Project.  
 (b) Lawry (1986, Appendix 1:2), sample survey in Sehlabathebe Range Management Area.  
 (c) Quinlan, random sample survey of eight villages in Tlokoeng Ward, Mokhotlong district, May 1988, for Agrar- und Hydrotechnik (1988).  
 (d) Quinlan, random sample survey in one village in the Sangebethu river valley, Mokhotlong district, September 1988.  
 (e) Gattinara (n.d:157-158), nationwide survey which included village surveys in the environs of Thaba Tseka, Sehlabathebe and Mokhotlong.

Although many Basotho own livestock, my own surveys indicate that few own many animals, as is indicated in Tables 3 and 4 on below. These Tables indicate the general pattern of stock ownership, but there is substantial differentiation of livestock holdings amongst stock owners as is indicated in Tables 3 and 4.



Table 3: Percentages of households which owned sheep and goats according to herd size

Herd size	Survey 1: May 1988 % of households which own herds of:		Survey 2: September 1988 % of households which own herds of:	
	Sheep	Goats	Sheep	Goats
1 - 10	32	40	40	17
11 - 20	19.5	40	10	66
21 - 30	19.5	10	20	-
31 - 40	5	-	-	-
41 - 50	7	7	-	-
51 - 100	7	3	10	17
101 - 150	10	-	20	-
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	100	100	100	100

Table 4: Percentage of households which owned Cattle, Horses and Donkeys according to herd size

Herd size	Survey 1: May 1988 % of households which own herds of:			Survey 2: September 1988 % of households which own herds of:		
	Cattle	Horses	Donkeys	Cattle	Horses	Donkeys
1	16	60	51	11	57	100
2	21	19	28	11	29	-
3	9	5	15	45	-	-
4	12	9	3	22	14	-
5	7	2	3	11	-	-
6 - 10	19	5	-	-	-	-
11 - 15	7	-	-	-	-	-
16 - 20	4	-	-	-	-	-
21 - 30	4	-	-	-	-	-
31 - 50	1	-	-	-	-	-

Sources for Tables 3 and 4:

Village surveys conducted in Mokhotlong district during 1988. Survey 1 was conducted during May 1988, by myself and a team of local field workers for Agrar- und HydroTechnik, and it covered eight villages in Tlokoeng Ward. The original sample included 100 households out of a total of 347. Adequate data for the purpose of these Tables were obtained from 95 households. Survey 2 was carried out by myself in one village in the Sangebethu river valley during September 1988. The sample consisted of 17 households out of a total of 47 in the village.

One of the problems with discussing livestock ownership and differentiation of livestock holdings in Lesotho is the rapidity with which herd sizes and composition can change. On the one

hand, in theoretical terms, a herd of mature female animals can reproduce its own number and 50% of its own kind in the first year, assuming that all conceive and that half those born are males. Thereafter, the herd will reproduce slightly less than 50% of its number, assuming that it takes two years for young female animals to achieve maturity and that half of the new born animals each year are males. Accordingly, the size of a herd can increase rapidly. On the other hand, herd size and composition can change rapidly from year to year and intra-seasonally, through the influence of a multitude of variables such as changing genetic cycles and variation in animal fertility; theft; climatic conditions; individual knowledge, and use, of veterinary medicines; herders' skills; and stock owners' management decisions. In other words, one cannot reasonably discuss data on livestock ownership in terms of averages. To own livestock in Lesotho is to be both agent and subject of almost continual and marked variation in size of herds (Dobb, 1985:242-245; Lawry, 1986:7-37). Most households own some livestock but there is no certainty that these households will always have livestock and that the size of herds will increase over time. For instance, my research indicated that approximately 70% of households in Mokhotlong district owned some livestock during 1988. However, in a survey of one village in Sangebethu valley, 3 of the 17 households in the sample reported loss of all their animals during the severe snowstorms of October 1987.

A central problem with the RMA programme is that it does not take into account these rapid fluctuations in livestock holdings and the distribution of animals amongst villagers. Instead, it

exacerbates differentiation between the relatively poor, and the relatively wealthy, stock owners. The RMA programme supports the commercial interests of the latter. Rotational grazing is necessary, as people know, for anyone who owns a large number of animals. The wealthier stock owners, therefore, support the rotational grazing schemes which ensure that their herds have regular access to adequate forage. For the majority, however, the costs of participating in these schemes can often outweigh the benefits. These stock owners often do not regard rotational grazing within a grazing area as a necessary strategy, because they see that the grassland in the environs of their grazing posts provides adequate forage for their relatively few animals. Furthermore, following a rotational system means that they must build several grazing posts instead of staying at one post in one grazing area. Moreover, the costs of herding are indirectly increased. By using one grazing post year after year, the livestock learn to stay in the vicinity and, thus, require less daily monitoring. For instance, the herds of sheep and goats learn to follow a set daily grazing route, such that the herders need only send out the animals in the morning and check the numbers upon their return in the evening.

Furthermore, 'community' is built up between the herders and stock owners in one locality such that support is freely given when needed. For instance, if a stock owner cannot afford to hire a herder, he may be able to share the grazing post of a friend whose herder will look after the additional stock. Alternatively, if a stock owner has to rely on a young son to herd because of short term inability to find a teenager or a man, he can usually

rely on herders in neighbouring posts to help the son. However, once the stock owner participates in the rotational grazing schemes, he incurs the problems and costs of finding experienced herders to keep the animals safe while on the move and a close watch on the herds when they arrive in a new area.

Finally, the market orientation of the services offered by the wool and mohair growers associations favours economies of scale, which in turn favour the stock owner who owns many animals. Such a stock owner obviously earns more from sale of wool and mohair than his poorer counterpart and is, therefore, in a better position to pay fees in addition to other costs such as hire of herders, building of additional grazing posts and purchase of veterinary medicines. Moreover, the unit cost for hire of stud animals such as rams and bucks is obviously less for the person who owns many ewes and does than for the one who owns a few. Furthermore, by having a diversity of livestock, the former is in a better position than the latter to offset market fluctuations, such as annual changes in market prices for wool and mohair, by occasional sale of other livestock such as horses and cattle.

The management structure of RMAs is equally problematic in terms of the intention to diminish the authority of chiefs. First, the authority to assess the condition of grassland is placed in the hands of government officials. Secondly, the criteria used for assessment are determined by foreign scientists with an emphasis on preservation of natural resources. Thirdly, the wool and mohair growers associations are being groomed to implement the scientific agenda which will serve as a basis of

government authority to counter that of chiefs. Fourthly, the associations are being groomed to implement an economic agenda of emphasising market production of livestock. Once these agendas have been inculcated, it is apparent that the associations will continue to be dependent on external expertise in the form of scientific knowledge and marketing infrastructure, thereby extending government authority into the villages.

There is nothing unusual about the structure of the RMA programme, for it reflects a functionalist logic that marks the culture of government interventions in Lesotho. Like the intervention to establish 'Development Committees', discussed in chapter 4, it poses a threat to the authority of chiefs by implantation of alternative structures. However, unlike the colonial livestock programmes, it ignores the concrete and abstract loci of chiefs' authority, thereby creating conditions for polarisation between chiefs supported by the majority of rural residents on the one hand, and, on the other, the government supported by a minority of wealthy stock owners. The programme ignores the political reality that livestock and grassland management begins and ends in the villages which are the nexus of chiefs' authority. It also ignores the way in which Basotho have accommodated changing economic and ecological circumstances in relation to the heritage of communal land tenure of which chiefs are an integral part.

The annual cycle of livestock transhumance begins in spring with collective consideration of the state of grassland in village environs. The question of when to restrict use of this grassland depends on consultation with the chief, not only

because the resource falls within the territorial boundaries of the chief's authority, but also because it is categorised as a communal resource, access to which is a basis of chiefs' authority. Furthermore, control of livestock in the villages is vested in the chief as a result of government interventions during the colonial era. In short, the critical decisions on livestock and grassland management are made in the villages through collective consultation, and in a far more holistic manner than is contemplated in government policies.

The narrow perspective of the RMA programme begins with the use of the word 'range'. 'Range' and 'range management' do not exist in any meaningful sense amongst rural Basotho, even when translated as Ntlafatso ea Makhulo - 'Development of grazing land' - as the RMA programme describes itself in Sesotho. Although Basotho readily recognise the general intent to improve the quality of grazing land and to prevent grassland degradation, few would accept such an objective perspective on resource preservation. On the one hand, the official description is often modified in discussion as 'Ntlafatso ea Phuliso', meaning 'development of grassland which is used as grazing land, and which is administered by District chiefs', in recognition of the primary focus on grazing post areas which are under the nominal jurisdiction of these chiefs. On the other hand, the intent to control grassland degradation is identified and located in its appropriate cultural category. The word leboella, signifying restriction on the use of a particular communal resource according to varying collective demand, is also used frequently by stock owners to describe the RMA programme. The reference

point in the latter case is the overt emphasis of the programme on the principle of rotational grazing, and its implication for restriction on use of grassland as grazing land at certain times of the year.

The irony is twofold. First, the Basotho response has somehow led to appropriation of indigenous terminology to fit the logic of the RMA programme. Government officials, notably foreign personnel, often use the word maboella, the plural form of leboella, to mean specifically grazing land and to signify the need to preserve it by implementing some restrictions on its use. However, maboella formally refers to communal resources in general, and hence, to occasional restriction on the use and re-definition of possible uses according to collective needs. In this confusing transliteration, the officials ignore the fact that grazing land is but one category of grassland amongst many. They also ignore the fact that chiefs authorise re-categorisation of the grassland, within their areas of jurisdiction, for a variety of uses according to the variable requirements of their subjects, and with regard to the biophysical characteristics of the different species of grasses. Secondly, the association of RMAs with restrictions is somewhat unfortunate because the implication for many stock owners is that the programme will somehow deny them access to grazing land. Such unintended consequences are not unusual amongst Lesotho development projects (Ferguson, 1990). For instance, there is an arable project, the Lesotho Agricultural Project for Irrigation Systems, which is advertised as LAPIS. Unfortunately, when perceived in Sesotho, LAPIS suggests the verb Lapisa, meaning to

cause hunger.

Although the imposition of the word 'range' and subsequent semantic confusion reflect a conflict of interest, its use to demarcate territories establishes conditions for conflict. In effect, the RMA programme superimposes a territorial basis of authority for the government in opposition to those of chiefs. The boundaries of RMAs often overlap the territories of two or more chiefs as well as those of the permanent alpine grazing areas that are under the authority of district chiefs. This problem has been recognised by the Range Management Division which, as noted earlier, now attempts to draw RMA boundaries to coincide approximately with locally acknowledged boundaries. However, such boundaries are not defined only topographically. The stock owner's propensity to keep to fixed transhumance routes between village and specified summer grazing areas and, in many cases, to establish a grazing post near to the post of his chief, indicate that the 'boundaries' are those of social networks. Accordingly, the 'boundaries' are not fixed, for they change in concert with life changes of members of the networks.

For instance, a stock owner may inherit a grazing post and use it as did his father and grandfather before him, but there is no certainty that he will use it all his life or that his sons will continue to use it. If a stock owner's livestock holdings diminish at any time, or if he has problems securing the services of a herder, he may incorporate his herd into that of another kinsman or friend who has a post in a different locality. Alternately, if he is successful in rearing livestock he may choose to build his own grazing post, and the choice of location



will depend on which set of social relationships he feels are appropriate to use.

In other words, demarcation of RMAs ignores the ways in which the precepts of human use and need are culturally expressed. Livestock and grassland management begins not only in the village, but also in the particular social networks that create the village. As we saw in chapters 3 and 4, those networks are built on a patriarchal imagination of family and social order, of which the chief is the personification. By ignoring these cultural premises and practices, the RMA programme fails to locate the social roots of grassland degradation which it is nominally intended to resolve. These roots lie in the relative lack of authority of chiefs over use of the mountain grasslands beyond their areas of jurisdiction. This lack of authority is the outcome of an historical process set in motion by settlement patterns, on the one hand, and, on the other, by colonial demarcation of chiefs' areas of jurisdiction. I discussed this process in chapter 3 to illustrate the way it entrenched chiefs' authority in relation to their subjects by confirming their control over access to, and use of, land in general. In view of the discussion in chapters 4 and 5, however, it is necessary to recognise that this process also laid the basis for subsequent differentiation of chiefs' authority with regard to land.

