

THE REGENCY OF PARAMOUNT
CHIEFTAINESS 'MANTŠEBO
AMELIA SEEISO
1941 TO 1960

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study documents the long regency of Chieftainess Mantšebo which lasted close to two decades, from 1941 to 1960. Mantšebo was the first and the only woman to occupy the seat of the Paramountcy in the History of Basutoland. After the death of her husband Paramount Chief Seeiso Griffith, she was appointed the regent by the Sons of Moshoeshoe in the minority of the heir apparent who was only five years in 1939 when Seeiso passed on. As a regent, Chieftainess Mantšebo faced a serious challenge from the British colonial authorities who were pursuing the chieftaincy Reforms which unfortunately threatened Basotho chieftaincy. Regardless, there were milestones that she achieved like the socio-economic and political empowerment of Basotho in general and that of Basotho women. Most importantly she repelled incorporation of Basotho into the Union of South. Mantšebo's regency revealed that women chiefs were also well suited to those positions that were traditionally designated for men.

Key words; Regency, Empowerment, Nationalism and Incorporation.

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DECLARATION

I Matiheli Tebatso Octavia Ntsane- Mosebo declare that this dissertation is the result of my independent work. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material that has not been previously submitted. I have made an effort to indicate where contributions of others are involved.

Signed.....

Date.....

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that the candidate has met all the requirements for the award of the Master of Arts in Historical studies, under the Department of Historical Studies, National University of Lesotho in September 2021.

Supervisor.....

Date.....

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Date.....

Head of Department.....

Date.....

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my daughter Mahlape Mosebo and my son Tiheli Mosebo.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

ARC Administrative Reform Committee

BAC Basutoland African Congress

BNC..... Basotho National Council

BNP..... Basotho National Party

CRC Constitutional Reform Committee

HCT..... High Commission Territories

LNA Lesotho National Archives

MTP Marema- Tlou Party

MFP Marema- Tlou Freedom Party

RAM..... Royal Archives and Museum

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Content	Page
Abstract	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Declaration	iii
Certification	vi
Dedication	v
List of Acronyms	iv
Chapter 1 Introduction	
Background	1
Literature Review	4
Research Problem	10
Aims and Objectives	11
Methodology	11
Limitations of the Study	13
Summary of Chapters	13
Chapter 2 Mantšebo's life 1902- 1940	
2.1 Introduction	15
2.2 Mantšebo's Early Life	15
2.3 Education and Marriage	17
2.4 Mantšebo in Mokhotlong	19
2.5 Mantšebo in Matsieng	21
2.6 Conclusion	22
Chapter 3 Mantšebo's ascension to the Paramountcy and the challenges that followed.	

3.1 Introduction	25
3.2 Mantšebo becomes a Regent	27
3.3 Mantšebo-Mabereng feud over guardianship of the heir apparent	33
3.4 Mantšebo and the Second World War	36
3.5 Mantšebo resists Reforms	40
3.6 The Terror and Crisis of Liretlo (ritual murders)	42
3.7 Conclusion	48

Chapter 4 Mantšebo and the empowerment of women.

4.1 Introduction.....	51
4.2 Social of empowerment of Basotho women	52
4.3 Economic empowerment of Basotho women	55
4.4 Political empowerment of Basotho women	58
4.5 Conclusion	61

Chapter 5 Mantšebo and empowerment of Basotho

5.1 Introduction	62
5.2 Mantšebo on improvement in education	64
5.3 Mantšebo on economic empowerment of Basotho	67
5.4 Mantšebo political empowerment of Basotho	69
5.5 Conclusion	77

Chapter 6 Mantšebo and the incorporation of Basutoland into the Union of South Africa.

6.1 Introduction	79
6.2 Background of the Union formation	80
6.3 Nationalist Party and the incorporation of Basutoland	80
6.4 Mantšebo's resistance against the incorporation of Basutoland	82

6.5 Mantšebo supports Basotho in the Union of South Africa	85
6.6 Conclusion	87
Chapter 7 Conclusion	89
Bibliography	101
Appendices	107

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The late colonial period in Basutoland, especially 1940 to 1960 saw the country undergo unprecedented changes. The most significant change of this time was the ascension of a female to the Paramountcy of Basutoland. Mofumahali (Chieftainess) 'Mantšebo Amelia Seeiso, the senior wife of the late Paramount Chief Seeiso Griffith who passed on in 1940, was chosen by the Sons of Moshoeshoe¹ “to become regent for her husband’s two year old son by his second wife, Constantine Bereng Seeiso”.

'Mantšebo's regency marked an important epoch in the history of Basutoland not only because she was the first woman to ascend to such a position but also because the 1940s and the 1950s were periods of fundamental change which threatened chieftaincy. Most notable were chieftaincy reforms which were mostly instigated by the colonial authorities to reshape the institution of Basutoland's chieftaincy. Another significant changes was the emergence of political parties in the 1950s led by commoners and some chiefs. These political movements became the new voice of the people until 1966 when Basutoland gained her independence.

It is in this context that this study documents 'Mantšebo's long regency of almost two decades during the period of “...tremendous upheaval and change,”² in Basutoland. First, it argues how, contrary to patriarchal obstructions of her regency, 'Mantšebo, the first and the only Queen Regent of Basutoland, ensured that the position of the

¹ A panel of principal chiefs that serve as the highest decision making body over chiefly matters especially succession.

² G.W. Hincks, *Quest for Peace: An Ecumenical of the church in Lesotho*, (Lesotho, Heads of Churches in Lesotho and Christian Council of Lesotho, 2000) p.357.

Paramount Chief survived the challenges of total colonial marginalization through the so-called reforms.

Second, it focuses on her role in empowering³ Basotho women socially, economically and politically. Socially, Mantšebo paved way for women to stand their ground against patriarchal prejudices. This is seen when she rejected Bereng's proposal for liverate marriage (lekenelo). Her stance against liverate marriage was cemented by the Resident Commissioner who argued that liverate marriage was one of the customs that were dying out and that held no statutory value thus it was not binding⁴. Economically, in the 1950s women could claim greater control of their late husband's estate. This happened through the agitation of chieftainess Mantšebo in the National Council despite strong opposition from her male counterparts.⁵ Mantšebo also thwarted the common practice of inheritance whereby a male child or brother of the late husband had the right to control and use the property of the late husband instead of his wife. Politically, empowerment of women was inspired and harnessed by Chieftainess Mantšebo whose thrust into the position of such high authority encouraged women to enter leadership positions.⁶ In 1955 there were four females out of the twenty-two most senior chiefs known as 'the Sons of Moshoeshoe'.⁷ This was unprecedented, never in the history of Basutoland chieftaincy were females allowed to be part of that body of high authority.

³ C.M. Keshab, *'Concept and Types of Women empowerment'*, Social Sciences with rural administration, Vol.9, No.2 (India, West Bengdal, 2013), pp. 18-19. Keshab defines empowerment as a process that help people to gain power in their own lives. It involves increasing social, economic and political strength of individuals and communities.

⁴ E. A. Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa; Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho*,(London, University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), p.165.

⁵ M. Epprecht, *'This Matter of Women is getting very Bad': Gender, Development and Politics in colonial Lesotho*, (PietermaritzburgUniversity of Natal Press, 2000,) p.108-120.

⁶ M. Epprecht, *Women's Conservatism in the late Colonial Lesotho*", *Journal of African Studies*, 36(1993) pp.34-35.

⁷ M. Epprecht, *"Women's Conservatism in the late Colonial Lesotho"*, *Journal of African Studies*, pp.35.

Thirdly this study affirms Mantšebo's role in empowering Basotho during her long regency. Empowerment of Basotho entailed agitation to have a greater say in decision making, on matters affecting their country. By the 1950s, she spoke with one voice with political parties in their call for self-government. She believed that Basotho had to be given a chance to have a greater say in the governance of their country. This turn of events puzzled the colonial authorities as they never anticipated Mantšebo to be steadfast in safeguarding the interests of Basotho⁸.

Lastly, it unpacks the role played by Mantšebo in resisting incorporation of Basutoland into South Africa. She opposed issues that were related to South Africa or seemed to prepare the territory for incorporation into South Africa. For instance in 1956, she objected to the hiring of Mr A.G.T Chaplin as the new Resident Commissioner on the basis that he was a South African citizen⁹. She argued that hiring Chaplin was South Africa's tricky move towards incorporation of Basutoland into South Africa¹⁰.

Literature Review

There are two schools of thought regarding Mofumahali 'Mantšebo's regency in the published literature. The first school argues that 'Mantsebo was a liability because she weakened the Basotho monarchy at a time of political transformation¹¹ while the

⁸ M. Epprecht, *'This Matter of Women is getting very Bad' : Gender, Development and Politics in colonial Lesotho*, (Pietermaritzburg University of Natal Press, 2000,) p.193.

⁹ S. Rosenberg , *Promises of Moshoeshoe: Culture, Nationalism and Identity in Lesotho*, (ISAS, NUL, 2008), pp.96-97.

¹⁰ S. Rosenberg *Promises of Moshoeshoe*, p.97.

¹¹ The political transformation was brought by the chieftaincy reforms that started in 1938. Most importantly chiefs' powers were limited to settling local disputes in their local courts only instead of charging and collecting fines as they previously did. The number of chiefs who could hold court was cut down and the system of placing was abolished.

second school argues that “she was ahead of her time in attempting to empower women and ordinary Basotho.”¹²

The first school of thought is led by L.B.B.J Machobane¹³ and generally, portrays Mantšebo as a weak leader. Its argument rests on three main issues: Mantšebo’s ascension to the Paramountcy and Lesotho becoming a constitutional monarchy. Machobane questions the legitimacy of Mantšebo as the regent. He argues that Mantšebo’s claims to the Paramountcy of Basutoland were supported and determined by the British authorities against Bereng’s claims¹⁴. He posits that, events leading to the appointment of the Regent were somewhat dubious because this time around it was not only Basotho who did the appointment but also the British authorities. According to Machobane, had it not been for colonial authorities Mantšebo could have lost the case. He therefore concludes that, Mantšebo would be forced to cooperate with the colonial officials so as to return their favour.

Eldredge¹⁵ agrees with Machobane on the issue of Mantšebo’s legitimacy as the regent in that the British supported Mantšebo’s claim to Paramountcy not because they believed she was capable, but because they preferred a weak regent so that they could push through their reform programme.¹⁶

The other issue which Machobane blames on Mantšebo was the issue of Lesotho becoming a constitutional monarchy. He argues that it was during Mantšebo’s reign, the power of the Paramount chief relentlessly diminished because of her incapability

¹² S. Rosenberg, R. Weisfelder and Frisbie-Fulton, *Historical Dictionary of Lesotho*. p.303.

¹³ L.B.B.J Machobane is a retired professor of the National University of Lesotho. He wrote extensively on the Constitutional History of Lesotho.

¹⁴ Ibid, p.198.

¹⁵ E. A. Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa; Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho*, (London, University of Wisconsin Press, 2007).

¹⁶ E. A. Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa; Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho*, pp.164.

to quell the threats to the Paramountcy especially from the colonial authorities and the National Council. He points out that, Mantšebo agreed “in her own response to Resolution 7 addressed to National Council on 10 May 1944” that the Paramount chief will ... *consult the Basutoland Council before issuing orders or making rules especially affecting the life or welfare of the Basuto people and administration of the Basuto*¹⁷. According to Machobane, this admission laid the foundation for Lesotho to become constitutional. He concludes that the 1958 constitution which officially made the Paramount chief answerable to the National Council was the final stroke in institutionalizing a constitutional monarchy.

S.J.Gill¹⁸ concurs with Machobane's, that it was Mantšebo who prepared a fertile ground for a constitutional monarchy by allowing the National Council to be more representative.¹⁹ He adds that Mantšebo was unable to rule and that it was through the efforts of the Resident Commissioner, the National Council and emerging nationalist parties that changes took place in Lesotho. He makes reference to 1958 Constitutional reforms that transformed the National Council to a Legislative Council which would be responsible for all internal matters affecting Lesotho²⁰.

M.Selebalo²¹ also agrees with Machobane on the issue of a constitutional monarchy. She indicates that Mantšebo through her advisors advocated for a constitutional monarchy. Selebalo points out that Mantšebo accepted the constitution of 1958 that sealed the fate of the Paramountcy. This constitution gave the National Council

¹⁷ As quoted by L.B.B.J. Machobane, *Government and Change* p.246.

¹⁸ S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Moriya, Morija Museum and Archives, 1993).

¹⁹ S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Moriya, Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), 188.

²⁰ S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Moriya, Morija Museum and Archives, 1993) pp.204.

²¹ M. Selebalo, *Moshoeshe II and his Struggle against Constitutional Monarchy 1960-1970*, MA Dissertation, (Roma,NUL, 2019).

Legislating powers and made the Paramount Chief answerable to the National Council²².

Murray and Sanders²³ focus on *Liretlo* (medicine murder) that took place during the reign of chieftainess 'Mantšebo in the 1940s and 1950s. On this issue they blame 'Mantšebo for two things. First, they assert that 'Mantšebo had a hand in *Liretlo*. This charge is based on thirty- seven murder cases²⁴ that took place in Mokhotlong which was 'Mantšebo's ward though ceded to Chief Matlere when Mantšebo moved to Matsieng. They maintain that ...*'even though she was never convicted but the fact remains, it was evident and the people believed that she indulged in ritual murders'*²⁵ so as to strengthen her hold to the Paramountcy. Second, they argue that it was because of Mantšebo's poor leadership that *Liretlo* escalated.²⁶

In his thesis, Aerni Flessner²⁷ focuses on the call for unity among Basotho in the 1940s and 1950s by the politicians as well as by the Regent. However he points that it was because of Mantšebo's suspected involvement in *Liretlo*, that her call for unity amongst Basotho was in vain as she had lost respect amongst her people.²⁸

The second school of thought led by Marc Epprecht²⁹ contends that Mantšebo was a shrewd leader who refused to be the colonial 'rubber stamp'³⁰. Its argument rest on three main issues: Mantšebo's success in upholding the position of the Paramount

²² M. Selebalo, *Moshoeshoell and his Struggle against Constitutional Monarchy 1960-1970*. pp. 38-39.