Following the creation of Basutoland, Basotho began to occupy the mountainous interior of the country. At the time, according to chief Nkuebe Molapo, who lives in the foothills of the Maluti mountains near Butha Buthe, the vacant valleys of the foothill region were often used as summer grazing areas. A chief and his

stock-owning subjects would generally keep all their animals in a valley, where some men would live in grazing posts and act as herders.<sup>5</sup> As a chief's following increased and as the lowland villages grew, the grazing posts were used as settlement nuclei for people demanding land. As a result, these valleys were settled and grazing posts were moved to the higher, and as yet unsettled, valleys. Thus there was a gradual expansion of settlement from the lowlands up to the lower lying river valleys of the mountain region, preceded by establishment of grazing posts.

A political consequence of this demographic process was distinction between authority over summer grazing areas and over villages. The summer grazing posts were initially like satellites around villages, marking the social boundaries of chiefs' authority over particular subjects and the land on which they depended. With the emphasis on gaining access to arable land, and the importance of this need as a basis of chiefs' authority over their subjects, settlement generally, and villages in particular, became the reference points for demarcation of different chiefs' authority. That orientation in the definition of political authority was endorsed, as we saw in Chapter 3, by colonial government interventions which used chiefs and villages to demarcate territorial boundaries to chiefs' authority.

The outcome was that the unsettled valleys were excluded from the territories of chiefs and headmen, and were nominally under the authority of the paramount chief. Following the creation of districts, the unsettled grazing areas within each district became nominally the responsibility of each district chief, as

the representative of the paramount chief. Yet, given the political emphasis on settlement and subject, there was no reason to consider the grazing areas which were simply functional locations for keeping livestock, and which were only ever occupied temporarily. As a result, there has never been any systematic attempt by chiefs to exert authority over these areas. Instead, stock owners simply approached the district chief for permission to build a grazing post in the area of their choice, and such permission was unlikely ever to be refused.

One can go further in analysis of this process to suggest that the exclusion of the grazing areas was consistent with cultural norms that were evolving in this political context, and in the broader economic context of using arable farming as a basis for survival and as a means to exploit the South African market for agricultural commodities. The grazing areas were effectively beyond society, in the sense of not being the nexus of political and economic activity, and hence not properly within the domain of chief's authority. The remote valleys were locations for mephato, lodges for initiation of boys into adulthood. Given that boys undergoing this ritual were (and still are) regarded as being in a liminal stage of life, and not subject to norms of family and village life, the remote valleys where the lodges were located would have been implicitly regarded, by such definition, as beyond society. Moreover, myths and legends of these areas as the domain of wild animals would have supported popular imagination of these areas as dangerous places to be occupied only by men capable of protecting their lives and livestock. Furthermore, a prohibition on women working at grazing posts

emphasised the separation of these areas from the norms and routines of village life. Finally, the separation of these areas from society is reflected in herders' tales. For example, discussions of livestock theft from grazing posts often include anecdotes of how thieves in the 'old days' were as likely to be shot by stock owners as to be delivered to the police.

In view of the above, stock owners have been free to build grazing posts wherever they wanted in these valleys. The propensity for the stock owners and the chief of one locality to colonise particular valleys attests to the nature of this freedom. The choice of a site depends more on social relationships within a locality than on the formal authority of the district chief, and that of past and present government officials who have intervened in livestock and grassland management practices. Given the locus of chiefs' authority in the villages, there has been no reason for chiefs to transform this propensity into a separate and formal basis of authority. Instead, stock owners who built grazing posts near to those of their village neighbours and/or near to the chief's post simply reinforced the social networks of the village and, at the same time, the cultural bases of chiefs' authority. Coupled with intensive promotion of livestock production throughout this century, this 'freedom' has led indirectly to the current tensions in the community between chief and stock owner.

First, stock owners have been drawn into adopting a utilitarian perspective on the alpine grasslands because, until recently, neither chiefs nor government officials have imposed strict controls over their use. Instead, promotion of livestock

production endorsed this perspective. The diversification and subsequent differentiation in value of livestock in the context of poverty required flexibility in livestock management. Stock owners needed 'freedom' to use the grasslands extensively in order to link the different survival capabilities of different breeds with their own limited financial capacity to transcend ecological constraints through, for example, purchase of modern veterinary medicines and cultivation of fodder crops.

Secondly, although grazing posts inevitably became an important feature of more and more stock owners' livestock management strategies, the economic and political context of livestock management has limited the authority of chiefs over use of the alpine grasslands. On the one hand, the district chiefs acquired only nominal authority over these areas. Although they could, conceivably, restrict the number of posts built in a locality, they had no authority to restrict the number of animals at the posts. If denied permission to build a post, a stock owner could simply share the post of a friend or kinsman. On the other hand, control over livestock numbers on grazing land has been the responsibility of subordinate chiefs but, through territorial demarcation of their authority, the grazing post areas were placed beyond their jurisdiction.

This process by which the boundaries of chiefs' authority were territorially defined, and by which stock owners' rights of access to, and use of, the grassland were entrenched, served Basotho interests in livestock for much of this century. In short, it enabled the colonially-induced imperative for accumulation of livestock to be grafted onto indigenous precepts

of human use and need without apparent contradiction. However, the contradictions have slowly become apparent. Grassland degradation has become evident and is exacerbated by use of 'winter' grazing posts.

Any attempt to illustrate this general ecological process is necessarily crude, owing to the lack of empirical data on the ecology of the mountain region. Written historical sources which include observations of the natural environment are few and far between (e.g. War Office, 1910; Ambrose & Brutsch, 1991). There is also a paucity of scientific research on bio-physical conditions in the region. The first ecological survey of the mountain region was conducted in the 1930s (Staples & Hudson, 1938), and some botanical surveys have been conducted since then (e.g. Jacot Guillarmod, 1962; Killick, 1978), but intensive research began again only in the the 1980s with the establishment of the Range Management Division. The RMA programme and the recent Drakensberg/Maluti Catchment Conservation Programme (D/MCCP) (Bainbridge et al, 1991) have improved ecological knowledge of grazing post areas in the region, but much of the data are inadequate.<sup>6</sup> The following analysis is based on research that I conducted in several valleys in eastern Lesotho (see Map 2, page ix).

First, the evidence suggests there has been a proliferation of grazing posts during this century, as is indicated in Table 5. The rapid increase in post numbers during the last 20 years is perhaps indicative of the delayed but cumulative effects of settlement expansion and the colonial livestock production programmes in the mountain region. The valleys in question lie

close to the Drakensburg/Maluti escarpment, that is, at the territorial limits of Lesotho. It is, therefore, likely that these valleys would have been the last areas for establishment of grazing posts. Mokhotlong district as a whole, moreover, seems to be one of the last to benefit from infrastructural developments in support of a market economy in livestock. The district was created only in the early 1940s. A passable road from the lowlands in the north to Sani pass was built only in the 1960s. Furthermore, integration of the district into the market economy was restricted for political reasons after Lesotho became an independent country. According to oral reports, popular support for the BCP in Mokhotlong district led to political restriction on development of infrastructure by the BNP government for much of the 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>7</sup>

Table 5: Number of Grazing Posts in use during summer months in five valleys near the Maluti\Drakensburg escarpment 1925-1992

	circa								
Year:	1925	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1988	1991	1992
Valley:									
Langala-balele	2	2	3	4	7	7	14	15	14
Jareteng	2	3	5	6	14	12	20	22	26
Merareng	-	1	3	4	4	4	12	13	10
Sangebethu (section)	1	1	1	1	2	3	9	9	9
Khohlo li Ntja	?	?	?	?	?	-	-	-	-

Source: Interviews with herders and stock owners, 1988, 1991, 1992.

NB: Khohlo li Ntja is now regarded as a 'winter' grazing area, but one cannot discount the possibility that it was once a 'summer' grazing area prior to establishment of villages in lower, neighbouring valleys. In July 1992, there were nine 'winter' grazing posts in regular use in this valley.

Secondly, there are clear indications that use of grazing posts is not restricted to their owners. Not only do the majority of stock owners use grazing posts, but many share posts. Table 6 and 7 illustrate these trends from two different perspectives. Table 6 represents results of two village surveys that I conducted while Table 7 gives the combined results of my seasonal surveys conducted in five grazing post areas.

Table 6: Ownership and use of grazing posts

Category	Letseng village sample		Tlokoeng Ward sample	
	No of Stock owners	%	No of Stock owners	%
Own and use GP	5	46	26	35
Do not own GP\				
use GP of: Agnate	3	21	6	8
Friend	1	9	27	36
Own GP\no use of GP	1	9	-	-
Do not own GP\no use of GP	1	9	16	21
	---	---	---	---
	11	100	75	100

Source: Letseng is the village in the Sangebethu valley in which I conducted a survey during September 1988 at 17 of the 47 households. The Tlokoeng ward sample consists of 100 households, in eight villages, surveyed by me and a team of local field workers for Agrar- und HydroTechnik during May 1988. Adequate data for the purposes of this Table were obtained from 95 households.

These results indicate that 79% of stock owners in Tlokoeng ward and 82% in Letseng use grazing posts.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the majority rely on access to posts of other stock owners. While these results suggest intensive use of grazing post areas, they also suggest that a sizeable number of stock owners keep livestock permanently in villages, supporting stock owners' contentions about shortages of forage on village grasslands. The



struggle to find adequate grazing and the increasing use of grazing post areas throughout the year are indicated in Table 7.

Table 7: Number and ownership of herds at grazing posts in five valleys during 1988

Valley	Season*	No and ownership of herds in relation to Grazing post owners				Total
		Post owner	Agnate	Friend	Hired herder	
Langala- -balele	Late summer	11	3	5	3	22
	Winter	1	-	-	1	2
	Early summer	7	4	2	2	15
Jareteng	Late summer	20	10	10	7	47
	Winter	6	-	-	1	7
	Early summer	11	3	3	3	20
Sangebethu (section)	Late summer	4	-	1	1	6
	Winter	4	-	-	-	4
	Early summer	6	-	-	1	7
Merareng	Late summer	11	-	4	3	18
	Winter	4	-	-	1	5
	Early summer	7	-	1	2	10
Khohlo li Ntja	Late summer	?	?	?	?	?
	Winter	7	-	-	2	9
	Early Summer	7	1	1	1	10

\* Late summer survey: mid April-early May 1988.

Winter survey: first week of September 1988.

Early summer survey: second week of November 1988.

NB: Surveys of grazing posts in Khohlo li Ntja only began in September 1988.

Although the first four areas listed are generally regarded as 'summer' grazing areas as opposed to the fifth area, Khohlo li Ntja, the seasonal division is not clear cut. The grazing post in Langalabalele valley which is used during winter, is owned by a stock owner who, with his son, has more than 600 sheep, and feels impelled to keep hammels at the 'summer' post

during winter as a means to offset the problems of finding adequate winter forage for them and his other animals. The same reason governs the use of other posts in the Jareteng valley during the winter. Two of the four posts in use during winter in Merareng valley are designated 'winter' posts by the owners while the other two are used all year round. Two of the posts in the section of the Sangebethu valley are designated 'winter' posts by their owners who have 'summer' posts further up the valley.

Thirdly, as would be expected with intensive use of grazing posts, there is marked though varying concentration of livestock in different grazing areas, as is illustrated in Tables 8 and 9. Table 8 provides data drawn from surveys conducted in 1988 and 1992 whereas Table 9 provides data for the years 1988 and 1991. There are two reasons for this discrepancy. The first is that I was unable to obtain adequate 'summer' data for the year 1991 because of inclement weather during a field trip which severely restricted research. The other reason is that I was unable to conduct any field research after the summer of 1992, and thus I have only 'winter' data up the year of 1991.