²³ C. Murray and P. Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2005)

²⁴ C. Murray and P. Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, p.163.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ J. Aerni-Flessner, *'If We Govern Ourselves, Whose sons is it to Govern Us?' Youth, Independence and the 1960s in Lesotho*. PhD Thesis, Washington University of Saint Louis, 2011.

²⁸ Aerni-Flessner, *'If We Govern Ourselves, Whose sons is it to Govern Us?' Youth, Independence and the 1960s in Lesotho*. p.94.

²⁹ M. Epprecht, *'This Matter of Women is getting very Bad'*: pp.108-120.

³⁰ M. Epprecht, *'This Matter of Women is getting very Bad'*: p.109.

chief against the onslaught of colonial reforms, her success in empowering women in particular and Basotho in general.

Epprecht argues that Mantšebo clashed with colonial authorities where she felt her power was under threat. For instance, Mantšebo adamantly opposed the British attempt to impose advisors on her.³¹ According to Epprecht this was the first move that sent a message to the colonial authorities that Mantšebo was not going to be their door mat.

He also shows an important role played by Mantšebo in empowering Basotho women socially, economically and politically. Socially, she agitated for a law that allowed widowed women to inherit the property of their husbands without the eldest son's consent. Economically, Basotho women could move to the urban areas to seek job opportunities without asking for permission from their husbands' families. She also ended the harassment brewers of traditional beer were subjected to in the urban areas³². Politically, many Basotho women assumed leadership of chieftaincy. Epprecht further points out that Mantšebo led the developments in education where she allocated land for the construction of the first university in Basutoland, Pius XII Catholic University College. According to him, Mantšebo facilitated the academic growth of Basotho. Also, he puts to light that Mantšebo also supported Basotho's political growth by allowing the existence of political parties.

Tlali Phoohlo³³ concurs on the issue of Mantšebo's success in empowering women politically mainly because it was during her reign that quite a number of women

³¹ M. Epprecht, *'This Matter of Women is getting very Bad'*, p.108.

³² M. Epprecht, *Women's Conservatism and the Politics of Gender in Late Colonial, Lesotho*, Journal of African Studies, vol.36 no.1 (London, Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 35.

³³ Tlali.M.Phohlo, *Gendered Conciousness as Watershed of Masculinity: Men's Journeys with Manhood in Lesotho*, PhD Thesis(University of South Africa,2011), pp.68-69.

became regents. Nonetheless he shows that this empowerment was unilateral because women who assumed political authority were from chieftaincy class only³⁴.

Scott Rosenberg³⁵ and R. Weisfelder³⁶ add that 'Mantšebo supported the existence of political parties in the country and spoke in one voice with them for the attainment of Basotho's self-rule. These scholars also show how Mantšebo, alongside political parties, rejected the Moore Report because it did not include the Legislative Council which was the major demand of the National Council.

Scott Rosenberg has touched other important achievements of Mantšebo where she resisted incorporation of Basutoland into South Africa. According to him, Mantšebo together with thirty-two chiefs of the National Council showed resistance by sending a petition to the British government, requesting the removal of white South African employed in Basutoland.³⁷ Rosenberg points out that this claim was based on the fear that placing white South Africans in administrative positions was a prelude to incorporation.

Leselinyana la Lesotho³⁸, commended Mantšebo for her outstanding leadership in thwarting all attempts of incorporating Lesotho into South Africa. Her resistance to incorporation was also featured prominently in Mohlabani newspaper³⁹. For example, Mantšebo's opposition to the appointment of Mr A.G.T Chaplin, a South African

³⁴ Ibid, p.

³⁵ S. Rosenberg, *Promises of Moshoeshoe: Culture, Nationalism and Identity in Lesotho*. p.49

³⁶ R. Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho 1952-1965*, pp.10-14.

³⁷ S. Rosenberg, *Promises of Moshoeshoe: Culture, Nationalism and Identity in Lesotho*. p.66.

³⁸ Leselinyana La Lesotho is a local newspaper owned by Lesotho Evangelical Church(LEC) now referred to as the Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa (LECSA).

³⁹ Mohlabani, was Basutoland African Congress newspaper established in 1955 under the editorship of B.M. Khaketla.

citizen, as the new Resident Commissioner in 1956. To the regent this appointment was one way of involuntarily incorporating Basutoland into South Africa.⁴⁰

Research problem

Majority of the scholarly literature has portrayed 'Mantsebo's regency in a negative way, some even going to an extent of casting aspersions on her as a woman. Despite the brunt of patriarchy that not only undermines women's leadership capabilities but also down plays their achievements, this study challenges that and offers a balanced account of Mantšebo's long regency. It essentially argues that as the first woman to hold the position of Paramount chief, she consistently manifested good leadership throughout her regency. It also argues that Mantšebo not only empowered women but Basotho in general.

Significance of the study

To-date, no comprehensive documentation has been undertaken on Queen Regent 'Mantšebo's reign which lasted almost twenty years, a feat few of her predecessors achieved. She was also the first and the only woman to occupy the position of Paramount Chief in the history of Basutoland. This study addresses this lacunae by documenting her reign. It is also hoped, it will serve as reference for other studies and might stimulate interests in studying women in the realms of power in male dominated societies.

Research questions;

The study asks the following questions,

- How did Mantšebo maintain her leadership as the Paramount Chief?

⁴⁰ Mohlalani, 02 March 1956.

- How did she empower Basotho women?
- How did Mantšebo empower Basotho in general?
- How did Mantšebo resist the incorporation of Lesotho into South Africa?

Aims and Objectives of the Study

Based on the questions asked by this study, the aim is to document the long reign of Queen Regent 'Mantšebo Seeiso from 1941 to 1960. Its objectives are

(a) To examine Mantšebo's leadership and the challenges she faced during her long regency.

(b) To examine how she empowered Basotho women.

(c) To examine how she empowered Basotho in general.

(d) To examine how she resisted Lesotho's incorporation into South Africa.

Methodology

Data for this research was collected from primary sources which were mainly archival material and oral interviews. Archival material included the newspapers that cover the period 1941-1960, Letters and official records were also consulted as they provided crucial information regarding the relationship of the colonial authorities, the Paramount chieftainess and the Basotho National Council through which Mofumahali 'Mantšebo prevailed and operated in the period 1940 to 1960.