Table 8: Livestock numbers and stock density in grazing post areas during the summer months of 1988 and 1992

Valley:	Langalabalele		Jareteng		Merareng		Khohlo li Ntja	
Area (ha):	1321		2306		2387		556	
Year:	1988	1992	1988	1992	1988	1992	1988	1992
Stock No:								
Sheep	1037	1393	2530	3040	1401	1053	-	-
Goats	879	1225	1419	1286	903	449	-	-
Cattle	198	226	291	284	132	107	-	-
Horses	49	68	91	132	56	17	-	-
Donkeys	21	50	27	34	16	18	-	-
Total AUs	586	777	1100	1202	614	407	-	-
Stocking rate(AUs/ha)	.44	.58	.47	.52	.25	.17	-	-

Table 9: Livestock numbers and stock density in grazing post areas during the winter months of 1988 and 1991

Valley:	Langalabalele		Jareteng		Merareng		Khohlo li Ntja	
Area (ha):	1321		2306		2387		556	
Year:	1988	1991	1988	1991	1988	1991	1988	1991
Stock No:								
Sheep	133	?	770	441	691	707	1053	1300
Goats	-	?	66	28	23	153	210	49
Horses	-	?	6	10	9	9	10	19
Total AUs	27	?	171	101	149	178	260	283
Stocking rate (AUs/ha)	.02	?	.07	.04	.06	.07	.46	.51

Notes for Tables 8 and 9:

- AU Conversion: Sheep, Goats = 0.2 AU; Donkeys = 0.5 AU; Horses = 0.7 AU; Cattle = 0.8 AU (Environmental Resources Limited, 1990).
- Only sheep, goats and horses were in these areas during the survey periods, September 1988 and July 1991.
- There are no 'winter' figures for Langalabalele valley in 1991, but only one post was used during that season and only sheep were kept there. The resident herders stated that 200 - 250 sheep were usually kept at this post in the winter months, but the number would vary between 100 and 300, depending on the management decisions of the owner and his son.

With regard to Tables 8 and 9, it must be stressed that livestock statistics need to be treated with caution in view of intra-seasonal livestock movements between areas and the rapidity

of change in livestock holdings. For instance, when I surveyed the valleys in late March/early April 1992, several stock owners had already removed sheep born in the previous spring from the herds, and taken them back to the villages. Although I have included these animals in the statistics, their absence at the time of the research highlights the potential for error in such research. In a different vein, the 'summer' data from Merareng, illustrate the changes in the transhumance system. Between 1988 and 1992, stock owners were beginning to regard the lower section of the valley as a 'winter' grazing area, and the upper section as a 'summer' grazing area. As a result, some of the posts in the lower section were not in use during the summer of 1992, whereas they had been 'summer' posts in 1988.

Furthermore, statistical description of variations in concentration of livestock in a locality, in order to illustrate an ecological function, is a problematic exercise. In seeking to illustrate contradictions that have developed in the livestock economy, grassland degradation is a visible indicator. Correlation of such degradation with a known cause - 'overstocking' - is problematic, however, because it requires, in the first instance, statistical description of livestock densities in a locality. And such description is extremely difficult because a multitude of variables need to be taken into account. This problem is obscured in Tables 8 and 9. They describe stock density on the basis of 'AUs' - Animal Units - which correlate the different foraging capacity of different animal species on the basis of differences in body weight. The formula used here is a particular one which is now being used

frequently in Lesotho by natural scientists. 'AUs' are used here to show, albeit imperfectly, the seasonal variation in stock densities within summer grazing areas as well as between them and winter grazing areas, and to indicate, albeit crudely, two problems - grassland degradation and 'overstocking' - that have developed in the livestock economy.

I have spelt out the fallibility of this exercise in view of my broader critique of the RMA programme. While I do not deny the legitimacy of conservationists concerns about grassland degradation and 'overstocking', the scientific rationale behind the RMA programme is suspect. This is indicated in the fact that the formula for 'AUs', which is used by government officials to assess 'carrying capacity' of the land as a basis for conservation and livestock management procedures, continues to change. The formula in common use today by natural scientists, and used in Tables 8 and 9, is not the formula used in the 1980 Range Management and Grazing Control Regulations (Legal Notice, 1980b), or the modified formula that appears in the 1986 amendment of these regulations (Legal Notice, 1986). The implication is that government officials and scientists involved in conservation and 'development' in Lesotho are struggling, as much as Basotho stock owners, to understand the ecological dynamics of the livestock economy. Accordingly, the situation highlights subliminal contradictions in the livestock economy that are emerging as a result of the current interactions between stock owners and conservation agencies. I draw out these contradictions in the discussion below.

A major ecological consequence of increasing use of grazing

posts, and of increasing stock densities in grazing areas, is degradation of the grassland.<sup>9</sup> Intensive grazing of grassland, fostered by animals following the same grazing route daily, creates bare patches of soil which allowed invasion of karroid shrubs (e.g. Chrysoma ciliata, Pentzia cooperi, Gymnopentzia bifurcata) (Morris et al, 1989). These shrubs, which are unpalatable to livestock, now carpet most grazing post areas, thereby increasing the pressure on remaining palatable grasses. Having accumulated livestock on a wide scale, Basotho stock owners are now victims of a situation that has been created by themselves and others.

In particular, recourse to 'winter' grazing posts in answer to the lack of winter grazing in village environs is exacerbating grassland degradation. These cattleposts are located in sub-alpine valleys which are often narrow tributary valleys that are relatively warm and dry. While these conditions foster use of these valleys during winter, they also stimulate accelerated soil erosion when the grassland subject to trampling by livestock. Rainfall in the sub-alpine belt is less than on the alpine grasslands near to the Maluti\Drakensberg escarpment (Killick, 1978) and, given the relatively warm temperature regime at this altitude, the soils can be very dry at critical points during the year (Wieland, 1982). Use of these grasslands during the comparatively dry winter months, coupled with extended use over long periods (May - December) and the comparatively high concentrations of livestock (as is indicated in the figures for Khohlo li Ntja valley in Table 8), is contributing to marked degradation of these grasslands.

These problems are causes for dispute in villages because two different options are being impressed upon stock owners. On the one hand, there is an attempt, stimulated by government intervention, to develop an alternative system (RMAs and the MRA) which emphasises functional integration of livestock and grassland management, and seeks to sideline chiefs. On the other hand, there is an attempt, amongst the rural populace, to maintain the existing system of livestock management which implies, indirectly, extension of chiefs' authority to grazing post areas. These options and their implications are not so clearly defined in reality because they are part of a social process which is still in its infancy. Although most Basotho stock owners recognise grassland degradation as a problem, there is as yet little consensus on how to resolve it. Stock owners assess government initiated programmes in relation to the established system. Accordingly, while the implication of these programmes to sideline chiefs is becoming apparent, the possibility of extending chiefs' authority has yet to be acknowledged overtly. The contrast is being drawn to the surface only as use of 'winter' grazing posts becomes the norm.

Many 'winter' posts are now being built within ward and sub-ward chiefs' areas of jurisdiction, thereby bringing into question the relative authority of district and subordinate chiefs. The former are authorised to allow construction of grazing posts, but exercise of that authority within the territories of subordinate chiefs has never been contemplated. Subordinate chiefs have no authority over construction of grazing posts, which inevitably undermines their authority to control

winter grazing within their territories. Therefore, support for the government programmes would mean not only overt rejection of chiefs' authority over grazing management in general, but also a challenge to chiefs' authority with regard to use of communal resources within their territories. In contrast, support for subordinate chiefs to manage 'winter' grazing posts in their areas of jurisdiction would mean acknowledgment of chiefs' authority to control communal resources in their territories, endorsement of the village as the basis of control over livestock and grassland management, and ultimately, relinquishment of stock owners' entrenched rights to use grazing post environs as they wish. In a different vein, the practice whereby stock owners build 'winter' grazing posts in the summer grazing areas contradicts the purpose and boundaries of the MRA which are designed primarily to control use of these areas during the summer.

#### Conclusion: Community of chief and subject

Rural residents have had to modify livestock management strategies to accommodate market-oriented livestock production. They have now to consider further modifications as the dangers of grassland degradation become apparent. Yet the modifications involve far more than preservation of grassland. They involve re-definition of the content and boundaries of the rural political order. Ironically, the government's interventions are stimulating a contest over the boundaries of chiefs' authority in ways that are likely to exacerbate conflict between the government and the rural population. Simply put, the government is seeking to drive



a wedge into the community of interest amongst chiefs and stock owners, but it does not take into account the strength of that 'community'. It is a 'community' grounded in the village, not only on the basis of pre-colonial cultural heritage, but also on its affirmation by colonial rule. This is also a community of interest that is affirmed inadvertently by local level usurpation of the government's strategy with regard to ward and village 'development' in the sense that the VDCs and WDCs have been transformed to suit the existing social order, as we saw in chapter 4. Moreover, it is a community grounded in a context of material poverty in which collective and mutual support, in defence of threats to material security, is endorsed by the emphasis of the land tenure system on communal access to resources for the collective good.

In view of the above, the apparent erosion of chiefs' authority in relation to people's need for arable land must be qualified. The chiefs remain central to villager's rural livelihoods because people still rely on them to maintain their interests in livestock. As arable farming becomes less and less significant as a source of sustenance, livestock become more than ever a critical component of rural livelihoods. Currently, there is evident 'community' between chiefs and stock owners with regard to sustaining collective rights of access to, and control over, grazing land. However, there are also evident tensions in this 'community' as a result of recent government interventions. On the one hand, there is a possibility of conflict between chiefs and the majority who are relatively poor stock owners on the one side, and the government and the minority who are

relatively wealthy stock owners on the other. On the other hand, recent changes in the transhumance system indicate a struggle over the way grassland resources are categorised, which involves the subliminal issue of retention of communal right of access to grazing land and, therefore, a struggle over the appropriate form of authority to manage these resources.

Popular support for the chieftainship is likely to continue in this context for two reasons. First, the village is the nexus of any attempt to control use of grazing land, and this dynamic has yet to be fully recognised by the government. Secondly, the development of 'winter' grazing posts within and along the territorial boundaries of chiefs' areas of jurisdiction is similar to the period in the past when grazing posts were like satellites around settlements. In other words, the separation of grazing areas from chiefs' areas of jurisdiction is breaking down. As government interventions intrude on their authority over land within these areas, chiefs will inevitably be drawn to defend that authority generally, and their subjects' efforts to secure winter forage for their animals in particular. The evident political problem is that such re-invention of 'tradition' is likely to reinforce government scepticism of the chieftainship, and popular disdain of chiefs amongst the rural population. Nonetheless, even if individual chiefs become the subject of disdain as impediments to the interests of the relatively wealthy stock owners and to government concerns, or even as ineffectual defenders of the interests of the majority of poorer stock owners, the chieftainship will be the faultline for disputes. Therefore, the chieftainship will remain a critical factor in the

strategies of people to maintain their cultural and economic interests in livestock and, more generally, in rural livelihoods.

## CHAPTER 7

### POLITICAL CULTURE IN LESOTHO

#### The national context of chiefs' authority

The previous chapters have outlined the multiplicity of forces which have shaped the chieftainship. Here, I draw them together in order to conclude the study. I have argued that the process by which political authority in rural Lesotho is continually being re-defined, is a longstanding contest over the appropriate political order for a society which has become marginalised in the regional political economic system. I have characterised this process as a struggle over, and for, the chieftainship, thereby indicating that the chieftainship is a faultline in the contest between rural residents, chiefs, the government and other external agencies about what the appropriate political order should be.

By describing the chieftainship as a faultline, I am suggesting that it marks the many conflicts and means by which Basotho have created and sustained society in rural Lesotho. The contest within Lesotho society is, on one level, over the scope of chiefs' authority to govern use of natural resources, in an historical context of political and technological interventions which have regularly changed the options for use of these resources. On another level, the contest is over how to accommodate these changes with established social practices. There can be no permanent solution, for the interventions are continuous, and the authority of chiefs that is evoked in social practices is always changing as a result of efforts to

accommodate these interventions. Consequently, both the boundaries of chiefs' authority and the extent to which the chieftainship represents the rural social order are continually in question. However, in questioning the form of authority, and in seeking to create and maintain an appropriate social order, Basotho define their world and their collective place in it. Accordingly, I argue that popular concern to construct a collective identity which expresses the people's heritage and contemporary existence lies behind the manifest disputes about chiefs.