Interviews were carried out at the birth place of Mantšebo at Sebapala in Quthing. Here elderly members of the family of Mantšebo, were interviewed specifically on

Mantšebo's family background and adulthood. Other interviews were conducted on individuals that served the government and lived during the reign of Mofumahali Mantšebo to further build oral testimonies about her reign. Elderly Women as well were consulted to provide their general knowledge on the tactics of Basotho women in dealing with family issues and societal problems. The interviewees were Basotho nationals born in the 1930s and early 1940s. This selection was based on the understanding that the interviewees at a time of 'Mantšebo's reign were at the youthful age and could make sense of the events around them.

Oral testimonies were collected through face to face in depth and open ended interviews which allowed the interviewees to speak at length about what they remember about Regent 'Mantšebo. A recording device was used throughout the interviews and the interviews were transcribed for clarity and for reference.

Lastly there are secondary sources that have formed a basis for this study, for they provided a guide on what was lacking in what was said about Mantšebo. They were also consulted to substantiate arguments that emerge within the study.

Limitations of the study

Limitations of this study include time constraints and a possible difficulty in reaching the interviewees. This study was carried out during this time when the world is struck by the Novel Corona Virus pandemic. The eruption and the rapid spread of this virus has forced the government of Lesotho to implement stringent measures on movement of people from one place to another so as to curb its spread hence citizens are encouraged 'TO STAY AT HOME TO SAVE LIVES'. This restricted mobility lengthened the period of the study.

Another limitation was the age of my informants. Given their advanced age, they have problems remembering issues and it took time for them to recall facts.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter one: Introduction, This is the chapter that introduces the study. It provides the background of the study, literature review, research problem, the significance of the study and research questions. This chapter also presents aims and objectives of the study, methodology and lastly limitations of the study.

Chapter Two: Mantšebo's Life, 1902 to 1940: This chapter documents Mantšebo life from 1902 to 1940 before she became a regent. It highlights her early life, education and marriage.

Chapter Three: Mantšebo's ascension to the Paramountcy and challenges that followed: This chapter argues that, following the death of her husband, Paramount Chief Seeiso Griffith, Mantšebo ascended to the Paramountcy against patriarchal obstructions. It also presents the challenges she faced after assuming the Paramountcy and how she dealt with them. Her first challenge was her conflict with Mabereng over the cause of care-taking of Bereng (the heir apparent). The second challenge was the Second World War which was already taking place when she became the regent. The third challenge was the chieftaincy reforms which left it enfeebled. Lastly she was confronted with the outbreak of medicine murders.

Chapter Four: Mantšebo and the empowerment of women: This chapter documents the role played by Regent Mantšebo in empowering Basotho women. Socially she set precedence for women to stand their ground against liverate marriage. Economically she agitated that brewers of traditional beer in various camps be allowed to continue with their business. Lastly it shows how Mantšebo's thrust to power encouraged other women to assume leadership positions. For example, more chiefs' wives could claim regency for their sons.

Chapter Five: Mantšebo and the empowerment of Basotho; This chapter documents how Mantšebo empowered Basotho socially, economically and politically. Socially, she helped in the establishment of Pius XII Catholic College in 1945, the

first institution of higher learning in Basutoland. Economically, she encouraged Basotho to focus on agriculture. Politically, the National Council became more representative during her reign. Secondly, Mantšebo also supported the existence of political parties. Thirdly, she alongside political movements and parties rejected Moore Recommendations of 1954 as being against Basotho empowerment. Lastly, discussed, in this chapter is the formation of a Constitutional Reforms Committee led by Professor Cowen which resulted in to the constitution of 1958. This constitution was finally accepted by the Paramount Chieftainess and Basotho in general.

Chapter Six: Mantšebo and the Incorporation of Basutoland into South Africa:

This chapter documents South Africa motives' and attempts to make Basutoland part of South Africa after the introduction of Apartheid. It also demonstrates how Mantšebo resisted Basutoland's incorporation into South Africa. For example, she went to England to present a petition against the idea of incorporation.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion. This is the chapter that highlights and summarises the findings from previous chapters and offers general opinions about Mant'sebo's leadership.

Chapter 2

Mantšebo's Life, 1902 to 1940

2.1 Introduction

This chapter documents the life of Moipone Mantšebo Matšaba Amelia Seeiso before she became a Regent. It covers her family background and her education. It also discusses how her life evolved into adulthood that was stamped by marriage. After marriage, Mantšebo and her husband Seeiso set up homesteads in two different places, at Thabang village in Mokhotlong from 1925 to 1939 and later at Matsieng (the residence of the Paramountcy since 1858). Unfortunately, within a short time of their arrival at Matsieng, Mantšebo's husband passed on. When Seeiso died on the 26th December 1940 Mantšebo assumed his responsibilities in her capacity as the senior wife.

2.2 Mantšebo's Early Life

'Mantšebo 'Matšaba Amelia Seeiso was born Moipone Nkuebe in 1902 at Sebapala in Quthing . She was the only daughter among three siblings of chief Sempe Nkuebe⁴¹ and Manneko Alice Mpepuoa.⁴² Her other three siblings were 'Neko⁴³, Qefate and Nkuebe. Qefate became Sempe's successor in 1940.⁴⁴ Manneko was

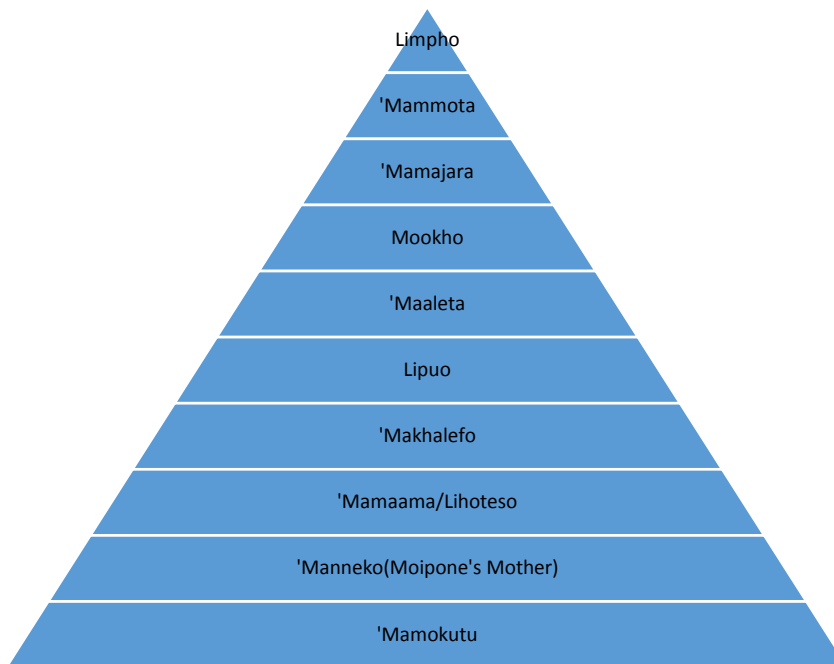
⁴¹ Sempe was the first son of Nkuebe Letsie. Nkuebe himself was the son of Letsie1 by his fourth wife Mampiti (Maleshoane). Sempe was born with four girls, namely; 'Mabatho, Sebueng, Thakane and Tsebo and four of them were married to Paramount Chief Griffith Lerotholi. Sebueng's son Seeiso, married Moipone.