This argument is based on the discussion in the previous chapters. In chapters 2 and 3, the discussion on the relationship between chiefs and the government highlighted a process of gradual localisation of chiefs' authority by which chiefs became identified with particular localities, and authorised to manage the affairs of people residing within their territorial areas of jurisdiction. This process continues with the re-drawing of the boundaries of chiefs' authority over management of settlement and use of land, as I discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

The first point I take up here is that this localisation of chiefs' authority suggests entrenchment of the chieftainship as personification of rural family structure and village society, such that the chieftainship remains the basis of collective identity. It is a process which readily confirms an 'outsider's' view, and a familiar one for anthropologists, that the chieftainship is a manifestation of an ascriptive, 'tribal', collective identity. I say that it confirms this view because a 'snap shot' analysis at virtually any point in the history of the

country would show not only that the chieftainship personified a society built upon co-resident kin groupings and communal distribution of natural resources within localities, but also that the 'outsider's' view was part of the consciousness of the people in view of colonial interventions.

One cannot deny that the 'outsider's' view captures elements of this consciousness, particularly the differentiation of groups in ethnic terms, and the building blocks of Basotho collective identity such as use of the principle of agnatic descent to describe group membership. One can, however, easily cast aside this view's characterisation of that consciousness and collective identity in terms such as tribe, which implies a fixed collective identity and, by extension, that the chieftainship is also a fixed social institution which alone governs the minds and actions of its subjects. Not only does the process of localisation of chiefs' authority reveal that collective identity was fashioned, and continued to be re-fashioned, through the interaction of Basotho with external agents in specific political and economic circumstances, but also that the form and content of the chieftainship was re-constructed as these circumstances changed, and as people's need for, and categorisation of, natural resources were re-defined. Furthermore, acknowledgement of the complexity of this process, which I have examined in terms of the relationship between chiefs and the government, between chiefs, and between chiefs and subjects, not only precludes acceptance of the 'outsider's' characterisation, but also raises the more pertinent issue of evident fragmentation of collective identity.

This fragmentation is the second point I take up here.

Chapters 4, 5 and 6 drew out the relationship between chief and subject, indicating that the chieftainship constitutes the terrain where rural residents and the government contest different strategies to realise people's need for land. This contest highlights the challenge to the chieftainship to represent collective interests in land. This challenge involves the question of fragmentation of collective identity in the face of economic differentiation amongst the populace (e.g. wealthy and poor stock owners) and the different collective conceptions of the rural economy; the government and aid organisations see potential for intensive market production of agricultural commodities, notably livestock, while the majority of the rural populace recognise that market production and the sustainability of agriculture depends on access to migrant wage incomes. There are, therefore, indications of an historical process in which the chieftainship has been central to construction of a national identity as Basotho, but also indications of its fragmentation.

The construction and fragmentation of collective identity is the general process of political culture which I explore in this chapter. The argument I wish to put forward is as follows. On the one hand, there is a popular perception within and beyond Lesotho of correspondence between the state and national identity in the past; this is based on a history that can be read to have produced the Basotho nation, with an homogenous population and a common language, and a state which, by retaining the chieftainship, upheld inclusive and indigenous concepts of government and economic practice. On the other hand, there are strong indications of divergence between identification with

Lesotho and the ability of the state to meet the needs of the people. Dependence on jobs and commodities in South Africa is an acknowledged, integral part of the population's existence. However, this has been at the cost of treatment as outsiders and subjection to the inequities of apartheid. Although that treatment has helped delineate a boundary of identity as Basotho, the people have depended on South Africa for the material means to sustain rural homes in Lesotho, and by extension, their political and cultural heritage.

In this chapter, I ask why there is this apparent lack of correspondence between state and nation in Lesotho. I begin by outlining recent state interventions in Lesotho to show that it is attempting to impose its authority on the populace, but that this has created considerable political tension in the country. Then I examine why the state has to make such an effort, to show that it is wrestling with an historical process which has led to a rupture between state and nation. In conclusion, I examine the threat to popular support of the chieftainship that results from people's increasing political and economic reliance on South Africa, the constraints on arable farming, and the political interventions by many agencies into the livestock economy.

#### State interventions: the indications of crisis

Chapters 4 and 5 outlined a number of political and economic changes in Lesotho with regard to settlement and arable farming, notably the Land Act of 1979 and the integration of 'Development Committees' into the rural social order. In chapter 6 I examined the marked interventions by the state into the livestock economy



since the 1980s. Thus far, however, I have only alluded to broader developments such as the implementation of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project in the mid 1980s, and the military coup in 1986, which need to be drawn into the picture now. Seen independently of each other, these changes illustrate a familiar pattern of efforts by poor countries to develop their economies. Seen in relation to each other, they indicate a sudden spate of state interventions in the lives of the predominantly rural population.

Lesotho has received substantial foreign aid since it gained independence in 1966, and particularly in the last decade (Ferguson, 1990). This assistance has been underwritten by considerable political interest. Apart from the longstanding presence of the embassies and aid organisations of the USA and of western European countries, the early 1980s witnessed establishment of a Russian embassy, amidst sparring between Taiwan and China which led to increased business investment by Taiwanese firms and establishment of an embassy by China. The 1986 military coup dislodged the Basotho National Party government which had governed since Lesotho gained independence in 1966. An economic blockade of the country by South Africa prior to the coup, and the speedy recognition of the new government by the American and British governments, suggest collusion to create a new basis for donor agencies' interactions with Lesotho. The coup was followed by the forced abdication of the king two years later, his expulsion from the country, and the government's appointment of his son in his place. The military government's proclaimed intent to re-establish civil rule was

eventually honoured in March 1993, when general elections were held for the first time since 1970. The Basotho Congress Party, which originated in, and which has long espoused, Pan Africanist Congress ideology of the 1950s, won every constituency (Leeman, 1985; Southall, 1994).

The 1980s also witnessed substantial economic intervention in the rural areas. The most notable development has been the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, which is designed to provide water and electricity for South Africa. Although plans had been drawn up in the early 1980s, they were implemented only after the 1986 coup. As I mentioned in chapter 4, the scheme involves a large number of multi-national consortiums and extensive subsidiary work. Indirectly linked to this scheme are the government's efforts to re-structure the agricultural economy, particularly its plan to concentrate arable farming in the lowlands and livestock production in the mountain region.

In addition, the RMA programme coincided with South African government detente with Lesotho which began in the early 1980s. In spite of ruptures such as the South African Defence Force raid on African National Congress refugees in Maseru in 1982, common ground was reached on agricultural questions. A result was the D/MCCP research programme to devise a conservation policy for the mountain region, with the primary aim to minimise soil erosion in the alpine valleys in the interest of preventing silting of the proposed LHWP dam resevoirs (Bainbridge et al, 1991). These plans tie in with official efforts to stimulate 'community participation' in the restructuring of the rural economy through use of grazing associations and the VDCs (Artz, 1994; Lesotho

National Livestock Task Force, 1990).

What is remarkable about these developments is their magnitude and concentration in such a short period of time. Why was there this sudden impetus and what is the purpose? I suggest that these developments indicate a crisis for the state in two respects. First, they indicate that the state is being driven by changes in South Africa's international relations. Secondly, they indicate a struggle within the state over how to accommodate these changes.

On the one hand, the economic interventions are a progression of government and donor policies of the 1970s. The policies stem from a calculated decision by Leabua Jonathan's BNP government to cut formal ties with South Africa, and to proclaim an anti-apartheid stance, which led to large scale international aid for the state (Hirschman, 1979). The state gained international legitimacy. Popular support within the country, however, was tenuous in the face of widescale patronage which restricted access to jobs that arose out of aid funding to BNP supporters, and restricted diffusion of aid services throughout the country. Seen in this light, the recent interventions reflect not only Lesotho's acceptance of its dependence on external support as a means to survive. They also indicate consolidation of that experience by both the state and aid agencies, and demands by the latter for more ambitious and larger initiatives. In other words, there has been a subtle change in Lesotho's relationship with donors. Donors will provide support, but they have effectively demanded that Lesotho acknowledge the need to align itself economically with South Africa. Consequently, Lesotho has had to

modify its stance towards South Africa.

Furthermore, acquiescence to these demands is endorsed by the changing political and economic relationships between the donor countries and South Africa. Today, the possibility of extensive aid in the future is threatened by the political transformation of South Africa and the re-establishment of formal ties between the latter and many other countries. The Russian embassy in Maseru has closed, for example, and there is no longer an ambassador resident at the USA embassy. Lesotho's Gross National Product, which is based largely on migrant wage remittances from South Africa, is under threat in the face of reduction in recruitment of Basotho workers by South Africa's mining houses, coupled with massive retrenchments that followed the 1987 miners' strike.

On the other hand, the changes in the relationship between Lesotho and its donors require the state to re-constitute its relationship with its citizens, if it is to exploit the potential of its water, wool and mohair resources.<sup>1</sup> In order to fulfill these demands, the state must exercise control over the populace not only through patronage, but also through direct intervention into local methods of exploitation of natural resources.

If the military coup signalled donors' impatience with the BNP government's failure to recognise the implications of the new dispensation, the recent general elections highlight the additional demand for legitimation of the state's interventions in the rural areas. This is a speculative point, but Lesotho's existence on terms dictated by more powerful states seems transparent. The clothing of this new dispensation is rather like

the tailoring of the Emperor's new clothes; this is the problem which the state faces with regard to its relationship with its citizens.

Although the state is legitimately represented in the form of the BCP, the magnitude of recent economic interventions in the rural areas suggest that the general elections were engineered by international agencies, rather than being the result of political pressure by Basotho citizens and commitment of the previous military government to re-establish parliamentary rule. Although the state is attempting to create an economic basis on which it might survive with less external support in the future, it is faced with a rural society which binds people more to chief and locality than to the government, and livelihoods which link people more to South African towns than to Maseru. Although nationalist sentiment was expressed in the elections, propagated by the BCP's Pan Africanist ideology, the grounds for drawing political boundaries in these terms is being swept away by South Africa's political transformation. Therefore, popular support for the BCP reflects perhaps, more a yearning for concordance between the state and national identity than commitment to the party's socialist ideology and support for the interventions over which the government presides (Quinlan, 1994).

This does not mean that the BCP is unlikely to retain a country to govern. The events of the last decade indicate the opposite. The problem facing the BCP government is that it has inherited a situation in which it has little chance of re-constituting the state in the image desired by itself or by the populace. The reasons for this lie not only in its inevitable

subordination to the demands of powerful donors and South Africa. They also lie in the way these demands exacerbate the disjunction between the state and national identity. This is putting the case too bluntly, but what is at stake is the BCP's difficulty of finding in nationalist sentiments the means to cultivate popular support for the state. And this difficulty stems not only from current circumstances, but also from the history of the country and the cultural heritage of the people, as I discuss below.

#### The state and national identity

Lesotho's tenuous existence, which has been re-emphasised recently in Eldridge's (1993) historical study, underlies the current crisis of legitimacy facing the state. Lesotho has existed as a separate geo-political entity for little more than 150 years. It arose out of Moshoeshoe's efforts to secure the survival of his Mokoteli chiefdom amidst the depredations of the lifagane, and to maintain a place for African people on the highveld in the face of colonial incursion. Following many wars against colonial forces, Moshoeshoe and his followers eventually acquiesced to the geo-political framework demanded by Britain and the emergent Afrikaner republics. 'Basutoland' was gradually circumscribed as a territory.

Lesotho came into being as a colonial state, but its existence has always been in question. As a result of colonial policies to integrate the people into the economy of South Africa, political incorporation was regularly considered as early as the time of Union, and continued to reverbrate until the 1960s when Basotho

sought political independence from Britain (Spence, 1968; Murray, 1981:1-26). Although Lesotho took its place within the global framework of nation states in 1966, its economy was almost totally dependent on external sources before then, and remains so today. As I have noted in earlier chapters, people continue to make considerable investments in arable farming, but like their forbears, they rely on migrant labour wage incomes to sustain rural livelihoods. Even the livestock economy, which generates sizeable incomes for individuals and for the country through the export of wool and mohair, is not self sustaining, but depends on regular importation of animals from South Africa (Quinlan, 1990a).

This dependence is central to the iconography of Lesotho. It has been the focus of most studies of the country for the last thirty years (e.g. Eldridge, 1993; Murray, 1981; Spence, 1968; Wallman, 1969). Much political capital has been made out of it, as the strategy of the BNP government demonstrated. The events of the last decade indicate that it has been formally incorporated into donor and government planning of Lesotho's future. What is of interest here is the intimation of a dichotomy between the state and the rural populace in the terms by which they identify the nation.

In the first instance, the state has constructed Lesotho's political identity on the basis of this dependency. The rural populace clearly cannot afford to delineate their collective identity so bluntly, however, for they have to contend with life at the interface between ideals about maintaining a rural home and the reality of dependence on jobs in South Africa. Secondly,

the state could not draw such boundaries if this dependency was not woven into the social and cultural fabric of society in Lesotho. This suggests that the state and the rural populace differ in the way they define a national identity. The state appears to have focused on the history which produced Lesotho as a subordinate but distinct geo-political entity, while the rural populace has focused on the history which forced people to share life at the margins of regional society. This dichotomy provides a clue to understanding why the BCP government is unlikely to find the means to cultivate popular support for the state in nationalist sentiments of its citizens. The government has to contend with a population which has constructed a national identity which is based more on a struggle to maintain homes in Lesotho than on the existence of Lesotho as a politically independent state. The question which follows is, how has this dichotomy evolved.

I suggest, as I discussed in chapters 2 and 3, that the seeds were sown in the 19th century when Moshoeshoe created a model of authority based on the notion of patrilineal descent, and expressed in the form of a hierarchy of chiefs. This model was the antithesis of colonial concepts of statehood. It was based on a conception of society as a network of familial bonds, of which the relationship between chief and subject was a representation, rather than on territorial demarcations of society and separation of political office from social relationships. The dichotomy was exacerbated by the interaction between colonial officials and Moshoeshoe's heirs. This interaction first allowed the latter to elaborate the model,



entrenching the chieftainship as the institution of the state, but then led to subordination of the institution to colonial concepts of statehood. In other words, the chieftainship was the central institution of the state until the early 20th century and it is still the core of rural government. This indicates that it has been the object of a wide range of ideas about political authority, and that it has been subject to modifications and re-positioning within the state.

The critical issue is that the chieftainship has been the nexus of political contests throughout the history of Lesotho. The contest has been, and still is, about the appropriate social order for the prevailing circumstances. This means that it is a struggle over the principles which are given coherency and form in the chieftainship, and which have been challenged in the course of Lesotho's genesis, growth as a colonial state, and existence as an independent state. On the one hand, the continued existence of the chieftainship has ensured that the principles which underlie its constitution have been retained. On the other hand, when the state attempts to impose its authority, using ideas of political order inherited from the colonial regime and borrowed from the international context of modern nation-states, it confronts the chieftainship not as a seemingly archaic obstacle, though that is often the reified sentiment of government officials, but a heritage of ideas which the rural populace have used and re-interpreted in different ways to define their place in the world. There are, therefore, historical factors which the state cannot ignore, but which it has yet to acknowledge.

The 'Basotho nation' evolved from the incorporation of many Sotho and Nguni speaking refugees into the Mokoteli chiefdom under Moshoeshoe (Ambrose and Brutsch, 1991:85,99,107; Lagden, 1909:41-44). The political identity of the polity as Basotho was, however, as much a product of interaction between Moshoeshoe and colonial settlers as it was a result of interaction between himself and other chiefdoms.

With regard to the interaction between chiefdoms, group identities were not so definitive during the early 19th century. Groups identified themselves in relation to their leader, the chief. This was a necessity in view of the tumult during the early 19th century which had witnessed the dispersal and re-constitution of groups as a result of the lifagane, the expansion of the Zulu polity and passage of Mzilikazi's 'Matabele' across the highveld (Lye & Murray, 1980:30-39, 45-50; Murray, 1992:13). Origins were not lost, however, and this is reflected in the way the people distinguished groups and acknowledged affinity through use of clan names and totems. Oral records which traced male ancestors back to a single legendary ancestor, like branches of a tree to a trunk, provided a formal representation of human society as a process of fission marked by male progeniture. Chiefs were the contemporary, individual markers of this process. Through reference to them, people could explain the existence of different groups as products of fission over the generations amongst the male descendants of the legendary ancestor. Reference to the genealogical heritage of chiefs also provided a formal means to determine the 'closeness' of one group with another. Those groups whose chiefs shared a common ancestor were, in

principle, part of a broader imaginary group. This broader affiliation was summarised in the use of totemic categorisations which correlated the familial model of society with known and imagined clan affiliations.

The indigenous conception of history and of society has little meaning, however, if divorced from the political circumstances of the 19th century. Distinctions made between different chiefdoms did not necessarily signify a distinct political identity and political independence. Indeed, Moshoeshoe paid tribute during the 1820s to more powerful chiefdoms such as the Ngwane and the Zulu and, at one stage, even acknowledged himself to be a vassal of Shaka (Thompson, 1975:44-52). As Moshoeshoe secured some freedom for independent action, he forged alliances with other chiefdoms such as those of Moroka and Moorosi which were identified by the totems of their leaders, Barolong and BaPhuthing respectively (Murray, 1992). Although Moorosi generally retained an independent status, Moshoeshoe came to regard Moroka as a subordinate chief of a following within his sphere of control (Thompson, 1975:126-132; Murray, 1992:15). In contrast, Moshoeshoe's totem, Bakoenana, was superseded rapidly by the epithet Basotho but became a basis for distinction of status within the polity. It marked Moshoeshoe's propensity to appoint agnates as subordinate chiefs, and the eventual dominance of these agnates vis a vis other non-related chiefs in the hierarchy (Thompson, 1975:176-180).

The point in question is that the circumstances of the early 19th century brought many different groups into contact, and also caused fragmentation and re-constitution of groups from amongst

refugees. As the fortunes of chiefdoms changed, so did their political identity and the terminology used to express it. These changes raise questions about what constructs of authority were being used and how they were being re-fashioned in a context where the chiefdoms were being directly and indirectly affected by colonial intrusion. These questions were put forward in chapter 2, in the light of the Comaroffs' recent study (1991) of Tswana history. Pre-colonial arrangements were clearly being contested, but leaders like Moshoeshoe were attempting to re-construct them in order to re-establish a stable society. However, they faced a novel situation of new political and economic opportunities and constraints and, in particular, of different ideas on possible combinations of authority constructs as a result of colonial interventions and local re-interpretations. Our focus here is not on the change between the old and the new patterns of political discourse, but on how established constructs of authority were re-fashioned in the Basotho polity during this period.

The striking theme in this history is the paternalistic character of political relationships within and between chiefdoms. The point is significant, for it is indicative of how Moshoeshoe tried to build a following on the same basis as other leaders through use of the pre-colonial, patrilineal model of authority. In short, to be a Mosotho was to acknowledge Moshoeshoe as the patriarch of a society structured in familial terms. However, this model was not a particularly cohesive mechanism. It was a premise for construction of a collective identity because it conveyed a very different sense of society

to that of the colonial settlers with whom the Africans were locked in conflict. The model served Moshoeshoe by demarcating a political boundary between his followers and colonial settlers rather than containing inherent features which determined a particular corporate identity for his followers.

As a pre-colonial construct, the model was not designed to promote political groupings on a large scale. Once people were congregated together, there was little that Moshoeshoe could do to prevent subordinate chiefs from leading their followings independently, as I discussed in chapter 2. The reason for this is that each chief was patriarch to his own followers, and, accordingly, committed to extending his own authority rather than subordinating it to other chiefs. This was a dynamic which, as I discussed in chapter 4, was still very evident in the case of the Batlokoa chiefship during this century, but which was less controllable during the 19th century (Thompson, 1975:257-258, 283). However, in the context of external threats, the model's ideological emphasis on familial bonds was a means to unite people to face those threats, as was illustrated in Mopeli Mokhachane's incorporation into Moshoeshoe's polity during the wars against the colonial forces.

The model served Moshoeshoe in the face of colonial intrusion and the particular threat of denial of access to land, but had it not been for that development Moshoeshoe might not have been able to maintain his supremacy vis a vis his subordinates. Even then, as I noted in chapter 2, his authority was not absolute, as the secession of his son, Molapo, from the polity in 1869 demonstrated. Despite such tribulations, use of this model and

its acknowledgement by the colonial forces ensured that it was kept alive for subsequent use in organising a government for Basutoland, and in constructing a national identity for its inhabitants.

A critical factor in this history was the translation of Moshoeshoe's model by colonial settlers into their terms, for it had the subtle effect of differentiating the status of the Sotho chiefdoms with respect to each other and to the settlers. Moshoeshoe's success in building up a large following, and in combining both diplomacy and military resistance against colonial forces, secured him status as 'majestic', a 'stately' ruler with 'absolute' authority over a distinct 'Basutoo'/'Basuto'/'Basutu' 'tribe', and commensurate recognition as the ruler of 'Basutoland' (Orpen, 1979:10-12; Thompson, 1975:59,64,80,81,122, 123). Other chiefs fared less well, salvaging what they could from the turmoil; one example is Mopeli Mokhachane, who was tempted away from the Basotho polity by the offer of a 'reserve' in Witsiehoek, where he used the Bakoenā totem to distinguish his group from others, and to be accepted as a 'tribe' by colonial officials (Quinlan, 1986:33-34). After Basutoland became a colonial state in 1870, Moshoeshoe's model was elaborated under novel political conditions. Again, the elaboration of this model was as much a response to colonial intrusion as a product of indigenous heritage. In particular, the territorial circumscription of the Basotho polity, and the colonial support given to Moshoeshoe's heirs to follow in his footsteps, enabled these chiefs to achieve a concordance between state and national identity.

### Creation of concordance between the state and national identity

Moshoeshoe's heirs implemented his model in relative freedom during the late 19th century. The minimal colonial presence in the territory, coupled with Imperial protection, provided them with a secure domain, free of competition from other chiefdoms, in which to establish a structure of authority. However, as I discussed in chapters 2 and 3, use of this principle did not lead to a well defined hierarchy of chiefs. On the one hand, the principle affirmed the lineage structure of authority and formally safeguarded the claim of Moshoeshoe's sons to superior status. On the other hand, it also justified every chief, and each succeeding generation of chiefs, to act like lineage founders. Given that the younger brothers of the paramount chief had become chiefs, so too other chiefs could appoint not only their eldest son as heirs but also other sons to subordinate positions of authority. As a result, the hierarchy burgeoned as more and more chiefs were appointed. Furthermore, as the case of Mosuo Sekonyela demonstrated, there was a propensity for chiefs in later generations to counter the dissipative effect of this increase, and to re-affirm their own authority, by placing their junior sons as superiors over previously placed chiefs.

Furthermore, the construction of the chieftainship involved the application of contradictory criteria, as both chiefs and colonial officials contested the form and content of the institution. It would be, therefore, simplistic to assert that the construction of the chieftainship, and its suffusion throughout a finite area, determined a national identity which coincided with the territorial boundaries of Basutoland. Such a

perspective simply tallies with the 'outsiders' view of the chieftainship which I discussed in chapter 2. It implies that Basotho saw Basutoland through the eyes of the colonial authorities, and proceeded to construct the chieftainship on this basis. Given that Moshoeshoe's political model did not recognise territory as a criterion of political authority and collective identity, one must acknowledge that the profusion of chiefs and subsequent suffusion of the institution throughout the country did not determine a national identity, but expressed a deeper struggle by Basotho to define their world. Put differently, Moshoeshoe's heirs asked not only how to occupy Basutoland, but also how to re-draw 'Basutoland', the colonial and territorially defined political space, so that it accorded with familiar concepts of political space.

Moshoeshoe's model provided an answer to the first question. As the population and demand for land on which to survive increased, Moshoeshoe's heirs appointed subordinate chiefs and despatched them, with subjects, to establish new settlements in the interior of the country. However, it was in answering the second question that concordance between the state and national identity was engineered. The application of Moshoeshoe's model within Basutoland established the character of the state. As Moshoeshoe's heirs placed chiefs to fill up the territorial space, they also changed the relationship between chiefs, and between them and their subjects. In the past, Moshoeshoe's chieftainship had been a loose combination of leaders with their own followings and of some of his agnates, all of whom were struggling to defend African highveld residents' access to land



and their usufructory use of it. Once contained within Basutoland, the paramount chief was the authority over a defined area, and subordinates were dependent on his patronage to become leaders of settlements and to manage usufructory use of land. Similarly, chiefs no longer retained their status as leaders primarily through their capabilities to command a popular following. People were dependent on chiefs to gain access to land through expression of allegiance to particular chiefs and, through them, to the paramount chief. Basutoland, the colonial construct, was being redefined by patronage on a large scale, to the extent that the state was the chieftainship.