⁴² Mpepuoa ('Manneko) was the daughter of chief Mohale Mopeli of Mphaki in the district of Quthing.

⁴³ 'Neko died at infancy, so Moipone became the eldest child from the house of 'Maneko.

⁴⁴ Interview with Mr Mashapha Letsie, Maseru, 4th February 2021.

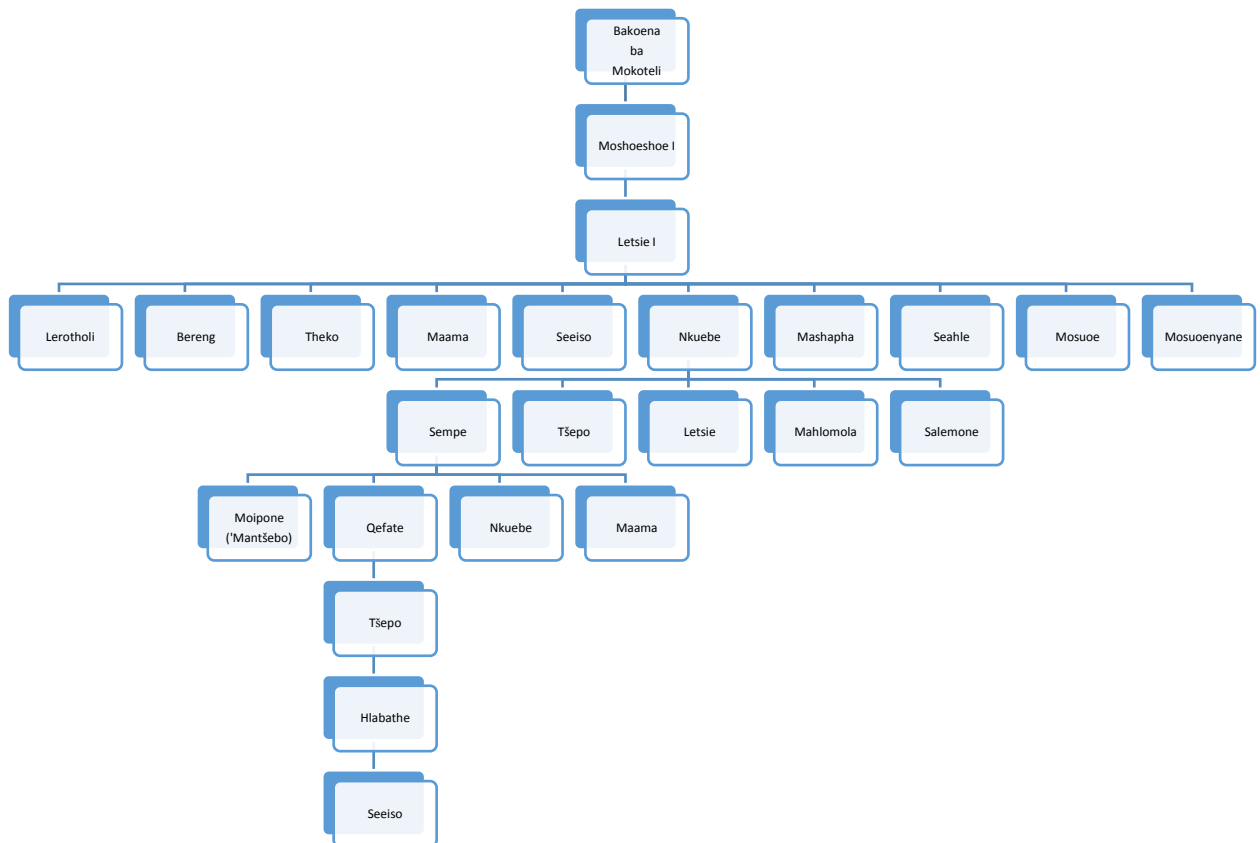
the second out of the ten wives of Sempe.⁴⁵ The following are the other wives of Sempe listed according to seniority. The senior wife is at the bottom of the pyramid.



List of wives derived from: P. Bereng, Haboo, (Maseru, Lilala Publications, 2008) p.106, together with the oral testimonies of Nkhono Malehlohonolo Nkuebe, (81), Seapala Quthing, 19th December 2020.

⁴⁵ Interview with Nkhono 'Malehlohonolo Nkuebe, (81), Seapala Quthing, 19th December 2020.

Below is Moipone's family tree which shows where Nkuebe and his descendants appear within Morena Moshoeshoe's family tree.



Adapted from table 13.1, p. 519 of G.W. Hincks, *Quest for Peace: An Ecumenical history of the church in Lesotho*.

2.3 Education and Marriage.

Moipone obtained her primary education at St Gabriel Roman Catholic Church (R.C.C) Primary school in the district of Quthing⁴⁶. This school was about 10kilometres from her home. At that time primary education went up to standard three and its focus was to teach learners how to read and write as well as inculcate Christian values in learners at a young age.⁴⁷ This is what Moipone acquired from her primary education.⁴⁸

Moipone's education cannot be confined to formal education only because education is a life-long and continuous process which starts from birth. Moipone was also exposed to informal education like any other Mosotho child. According to Matšela, in this kind of education, teaching was done by the family and society at large. With language skills, teaching is mostly done by older children and adults. He further states that, adults also contribute to language skills and they also encourage careful observation and the ability to listen through games and folktale narration. They teach children to participate as assistants in family duties such as house chores and looking after animals⁴⁹. Moipone, a Mosotho girl child, as well as a daughter of a chief was exposed to the roles and responsibilities of the chief and his wives such as taking care of visitors, the poor and the elderly. She also took part in house chores and other social responsibilities like showing hospitality to visitors and

⁴⁶ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 18 April 1964.

⁴⁷ G.W. Hincks, *Quest for Peace: An Ecumenical of the church in Lesotho*, p.368

⁴⁸ M.N. Ntabeni, "Mantšebo Amelia Seeiso" in E.K. Akyeampong and H.L. Gates (eds), *Dictionary of African Biography*, (UK, Oxford University Press, 2011), Pp.320.

⁴⁹ Z.A Matšela, *The indigenous education of the Basotho and its implication for educational development in Lesotho*, pp.78-79.

taking care of the poor and the elderly⁵⁰. This was an exposure that shaped Moipone for the future.