The construction of the state in this manner also created the framework for a national identity. People's access to land through chiefs was reciprocated by chief's dependence on people for their own sustenance, as we saw in the careers of Mosuo Sekonyela and Seeiso in chapter 3. On the one hand, the opportunities to extract services and products in a usufructory system come from use of the land rather than directly from control over its allocation. On the other hand, agricultural livelihoods were the mainstay of the territory's inhabitants, but not a means to great wealth in the face of regular environmental hazards and a broader socio-economic process of decline in the capacity of agriculture to support the population. Accordingly, in a general context of relative poverty and economic uncertainty, to be a chief was a means to economic security. The 'placing system' was, therefore, as much a consequence of this context as it was a logical feature of Moshoeshoe's model. The quest for economic security encouraged junior sons of chiefs to

seek appointment as chiefs. The placing of agnates over previously placed subordinate chiefs was a means to re-affirm the nexus of patronage around the incumbent chief. The subsequent proliferation of chiefs not only consolidated the centrality of the chieftainship as the institution of the state, but also ensured that every citizen was bound intimately to it.

Although the hegemony of the state does not necessarily generate a concordant national identity, it did in this case because the chieftainship reflected its subjects' conception of social order. As I outlined earlier, society was understood in familial terms and described on the basis of belief in male progeniture. This conception of society was carried through into life in Basutoland because there was never a sharp rupture in the existence of the Basotho polity. As a result, the chieftainship was an accentuated expression of the type of society which Moshoeshoe had sought to build, which his subjects had endorsed, and which had been retained in popular imagination through resistance to colonial incursion onto the highveld.

Foundations for a national identity were laid in the early days of expansion into the interior of the country, by the establishment of new settlements consisting of groups led by leaders appointed by the paramount chief and his brothers. As we saw in chapter 3, the placing of Lelingoana, his struggles to command allegiance from settlers, and Rafolatsane's subsequent placement, helped to define not only the external boundaries of Lesotho vis a vis neighbouring states, but also superimposed a political framework with which settlers could identify. Territorial boundaries were not of primary concern. They were

obviously a consideration, but in the placing of these chiefs, the emphasis was clearly on clarifying boundaries in terms of personal affiliation to chiefs. The subsequent expression of affiliation in familial terms, such as in the names of villages and placing of sons as chiefs of new settlements, affirmed chiefs as representations of the social relationships which constituted family and society. In other words, the status of a chief was relative, reflecting social relationships which overtly expressed a patriarchal ideology of authority and identity. The placing system led to a profusion of chiefs which bordered on the absurd, but it was not a contradictory process. Not only did it ensure replication of familiar concepts of society, but it also promoted uniformity of political practice.

The critical point here is that a national identity was built upon the creation of local identities. In each locality, chiefs were patriarchs to their subjects. Through the placing of agnates as subordinates, a locality acquired a distinctive political identity, as in the case of Tlokoeng. The relationship between chief and subject in a locality reflected the familial conception of society, simply giving political expression in the form of patronage to the patriarchal ethos of social relationships between people. The chieftainship as a whole evolved out of those relationships, with the placing system being both the means to create the framework and the ideological endorsement of those relationships. In short, to be a Mosotho was to align oneself with a chief and through him, to acknowledge an affinity with other individuals as members of a unique social and political order.

I draw attention to the creation of local identities because it lies at the root of the present day crisis of legitimacy of the state. This is not to say that the creation of local identities in the early days of Lesotho's existence created rigid internal political boundaries between state and locality, and that the state has now inherited longstanding and deep divisions in the society. I suggest that for as long as the chieftainship was the state, albeit buttressed by imperial Britain, the boundary between the state and locality was perceptible but not substantial. Only as the chieftainship lost its predominance and became an institution within the state, was the boundary sharpened. And only as this occurred, did this boundary become politically significant in terms of creating division between the state and its subjects. In other words, the delineation of the boundary took time. The process originated, as we have seen, at the beginning of this century, but became politically significant only in the 1940s. Furthermore, the delineation of the boundary involved a re-positioning of the chieftainship and consequent change in the dynamics of collective identity. In particular, the chieftainship became an expression of a national identity which did not depend on the existence of Lesotho as a state, but which reflected the realities of people's existence on the margins of regional society.

#### Disassembling the state and national identity

The potential for creation of local identities was not a pressing threat to the state in the late 19th century, though the danger was perceived, as is intimated in the local explanation

of Lelingoana's and Rafolatsane's placing in eastern Lesotho, discussed in chapter 3. However, that perception could have been only a momentary fear, reflecting consciousness of the earlier 19th-century struggles between chiefdoms, and the weakness of Moshoeshoe's model in retaining the allegiance of chiefs. In the context of containment within Basutoland and acknowledgement of colonial authority in support of Moshoeshoe's heirs, the threat of clan and totem affiliations being fault lines for fragmentation of the Basotho polity was a temporary possibility. The era of the chiefdom had passed, and with it, the political and economic conditions that had given credence to their individual identities.

The threat to Moshoeshoe's heirs lay in the appropriation of these identities by colonial authorities as part of their strategy to divide the people and to restrict Africans access to land. At the time, the colonial authorities' attempts to lure Molapo away from the Basotho polity would still have been fresh in people's memories. Likewise, Mopeli Mokhachane's departure to Witiseshoek, as leader of the newly designated 'Bakoena tribe', was testimony to the potential for collusion between desperate leaders and the colonial authorities, at the expense of efforts by Moshoeshoe's heirs to defend the integrity of the Basotho polity. However, the underlying cause of this threat, namely the need to gain access to land, was dispelled within Basutoland by the availability of land in the interior for settlement and cultivation.

This did not mean that local identities in these terms simply disappeared. They receded, as politically significant sources of

internal tensions, into the cultural consciousness of the people, and found expression in everyday life as markers of different social practices amongst the inhabitants. For example, the different origins and heritage of the Batlokoa in relation to other Basotho were reflected in different bridewealth payment practices, and in the association of particular clan identities with particular villages in the Tlokoeng area (Ashton, 1952:200). Local identity expressed in these terms, however, was subsidiary to its expression in relation to the economic realities of rural life and the influence of the colonial authorities. I am referring here to the emergence of political and economic conditions which promoted stronger attachment to locality than to Basutoland, and to particular chiefs as opposed to the chieftainship. Central to this process were the colonial authorities who sought to align the chieftainship with their concepts of administration. In particular, the imposition of territory as a criterion of authority had the effect, in time, of consolidating the close bonds between individual chiefs and their subjects in each locality at the expense of distancing people from the chieftainship as a whole. Initially, however, the colonial intervention did not challenge people's identification with the chieftainship because it was subordinate to, and in service of, the efforts of Moshoeshoe's heirs to occupy Basutoland.

The intervention consisted initially of demarcation of large districts, which, as I outlined in chapters 2 and 3, were nominal rather than substantive, and helped to consolidate the new chieftainship by delineating the hierarchy and by specifying the

status of chiefs relative to each other. Moreover, one must remember that the chiefs' control over the administration of affairs within the country was greater than that of colonial officials in the late 19th century, for the latter's administrative structure had yet to be developed. The situation changed when the colonial authorities began to replicate the territorial precept within districts, beginning with imposition of categories such as 'sub-chief' and following with the systematic restructuring of the chieftainship in the 1930s and '40s. The ranking was neither uniform nor consistent, but the result, in broad terms, was a territorially defined hierarchy; the paramount chief was the authority over the whole country, and above district, ward, and sub-ward chiefs and headmen. Coupled with the restrictions imposed on the administrative and judicial authority of chiefs, the chieftainship was gradually subordinated to fledgling institutions of a modern state, as understood by the colonial government.

This subordination of the chieftainship marks the point at which the institution lost its capacity to reflect a national identity that was in concord with the state. The consequence was that the chieftainship itself represented the boundary between the state and locality. On the one hand, the chieftainship had become one institution within the colonial state, and chiefs were being pressured to become its agents. Demarcation of areas of jurisdiction eroded the indigenous notion of political authority as a representation of familial relationships. The restriction of chiefs' authority meant that the chieftainship no longer encompassed virtually every public facet of people's lives in the

rural areas. The specification of roles, duties and salaries for chiefs imposed a quasi-class barrier between chiefs and their subjects, distancing the chieftainship from its well spring, the people. On the other hand, however, the colonial interventions re-emphasised identification with locality and chief. Territorial demarcations of authority sharpened the boundary between locality and Basutoland as a whole. The restriction of chiefs' authority emphasised their role as local authorities in close contact with citizens, as opposed to the distanced position of colonial officials resident in district capitals. The specification of chiefs' roles and duties emphasised the authority of individual chiefs in the administration of a locality.

What was really an attempt to combine two very different models of society required re-definition of the relationships between the chieftainship and the colonial government, between chiefs, and between them and their subjects. The chieftainship was, therefore, inevitably the fault line, and the rupture was expressed in bitter contests such as the episode of liretlo (the politically inspired 'medicine' murders, discussed in chapter 2), as chiefs struggled to accommodate the structural changes in culturally familiar ways. A notable illustration of the process is the contest involving Lelingoana, his heir, Mosuoe, the paramount chief and the colonial government. During this contest the Batlokoa heritage became an integral part of the political and legal discourse, as Mosuoe managed successfully to straddle the contradictions arising from the re-structuring of the chieftainship. On the one hand he acquired status as a senior chief in the 'new' chieftainship. On the other hand, he



consolidated his authority with regard to his own subjects by establishing very clear boundaries between his area of jurisdiction and those of other senior chiefs. His success in creating a solid, local basis of authority was expressed in ethnic terms. The area and its residents acquired a political identity as Batlokoa, a distinction which has since been entrenched in official descriptions of the chieftainship (Mazenod, 1984).

The political process through which the chieftainship came to express local identities as much as a national identity was supported by changes in the people's livelihoods. The changes in question are the combination of agricultural activities and migrant employment in the late 19th century, their subsequent integration with established social practices, and the people's increasing reliance, during this century, on migrant work to sustain agricultural livelihoods. I suggest that these changes endorsed the close bond between chief and subject, but they also contributed to the re-definition of the relationship between people and the chieftainship as a whole, and of their affinity to Basutoland and the state.

Following the circumscription of Basutoland in 1869, the turbulent political economy of southern Africa required Basotho to rely on farming and occasional wage employment as complementary means of survival. The development of markets in agricultural commodities, through expansion of the mining industry in South Africa, provided opportunities for Basotho to prosper on occasion as farmers. However, they were vulnerable to environmental hazards such as drought at least once a decade, and

the rinderpest epidemic in the 1890s. They were also vulnerable to political hazards such as efforts by South African farmers to establish tariff barriers against grain exports from Basutoland in the 1890s, and the Anglo-Boer war of 1899-1902 which restricted trade (Murray, 1981:10-14).

The hazards of farming were offset by reliance on occasional employment in South Africa (Murray, 1981:14-15). Although the historical evidence from the early 20th century suggests that per capita income from agriculture was steadily declining, farming was clearly still the primary economic interest of Basotho (Ashton, 1952:173-177; Eldridge, 1993:187-192). Coupled with the opportunities to use land as needed, according to the usufructory principles of land tenure, and with the dependence on chiefs to acquire land, this interest would have supported the expansion of the chieftainship and, in particular, the close bonds between chief and subject. As the capacity of agriculture to sustain the people declined and as migrant work became a necessity, the capacity of the chieftainship to encapsulate the economic activities of the people and their social and cultural heritage receded for several reasons.

First, the constraints on farming, and the efforts of people to resolve them, focused people's attentions on the locality in which they were born and raised rather than on the territory as a whole. By the 1930s it had become necessary to defer rights of access to arable land which had been enshrined in the usufructory land tenure system, and ensured through expansion of the population into the interior. The general lack of land and the threat of landlessness were resolved by allowing people

to inherit fields from their parents, though inheritance was only legally sanctioned much later. The contribution of these developments to the localisation of collective identity is still evident, as we saw in the case study of Maliehe's fields in chapter 5. Furthermore, as I discussed in chapter 6, the growth of the livestock economy entailed close co-operation between stock owners and chiefs within a locality, notably in villages, in order to sustain the accumulation of livestock.

Secondly, the migrant labour system encouraged workers to invest in rural homes. With restrictions on settlement and employment in South Africa, Basotho workers were driven to invest in rural livelihoods, and to support parents, as a means of gaining social security in the long term (Murray, 1977; Murray, 1979; Spiegel, 1979). Thirdly, the reliance on jobs in South Africa led to establishment of an ex-patriate population whose existence was closely bound to the regular flux of migrant workers. Many Basotho established homes in South Africa during the 1930s and 40s (Murray, 1981:15), and continue to do so, but they rarely gave up their de jure domiciles in Basutoland, particularly after the implementation of apartheid, in view of the difficulties of gaining rights to permanent residence in South Africa.

In summary, the reference points for collective identity sharpened in the face of the changing economic conditions which governed the people's lives in and beyond Basutoland. The consolidation of ties with localities, through migrant workers' support of parents and dependants as a means of gaining access to arable land, supported the authority of chiefs vis a vis

their subjects. The transition was not a smooth one. The proliferation of chiefs, and the demands they exercised on subjects in the context of the latter's general economic hardships, became a source of tension throughout Basutoland and re-inforced the hand of the colonial government to intervene during the 1930s and 1940s. Nonetheless, the interventions also affirmed chiefs as local authorities. The colonial interventions were really the political corollary to the economic process which narrowed people's options for survival. As the authority of chiefs became focused on the locality in which they resided, so too their subjects were driven to invest in the political economy of the locality.

Furthermore, the close links between rural residents, migrants and 'permanent' residents in South Africa can be seen to have contributed to creation of a national identity which transcended the boundaries of Basutoland. It was constructed in reference to the working environment, as in the case of Basotho shaft-sinkers on mines who acquired a reputation as the best workers for this job and constructed their identity as Basotho on this basis; and also in reference to the urban environment, as in the case of the street gangs which included the 'Ma-Russians' whose membership consisted of Basotho men (Guy & Thabane, 1988; Coplan, 1992). In short, the political and economic history of Basotho incorporated a process in which national identity was disassembled from the state.

The political consequences of this disassembling were apparent when Lesotho became an independent state in 1966. Popular support for independence reflected a long history of resistance to the

political and economic deprivations that the people had suffered. Nonetheless, this expression of Basotho nationalism could not hide for long the incapacity of the state to improve the lot of its citizens. Moreover, political independence itself could do little to change a population whose existence, and national identity was based on the bonds between chief and subject, and on links between rural home and urban South Africa, rather than on any substantive affinity with the state. In short, political independence brought into the open the fragmented political culture of Lesotho. Despite the gloss of common language and homogeneity of the population, Lesotho was divided into numerous political units which were tacitly expressed in the chiefs' territories with their own local hierarchies, and were sustained by their subjects' efforts to survive on the basis of whatever resources were available in the locality.

Following the BNP's usurption of the state during the 1970 elections, and Lebua Jonathan's volta face with regard to relations with South Africa, Weisfelder (1972) described the political situation in the following terms:

'...these all too real domestic divisions and conflicts must also be perceived as desperate expedients in a frantic, ad hoc, diplomatic game which is aimed at preserving the maximum residual options for the nation or at least for the chance to survive.'

It would have been more correct to assert that the situation reflected the state's struggle to survive rather than a collective struggle by the nation, particularly in view of the BNP's subsequent interventions which highlighted its ability only

to strengthen the barriers between the state and the people.

Government interventions to impose its authority were diverse, ranging from implementation of aid schemes as a form of patronage, to politicisation of VDCs, to physical coercion by a paramilitary force and the police (Murray, 1981:6). The outcome was a deeply divided society, as the rural areas were riven by disputes along party political lines, the formation of vigilante groups, passive resistance by chiefs and villagers, and military resistance by likhukhuni (guerrillas) of the BCP's 'Lesotho Liberation Army' (Leeman, 1985:40-110). For example, Mokhotlong district became a centre of BCP activity. Village militias (Maboto a Khotso) which were established by the BNP government rapidly deteriorated into vigilante groups, according to local informants. Furthermore, what was perhaps a longstanding perception of difference between lowland and highland existence was politicised; travel to the lowlands was, and still is, described as 'going to Lesotho' as often as 'going to the lowlands'. The interventions could not succeed in securing the hegemony of the state over the rural populace because they were like those of colonial settlers and governments in the past: intrusions which promised little in the way of significant improvements to people's lives but threatened the means that people had developed to survive, and which were being imposed on a population whose existence was simply not governed by the existence of Lesotho as an independent state. Instead, the interventions exacerbated the divisions between the state and its citizens.

In view of the above, the interventions of the state after

1980 reflect an intensification of its efforts to establish a commanding presence in the rural areas. Again, the faultline is the chieftainship, because the state contends with the recently consolidated divisions between itself and its citizens. The general context is well defined. The interventions, notably the effort to re-structure the agricultural economy, confront a multiplicity of local political entities which have become sharply defined through localised efforts to derive some sustenance from agriculture. As the state attempts to challenge the authority of chiefs in this context, so people are driven to use the chieftainship as their basis for assessment and response to the interventions. The dynamics of this confrontation are, however, different to those in the past.

On the one hand, the re-structuring of the agricultural economy promises considerable inflow of state resources into the rural areas. This promise raises expectations for the rural areas to be a basis of political patronage. Furthermore, it opens up the possibility for contestation over the distribution of the state's financial resources and subsequent differentiation of wealth amongst rural residents. Given the centrality of chiefs in management of natural resources, the chieftainship is again the focus of political attention. For example, there was vociferous debate in the National Assembly about the chieftainship, particularly the principal positions before the recent general elections. The debate included demands for installation of a Baputhing chiefship in southern Lesotho as a distinct political entity like the Batlokoa chiefship. Also, there was much debate over the occupation of all but three of

the principal positions by the descendants of Moshoeshoe.<sup>2</sup>

On the other hand, although such debate expresses perception of the chieftainship as both a barrier to state interventions and as a potentially significant 'gatekeeper' for distribution of the state's resources, it does not take into account the potential decline in the relevance of chiefs to their subjects. More and more people do not have arable land and are unlikely to gain access to it, particularly as land holders make use of the 1979 Land Act to secure private property rights to their fields. Moreover, the RMA programme and the new conservation policy pose a possible threat to the majority of relatively poor stock owners who cannot participate in them on the terms demanded by the government and conservationists. Furthermore, the incipient class division in the rural areas is producing a relatively wealthy elite who are gaining the ability to sidestep the authority of chiefs, as is reflected in traders' and salaried officials' acquisition of residential and commercial sites discussed in chapter 4, and in the alignment of the richer stock owners with the government's livestock programmes discussed in chapter 6. There is, therefore, a possibility that chiefs will become less relevant as rural administrators to an increasing number of their subjects. In a different vein, rising levels of unemployment due to cut backs in migrant job opportunities in South Africa, coupled with the inability of chiefs to help people with access to land, are likely to increase popular disdain for chiefs.

Nonetheless, the situation is complicated by state interventions into the livestock economy. The authority and relevance of chiefs is likely to be buttressed in the face of



these interventions for several reasons. First, the interventions are a direct challenge to stock owners' grazing and livestock management practices which hinge on chiefs' legitimate control over use of communal resources. Secondly, the interventions ignore the nexus of investment in, and control of, livestock, namely the villages, and thus they leave aside a critical position for political organisation and resistance under the aegis of chiefs. Thirdly, in the context of increasing unemployment and lack of access to arable land, livestock are a critical resource for rural residents, but without regular access to wage incomes, fewer people will have the capacity to build up and to maintain large herds. The question which remains is whether the state can incorporate this majority of people with few animals in programmes which are actually designed for people with large herds, and provide greater benefit to the wealthy rather than the poor stock owners. The lines of conflict have, therefore, been drawn between the state and the majority of the rural populace, and the chieftainship is at the interface.

There is a strong possibility, however, that the state interventions into the livestock economy, coupled with privatisation of arable land, will exacerbate the class divisions that are emerging amongst the rural populace. In that case, even if the government succeeds in establishing its authority in the rural areas at the expense of the chieftainship, rural society will be fragmented yet again, but on different lines. There will be a small proportion of the population which continues to derive an existence from agriculture, and a larger proportion which will be driven towards permanent employment and residence in South

Africa. As the relevance of the chieftainship declines and as state interventions contribute to an exodus of people, the future of the state and the heritage which created a Basotho national identity will be in doubt.

### Conclusion

Rural residents have perceived, and continue to voice, the complexity of political culture in Lesotho. This complexity is summarised in a question that is the basis of much political debate in the country. The question is, should Lesotho be incorporated into the 'new' South Africa? It is actually an old question, but its currency today stems from the political transformation of South Africa. Proponents point to the country's economic dependence upon South Africa, and the tenuous existence of Lesotho as a state since its birth in the 19th century, to suggest that citizens might be better off if they became part of the 'new' South Africa. Responses inevitably evoke nationalist pride, and the recounting of Lesotho's history of successful resistance, first against colonial settlers and, later, against incorporation into the Union and against apartheid. But proponents argue that the South African nemesis is crumbling, and ask what there is to resist.

Consensus is rare, for the question is really a rhetorical summation of complex popular concerns: what is the future of Lesotho as a state, and hence, of its citizens? What does it mean to be Basotho? What is the significance of Lesotho's particular history to contemporary political and economic circumstances? Moreover, the question presumes uncertainty about

the coherence of established social institutions and practices, such as the chieftainship, in the face of the multiplicity of forces that require re-assessment of rural livelihoods.

Clearly it would be simplistic to suggest that the chieftainship remains the basis on which rural Basotho define their world and construct a national identity. While the chieftainship is still a particularly significant reference point, it is itself subject to re-assessment. Its longstanding political and economic significance to rural residents is a reason why there appears to be a dual structure of government, as I indicated in Figure 4 in chapter 4. However, to accept that perspective would be to reify the institution. It would imply that the chieftainship is a solid rampart behind which exists a coherent Sesotho culture, and from which Basotho resist interventions that threaten to change that culture. As I have sought to show, the chieftainship still expresses to a large extent the social relationships which constitute family and society in rural Lesotho. These relationships are changing, however, as people witness the transformation of the world around them and participate in its transformation, notably in the ways they categorise and use natural resources. Moreover, rural residents clearly do not simply resist interventions into the rural social order. It follows that the validity of using 'resistance' as a basis for explanation of the continued existence and significance of the institution is suspect.

The chieftainship has certainly been held up as an expression of the type of society Basotho have sought to construct in the face of external threats. The institution is, however, really a

manifestation of a deeper struggle by rural residents to be authors of the way they construct and change their world rather than passive subjects of others' interventions. It is, accordingly, appropriate to see the chieftainship as a faultline whose fissures and cracks mark the course of their efforts to define appropriate concepts of authority at different times in the history of the country. The result is that the chieftainship reveals particular, but continually changing, resolutions in a society whose existence is as troubled today as it was 150 years ago.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE FUTURE OF THE CHIEFTAINSHIP

In view of the circumstances described in the previous chapter, it is not surprising that people voice disdain about individual chiefs, but shy away from suggestions that the chieftainship should be dissolved. Chiefs are fallible, imperfect representatives of an institution which reflects a longstanding, but only partially successful, struggle by Basotho to shape their society on their terms, and embodies their collective understanding of society and its history.

Chiefs are really the local government in rural Lesotho. It is government conceived in terms of the familial networks that constitute settlement, and sustained on the basis of collective identification with village and locality. These premises for government demarcate the world for chiefs to govern. In terms of their extent at any one time and their regeneration over time, these familiar networks identify the boundaries, albeit fluctuating ones, of the society to which chiefs are responsible. Identification with village and locality is a premise for use of the land, such that it guides definition of natural resources in terms of collective need. Chiefs are the pivot on which Basotho have defined and re-defined both the collective need for land and the social norms for categorisation and exploitation of its constituent resources. Their centrality in rural Lesotho as authorities who govern on the basis of direct interaction with subjects is, however, neither prescribed nor immutable. What it is to be a chief has clearly changed as political, economic and technological interventions have modified the conditions for

access to land and its use and, more generally, the form of rural society.