In 1925 'Moipone wedded Seeiso Simon Griffith⁵¹, the son and heir apparent of Paramount chief Griffith Lerotholi. Seeiso's mother Maseeiso (Sebueng) was the aunt to Moipone in that, Sempe who was Moipone's father, was Maseeiso's blood brother. Seeiso, therefore, married his cousin sister. Thus there is no doubt that the choice of Moipone as Seeiso's wife was influenced by his mother. This was a common practice among Basotho which was based on the idea that wealth should circulate within the family (*likhomo li boela sakeng*). Moipone's marriage was concluded through both customary and civil marriage rites. As per custom *bohali*⁵² was exchanged between the two families that join their children in marriage (Sempe and Griffith's family). In respect of civil marriage rites Mopoine's marriage was celebrated in a wedding that was solemnized by the Catholic Church at S.t Gabriel Mission⁵³.

2.4 Mantšebo in Mokhotlong

Seeiso's family was initially at Phamong where his father Griffith was placed before he ascended to the Paramountcy, and when Seeiso married Moipone, his father Griffith, now Paramount Chief placed the newly married couple in Mokhotlong where they set up their family. Seeiso became the principal chief of Mokhotlong Ward and

⁵⁰ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 20 March 1964.

⁵¹ Leselinyana la Lesotho, 10 January 1941.

⁵² Bohali means bride wealth, these are the animals that were transferred to the family of the bride by the groom's family to join two people, bride and the groom in marriage. Bohali is given as a sign of commitment by the groom. It is also a way of thanking the bride's family for taking good care of the girl. For a chief's daughter the number of cattle for bohali was thirty while for a commoner was twenty.

⁵³ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 20 March 1941.

an overseer of Batlokoa whom for a long time were independent until Seeiso's arrival.⁵⁴ The couple first settled in Salang but later moved to a new settlement which they named Thabang.⁵⁵ The name Thabang was conceived by the new area chief of Mokhotlong, Seeiso, denoting that Batlokoa should be happy because they were now given a chief. Seeiso is said to have uttered this statement when he arrived at a new settlement; '*Thabang Batlokoa, oa Moreneng o sa le teng*'.⁵⁶ Both villages Salang and Thabang are found in Mokhotlong⁵⁷.

In this marriage Moipone was blessed with an only girl child named Ntšebo Lydia Seeiso.⁵⁸ As a result, Moipone was given the name of Mantšebo. Customarily among most clans of the Basotho, a woman gets a new name after the birth of the first child. However, Her daughter Ntšebo later got married to the son of chief Nkhahle Lebona of Thaba-Tsoeu in Mohale's hoek.⁵⁹ Mantšebo also became popularly known as 'Matšaba'⁶⁰.

It did not take long before Seeiso married a second wife after 'Mantšebo, thus practicing a traditional polygamous marriage. The second wife was Sekhothali (Mabereng) from the clan of the Batlokoa. Marrying from Batlokoa was in line with Morena Moshoeshe's popular marriage alliance policy which helped him establish

⁵⁴ Interview with Ntate Tšeliso Khoboko,(66 years) History, Lecturer at the Lesotho College of Education, Maseru, 4 April 2021.

⁵⁵ Interview with Ntate Patrick Bereng, Maseru East, September 2020.

⁵⁶ Interview with Ntate Tšeliso Khoboko, Maseru, 4 April 2021.

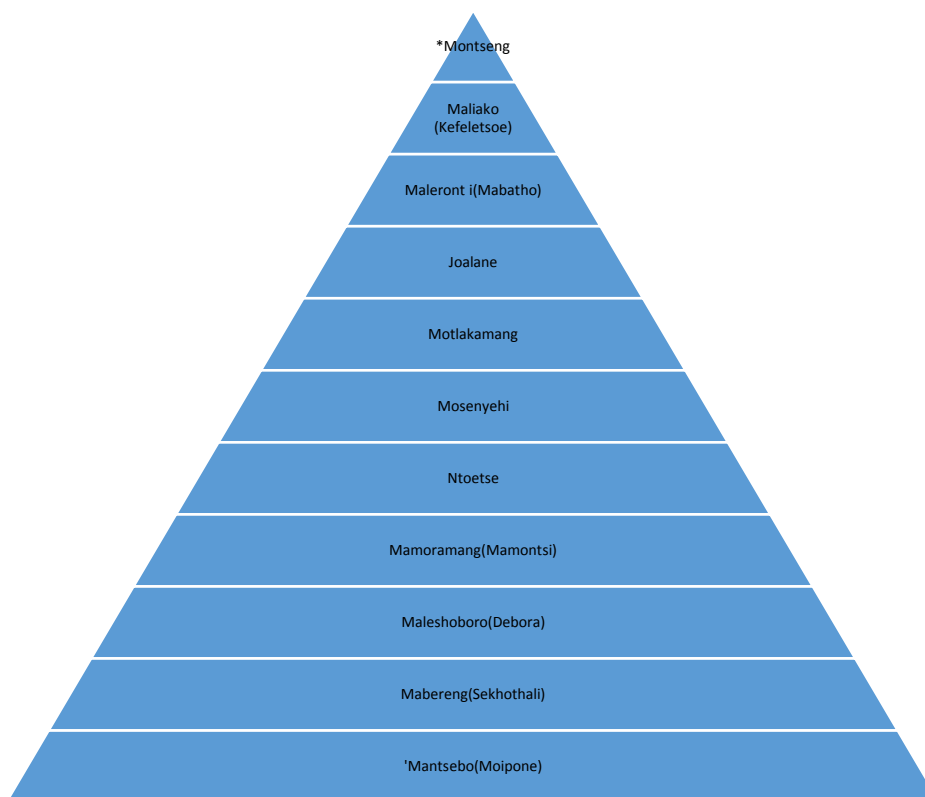
⁵⁷ L.B.B.J Machobane, *Government and Change*, (London, Macmillan, 1990) pp. 196-252.

⁵⁸ Moeletsi oa Basotho. 14 April 1940.

⁵⁹ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 16 October 1960.

⁶⁰ There are two versions regarding the origin of the name Matšaba first explanation show that it was the shortform of 'Mantšebo, while the other version is that the name Matšaba was the other name of the first 'Mantšebo after whom 'Mantšebo Seeiso was named.

ties with other clans and ethnic groups and formed the Basotho Nation.⁶¹ Sekhothali was blessed with three sons namely Bereng Constantine, Mathealira, and Masupha and three daughters named Mampoi, Mathaabe and Thakane. Bereng became the heir apparent. Many more wives followed after Mabereng. All in all, Seeiso had eleven wives. The following were Mantšebo's sister wives as per seniority. The senior wife is at the bottom of the pyramid.



List of wives derived from: P. Bereng, Haboo, (Maseru, Lilala Publications, 2008) p.106.

⁶¹ T. Mothibe , "State and Society,1824-1833" in N.W Pule and M. Thabane (eds), *Essays on the Aspects of Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (Roma, National University of Lesotho, 2002) p.20.

While at Thabang, 'Mantšebo was a strong adherent of the St. James Catholic mission in Mokhotlong. This is proved by the sacrifice she made, travelling a long distance of about two hours on horseback to reach the church⁶². Her dedication to the church was manifested through joining the church association of the Singers of S.t Cecila joined by men and women who lead church sessions with hymns⁶³. She also joined Mothers of Saint Anne which was joined by married women who connected with one another in prayer, to serve God through service to the church⁶⁴. Most importantly Mothers of St Anne empowered each other in building their families by emphasizing respect for the husband and good child care⁶⁵. By joining this religious organization, Mantšebo was committing to build her family with Christian values. Moeletsi oa Basotho describe her as a Christian who maintained the purity of Christian life.⁶⁶

2.5 Mantšebo in Matsieng.

In 1939 Mantšebo and her husband Seeiso Griffith moved to Matsieng in the district of Maseru following Seeiso's appointment to the Paramountcy. Seeiso's appointment followed a fierce contest for paramountcy between him and his half-brother, Bereng Constantinus Griffith⁶⁷. Unfortunately Mantšebo's husband died on the 26th December 1940, after just ten months as a paramount chief. At the time of his death Seeiso did not have an immediate successor. Therefore Chief Gabasheane Masupha, who was Seeiso's principal councillor became an obvious choice for the

⁶² Moeletsi oa Basotho, 12 April, 1960.

⁶³ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 18 April 1964.

⁶⁴ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 18 April 1964.

⁶⁵ M. Epprecht, *'This Matter of Women is getting very Bad'*. pp.108-120.

⁶⁶ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 18 April 1964.

⁶⁷ L.B.B.J Machobane, *Government and Change*, pp. 196-197.

position of acting Paramount chief. Gabasheane stood a good chance to act as the Paramount chief because he was already acting in that office when Seeiso became critically ill. After the death of Seeiso, Gabasheane prepared the process of appointing the regent from convening a meeting, sending invitation to chiefs and seeking intervention of colonial authorities when a deadlock surfaced⁶⁸.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed Moipone's early life up to 1940 before she became a Regent. As a daughter of the Principal chief, Moipone was fortunate as she got exposed to life experiences from two angles. One is that of an ordinary Mosotho child while the other angle is that of being a daughter of the Principal Chief. She went through the formal education system and acquired literacy skills of reading and writing. Moipone was a Mosotho girl, and how far she went with formal education was not so significant. What was significant was to learn the right conduct of a Mosotho girl child which includes respect to both elders and her age mates. At the same time she learnt the responsibilities of a Mosotho girl child in the family and in the society. All these life lessons at childhood and adolescent stages prepared her for marriage and to be a responsible family woman. At the age of twenty-three years, she married Seeiso Griffith, son of the Paramount chief Griffith Lerotholi in 1925.

The newly wedded couple established their family at Thabang then migrated Salang in Mokhotlong. As a married woman especially as a chief's wife, she unleashed the values inculcated in her from a young age. These included dedication to home care, respect to family and the people around her.

⁶⁸ L.B.J. Machobane, *Government and Change*, p.197.

While at Mokhotlong her husband married the second wife Sekhothali from the Batlokoa clan. This was not by any chance not a surprise to Mantšebo because polygamy was a common practice among Basotho especially chiefs. In addition, Mantšebo herself was a product of a polygamous marriage. For a woman to survive in a polygamous marriage she must be versatile, resilient and tolerant towards her sister wives. Given her background, there is no doubt that Mantšebo was well equipped with these values.

She lost her husband at the age of thirty seven years⁶⁹. Although she was a young widow, she developed into a strong and brave character that was able to fill the void left by her husband's death. Mantšebo was able to keep the family together as she assumed the responsibilities of her late husband. These included taking care of the needs of all of Seeiso's wives together with their children as well as maintaining Seeiso's inheritance for his children. Seeiso's possessions especially livestock was put under a good care of a family member Chief Matlere Lerotholi who was appointed a care-taker of Mokhotlong ward since 1939 when Seeiso moved to Matsieng to assume the Paramountcy. Ntate Potfol Letsoela⁷⁰ added that even Seeiso's cattle posts in Mokhotlong remained functional until Bereng was of age to take over⁷¹.

⁶⁹ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 31 December, 1940.

⁷⁰ Fetohang Potfol Letsoela (70years) is the chief of Bafokeng in the Matšekheng area in the district of Berea.

⁷¹ Interview with Morena Potfol Letsoela, Old Europa Maseru, 11 July 2021.

Chapter Three

Mantšebo's ascension to the Paramountcy and the Challenges that followed.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The untimely death of Paramount Chief Seeiso Griffith in 1940 resulted in discord within the royal house in Matsieng because his son Bereng Constantine Seeiso was only two years old. The discord over who should become the regent in the minority of the heir apparent, posed the first challenge to Mantšebo. The other challenge was caused by Mabereng, sister-wife to Mantšebo and a biological mother of the heir apparent. 'Mabereng demanded that Bereng remained under her care since she was his biological mother while on the other hand Mantšebo wanted Bereng to be raised by her as the regent because she was better suited to prepare him for the position of Paramount chief. The tension between the two senior wives was such that it ended up dividing the royal house at Matsieng in to two factions, with one side supporting the regent while the other supported 'Mabereng. This was a problem faced by none of Mantšebo's predecessors but she had to rule while she was fighting the opposition from home.

When Mantšebo attained the Paramountcy in 1941, the world was engulfed by the Second World War, Mantšebo's husband had done a lot to assist the British in their war effort. When she became the regent, Mantšebo had to ensure the continued support to the British war effort. The support she offered to the British earned her great respect and support from the British.

The 1940s and 1950s were a period of great reforms in Basutoland. These reforms included the establishment of the National Treasury in 1946 which further cut down

the number of chiefs who were salaried and could hold court. The other was the abolition of *Matsema*.⁷² These reforms brought division within the chieftaincy to those who were sidelined by the reforms and those who were favoured by them.

One other predicament, Mantšebo faced was an outbreak of *liretlo* which resulted in terror and crisis in Basutoland. Many people were found dead and mutilated. This brought terror among Basotho. Mantšebo and some chiefs were implicated with *liretlo*.⁷³

3.2 Mantšebo becomes a Regent.

Mantšebo's appointment to the regency was contested by her brother in law Bereng Griffith. It would take two meetings of the sons of Moshoeshoe to come to a consensus. The first meeting in Matsieng failed because Bereng's seniority was not recognized by Gabasheane. Secondly, Gabasheane had no power to call a meeting. Only Bereng had such authority. Thirdly it was not the Sons of Moshoeshoe but the Sons of Letsie who were to appoint a regent.

It was at the last meeting held at Matsieng which lasted three days which was chaired by S.W How, Government Secretary on the instruction of Resident Commissioner E.C Richards that a decision on this matter was reached. The decision was arrived at by a divided house. Mant'sebo garnered 44 votes. Following the vote, Bereng took an appeal to the courts of Law in a case that became popularly known as the Regency case which dragged on for two years.

⁷² This was a practice where chiefs enjoyed free labour of their subjects. It was abolished because the British saw it as exploitation of the common people.

⁷³ See for example, C. Murray and P. Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, p.163. and E. A. Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa; Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho*, p.201.