In schematic terms, chiefs of the mid-19th century occupied a tenuous position in relation to their subjects compared to their position at the end of the century; moreover, today, their position is being re-assessed amidst considerable uncertainty about their future viability as a form of authority. As the mid-19th century inhabitants of the highveld sought to re-establish society in the image of pre-colonial groupings, chiefs depended upon their subjects to grant them the authority to govern the group's affairs so that individuals could use land. Land in that context was the source of sustenance, and access to it was seen as an inalienable condition of existence prior to the right of chiefs to manage its allocation and use. By the end of the 19th century, however, chiefs had usurped this right through collusion with, and subjection to, colonial rule. As a result, their subjects were dependent on their patronage in order to sustain values which were evolving into rights of usufruct to land. Today, patronage is as entrenched, as a principle of social order, as are rights of usufruct. But chiefs are again dependent on their subjects to grant them authority to be patrons, in the face of their rapidly decreasing capacity to control use of land, and of the development of alternative and necessary means of survival.

The reasons for the discrepancy between popular disdain for chiefs and support of the chieftainship lie in this history. Chiefs are caught in the middle of contesting efforts by different agencies to define the nature and exercise of

authority. Popular criticism of chiefs is inevitable because they are the subjects in which different agencies have attempted to encapsulate diverse, and often contradictory, criteria of authority. Yet, as a body in the form of the chieftainship, they represent the social order which rural Basotho have struggled to create amidst the many interventions by external agencies.

Continual re-definition of the centrality of chiefs in the imagination and practical affairs of rural residents is marked by the numerous interventions to specify and, necessarily (as the form of society changed), to re-define the markers which identify the particular characteristics of 'chief', the position of chiefs in society, and the boundaries of their authority. These interventions indicate institutional transformation. The process in question is the construction of authority rather than its subsidiary, namely the encapsulation of authority in the category 'chief'. The former process is not immediately evident because it lies in the shadows of the latter, which is the domain in which modifications engineered by different agencies are presented and described. In other words, modifications draw attention to the continued existence of this form of authority rather than to change in how authority is being re-constructed and represented by chiefs.

The remaining question is whether or not this is a process of fundamental change as I argued in chapter 2. The point is debatable, given that it depends on the level at which analysis addresses the dynamics of change. If analysis emphasises the interventions of colonial and post-colonial agencies, the implication is that fundamental change was prevented by those

agencies' imposition of rigid constraints upon the exercise of authority in rural Lesotho by the resident population. If the emphasis is on this population, the implication is that these constraints dictated only particular directions for change, which this population continues to modify and to fashion in terms of their collective understanding of society and history. If analysis acknowledges both sets of agencies, then it must recognise an underlying dynamic; the evolution of the chieftainship along a generally predictable course, but subject to particular constructions of authority which are unique, and which can change that general course.

This qualified support of my argument in chapter 2 rests upon a neo-marxist approach to the topic, informed by questions that postmodernist discourse has raised with regard to both description and theoretical explanation. While this study has retained a focus on materialist explanation, it has also been a reflexive exercise. The outcome is an explanation of the chieftainship in Lesotho as a modern institution, in the sense that it is not a decaying phenomenon carried over from the past, but that it was fashioned, and continues to be re-fashioned, in relation to the changing circumstances of rural Basotho's lives. The chieftainship is a systematic representation of the rural populace's struggle to exercise some authority over how political and economic developments, and ecological consequences, beyond their immediate control were, and continue to be, integrated into rural society.

In developing this argument I have highlighted the importance of taking into account ecological processes in terms of how



'nature' is defined in society, and how bio-physical phenomena dictate certain premises upon which definitions are built. This approach has been useful to address the underlying dynamics of institutional and environmental change. I have used this aspect of the study to develop a critique of current interventions by the state and para-statal agencies, in terms of how their efforts to define objectively the relationship of people to the land cannot improve understanding of ecology, let alone fulfil aspirations for sustainable development, because they do not recognise the fact that this relationship is continually changing in form and content.

The interventions of colonial and post-colonial agencies highlight a striving to impose objective criteria of authority. This quest for uniformity hid, as it still does, a political imperative to sideline the chiefs in favour of the 'objectively' constructed institutions of the modern state. In the context of evident changes to society within and beyond Lesotho, this quest has led to reification of the chieftainship and to its assessment as an archaic form of authority. Such reification and assessment are premature because, as we have seen, chiefs cannot be so easily prised out of society, and from the imagination of its subjects.

The interventions of these agencies established, and continue to re-affirm, a political basis, in the form of modern state institutions, for gradual dissolution of the chieftainship. Yet it is an ineffectual basis in view of its economic constitution. However much officials may rail against chiefs, their work and the work of supporting donor agencies is focused on the

agricultural economy of the country. That attention has inevitably brought these agents into a domain in which the rural residents have undeniably as much, if not more, appreciation of the ecological, economic and political constraints and opportunities. Furthermore, it is a domain suffused with a long history of diverse reactions, including resistance, accommodation, and support, by rural Basotho to the various interventions of external agencies. Chiefs have been central figures in this history, in the sense that they have been the focus of attention of all other agencies with regard to questions of how to sustain agricultural activities. The outcome is that the numerous interventions of different agents have actually embedded the the chieftainship as an institution of authority deep into the fabric of rural society.

The chieftainship is not, however, simply a legacy of Lesotho's particular history, and rural Basotho do not shy away from suggestions of its dissolution simply because the institution is a longstanding cultural edifice. It is the embodiment of rural residents' longstanding struggle to authorise local aspirations to shape rural society. The rural population has supported the chieftainship, but as economic and political circumstances have changed, it has also re-defined the relationship between chief and subject. This re-definition continues in particular ways as the rural populace addresses new developments, such as changes in the livestock economy wrought by themselves and other agencies. There is a generally predictable course of reinforcement of local political identities, for example, that is fostered by the potential

conflict emanating from the establishment of RMAs, and from local re-assessment of the scope of chiefs' authority with regard to grazing posts built along, and within, their areas of jurisdiction. The political consequences of that course are not evident, however, in view of the uncertainty about the scope of agriculture to play a meaningful role in people's lives in the future.

The existence of the chieftainship and the way it increasingly reflects local political identities are due as much to the interventions of the national government and donor agencies as to the actions of the rural populace. As long as these agencies and the national government remain, in effect, as external agencies seeking to intervene in rural Lesotho, the future of the chieftainship seems secure, and dependant primarily on the commitment of the rural populace to rural residence.

## FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTERS

### Chapter 1

- (1) The D/MCCP was a South African government-funded project to help devise a conservation policy for the mountain region of Lesotho. This project is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

### Chapter 2

- (1) The undated document is attributed to Jones since it is written in the style of his work (personal communication: E.Eldridge, Department of History, Michigan University). This document is an analysis of the events which led to the 'medicine murders' that followed the rationalisation of the chieftainship in the 1930s and '40s. This document was probably written for colonial officials, given that it is marked 'secret'. The doubt about authorship stems from the unacknowledged inclusion of this material in Ashton's monograph and, likewise, inclusion of data on political organisation which appears to be derived from Ashton's field research (see Ashton, 1952:185-221) in the undated document. These authors probably collaborated to some extent in view of the presence of Jones' documents in Ashton's field notes and other documents, housed in the University of Cape Town archives.

### Chapter 3

- (1) These villages along the Mokhotlong river valley still exist, and are still distinguished as 'Bathepu' villages by other residents in the area. There are some old residents in these villages who continue to speak a language which is different from Sesotho. I have not been able to ascertain whether these settlements actually preceeded Lelingoana's and Rafolatsane's arrival.
- (2) Oral tradition records that Joel led a troop of warriors to fight Lelingoana but stopped at a place now known as Khalong ea Lithunya (Pass of Guns) and returned home without engaging in battle. During the night that he and his men rested at this place, Joel reportedly had a nightmare in which he dreamt of being killed by Lelingoana. Upon waking, he decided not to pursue Lelingoana but, he gave the place its name because he was startled by the sight of his men's rifles.
- (3) It is possible that the paramount chief, Griffith, did hope that Rafolatsane and Lelingoana would break Seeiso, in view of his efforts to have Bereng proclaimed as his appointed heir (Ashton, 1952:196-197; Hamnett, 1975:40).
- (4) Personal communication, D.Ambrose, National University of Lesotho, Roma.

#### Chapter 4

- (1) The figures were drawn from the 1986 census record, and were obtained from the Bureau of Statistics prior to its publication.
- (2) The Land Committee in Mapholaneng had met on only four occasions in 1986, and seven times during 1987. At the beginning of 1988 chief Reselisitsoe demanded that his committee meet regularly, once a week. Between January and March 1988, the committee processed 11 applications for residential sites (3 of which were also to be used as business premises), and three for commercial sites, and it ratified the division of fields amongst the heirs of a deceased landholder.
- (3) Spie Batignolle's interests were also served. The project was viewed as a 'loss leader' product by the professional staff. It was carried out at a time when lucrative contracts were in the offing for the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, a multi-billion rand scheme to build five large dams in the interior of Lesotho and a tunnel to feed water into South Africa's Vaal river system. Amidst intense competition amongst a number of international consortiums, the Tlokoeng project gave Spie Batignolle an opportunity to lobby for these contracts from within the country. Indeed, the presence of the company's director of operations for central and southern Africa on the Tlokoeng site, as 'site engineer' in addition to the real site engineer, could hardly be justified except as a means to establish close contact with government departments and ministers.

#### Chapter 5

- (1) This is an estimate based on information provided by stock owners and herders on stock losses between October 1987 and April 1988 (Quinlan, 1990a:76-77).

#### Chapter 6

- (1) A horse is often given in bridewealth payments and is categorised as Molisana, meaning 'the herder' of the other animals. A horse is not included in bridewealth payments of those who claim a Batlokoa heritage.
- (2) The maternal uncle also fulfils ritual obligations to his nephew before, and during, the latter's initiation (Ashton, 1952:47-48).
- (3) The current ban on importation of donkeys into Lesotho gives an indication of current official concern about the numbers of donkeys in the country and their ecological effects. I have not been able to find out the specific reasons for the ban.

#### Chapter 6/...

- (4) The RMA programme demarcates territorial boundaries in Lesotho, borrowing from experience of clearly defined reservations in the USA, within which extension workers developed livestock and grassland management programmes. Information from: A.Dobb, Arizona Ranch Management, Box 2792, Globe, Arizona.
- (5) Chief Nkuebe Molapo also stated that some men were fully occupied as herders and, as a result, the grazing posts became homes to them and their wives and children. This suggests that grazing posts were not so clearly distinguished from villages as they are today.
- (6) There has been no countrywide census of grazing posts, and official surveys of posts in RMAs are questionable. During the course of the D/CMMP, for example, a Range Management Division census of grazing posts in the Mokhotlong RMA 'found' over 400 grazing posts. However, my own research and that of an ecologist on the programme in six valleys within the RMA indicated that many of the recorded posts did not exist or were ruins.
- (7) Mokhotlong town has long been regarded as a "Robben Island" by civil servants posted to work in the district administration, in view of its isolation from the rest of the country. The tendency of civil servants to stay only for the minimum two years required is often seen amongst rural residents as a reason why little infra-structural development occurs.
- (8) Dobb (1985:136) notes that 78% of stock owners in his village survey used grazing posts.
- (9) There is a lack of adequate comparative data, but some exploratory research in summer grazing areas near to Mapholaneng (at the head of the Matsoku valley) revealed severe degradation of the grassland, and acknowledgement by stock owners that this area was unlikely to be useable in the near future.

#### Chapter 7

- (1) The potential of tourism is a subsidiary consideration. Tourism was initially propagated through building of hotels and casinos in Maseru, but it is now being aligned with conservation programmes (Crush & Wellings, 1987; Quinlan, 1990b).
- (2) Personal communication: T.Petlane, Institute of Southern African Studies, National University of Lesotho. Advocacy for a Baphuthing chiefship was openly voiced earlier, in 1988, by some senior civil servants who proclaimed a Baphuthing heritage (personal communication: S.Gill, Lesotho Evangelical Church Museum and Archives, Morija).

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