As to why Bereng lost was clearly explained in Justice Lansdowne's verdict. Firstly Justice Lansdowne argued that Mantsebo was not the first woman in the history of Basotho to assume chieftaincy position.⁷⁴ Women had assumed chieftaincy positions before in Basutoland so it was not surprising that other chiefs saw Mantšebo fit for that position⁷⁵. Secondly the verdict indicated that, on the basis of Proclamation No.61 of 1938 read together with its amendment Proclamation No.12 of 1942 the Acting Paramount Chief may be appointed and recognized without any precedent or qualification⁷⁶. Thirdly, Lansdown pointed that, custom was not mandatory even if it was highlighted under the Laws of Lerotholi⁷⁷. What this meant was that Mantšebo was at liberty to either accept or reject the liverate marriage.⁷⁸This verdict put an end to Bereng's claims for regency. The High Court of Lesotho confirmed Mantšebo as the Regent Paramount Chief in 1943.

3.3 Mantšebo- Mabereng's feud over guardianship of the heir apparent.

Just when the dust was about to settle after the debacle over the regency, new challenge emerged between Mantšebo and Mabereng over the issue of guardianship of the heir apparent. Following her confirmation as the Queen Regent, Mantšebo assumed full control and immediate care of Prince Bereng. However Mabereng together with Chief Theko Makhaola(Qacha'snek), Chief Thabo Mojela(Tebang) and Chief Bolokoe Malebanye (Mohaes' Hoek) could accept Mantšebo's appointment.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Although it refers to Basutoland it actually refers to Lesotho before 1868.

⁷⁵ Royal Museum and Archives, Regency Case Verdict, 1943.

⁷⁶ Royal Museum and Archives, Regency Case Verdict,1943.

⁷⁷ Royal Museum and Archives, Regency Case Verdict,1943.

⁷⁸ Royal Museum and Archives, Regency Case Verdict, 1943.

⁷⁹ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 31 March 1949. The names in brackets are the wards that the chiefs presided over.

The fear that 'Mabereng and her supporters had was that fear was that Mantšebo would murder the young Prince as it had happened with the young Tau(Letsie11's son). On the other hand Mantšebo and her supporters' feared that Prince Bereng could be killed by her enemies and she would have to take the blame. In this feud, however, Mantšebo had the upper hand as the Regent and the most senior wife. Consequently very sour relations developed between the two wives who loathed each other to the core. The royal family would be divided between the two senior wives.

3.4 Mantšebo and the Second World War.

Mantšebo's regency occurred during the course of the Second World War. Her husband died shortly after donating twenty war planes at a cost of 100 000 Pounds Sterling⁸⁰. Following his death, Mantšebo was confronted with a challenge of continuing Basotho's support of the British war effort. To achieve all this support, she took two measures where she encouraged Basotho men to conscript in the African Voluntary Corps and to raise funds for the war.

During her early years in the office of the Paramountcy, Mantšebo worked courageously to support the British war effort in the Second World War. She travelled around the country from 1941 calling upon Basotho men to enlist in the army⁸¹. Altogether Basotho were recruited in three divisions; the first one was the Native Military Corps which began in 1940 to 1942, and the second was Non-European Army Services of the South African Union Defence Force. However, this

⁸⁰ Leselinyana, 5 February 1941.

⁸¹ Leselinyana , 6 January 1943

group was repatriated in 1941 to form the third recruiting division named African Auxilliary Pioneer Corps.⁸²

While this was a difficult time for Basotho Servicemen, Mantšebo played an important role of giving them courage to fight with bravery in support of Britain. In her address at a *Pitso*, held in Maseru in 1943, January 3rd, she encouraged soldiers to go and make a good name for their country.⁸³ Mantšebo also gave the moral support to soldiers by visiting them during their training time.

Oral testimonies also show that where there was resistance or fear amongst men to enlist, she would ridicule them by telling men to give her their trousers so that she could go and fight on their behalf.⁸⁴ Thus while she gave the courage to go and fight in the second World War, She also used moral disapproval to those men who were struck by fear of dying in the war, away from their families.

In the end, numbers of Basotho who participated in the war as Auxilliary Pioneer Corps reached 21 463.⁸⁵ There were 2000 who worked in military contingents the Native Military corps.⁸⁶ 4000 were re-enlisted for the post war service of garrison guard and clearing the war debris from 1946 to 1949.⁸⁷

Mantšebo also ensured that Basotho provided financial support to the British through an established fund for the war. Funds were raised through tax and loans from the people. Money was sourced from Basotho tax payers, British tax payers in

⁸² M. N. Ntabeni, *The Impact of the Second World War on Basotho women: Welfare and survival*, pp. 68-69.

⁸³ Leselinyana, 6 January 1943.

⁸⁴ Interview, Patric Bereng, 18 September 2020, and Mr Mashapha Letsie, 2020

⁸⁵ M.N. Ntabeni, "'Mantšebo Seeiso" in E.K. Akyeampong and Henry Louis Gates (eds), *Dictionary of African Biography*, p. 321.

⁸⁶ M. N. "'Mantšebo Seeiso" in E.K. Akyeampong and Henry Louis Gates (eds), *Dictionary of African Biography*, p. 321.

⁸⁷ M. N. "'Mantšebo Seeiso" in E.K. Akyeampong and Henry Louis Gates (eds), *Dictionary of African Biography*, p. 321.

Basutoland, and Indians that lived in Lesotho. The table below shows how the tax payers were categorized and the amounts they paid:

Tax Payers	Amount
Principal Chiefs	£ 5
Sub chiefs	£ 3
Headmen	£2
Mine workers and other Basotho employees in the Union of South Africa	£1
Other Basotho tax payers.	10 shillings

Table adopted from data in Leselinyana newspaper, 6 January 1943.

In 1943 a record 79,520 British Pounds Sterling⁸⁸ was raised for the War fund. In the same year, the government raised 900 British Pounds Sterling contributed by willing Basotho men of the Mokhotlong district. The table presents their names and the amounts they contributed.

Names of lenders	Amount
Halala Leloka	£500
Paramente Kente	£200
Pesa Lenka	£200

⁸⁸ Leselinyana la Lesotho 6 January 1943,

Table adopted from data in Leselinyana newspaper,6 January 1943.

The War Fund continued until the end of the War. Through the War fund Mantšebo bought two more war planes on top of the twenty that were bought in 1940 by Seeiso with £10,000.⁸⁹ Below is a list of names given to the first twenty spitfires.⁹⁰

1. Basuto
2. Moshoeshoe
3. Makesi
4. Lilepe
5. Lijabatho
6. Matlama
7. Liphamola
8. Harding
9. Richards
10. Thaba-Bosiu
11. Maseru
12. Lerumo
13. Thebe
14. Leribe
15. Berea
16. Mafeteng
17. Mohaleshoek
18. Quthing
19. Qacha'snek
20. Mokhotlong

⁸⁹ Basutoland news, 1 January 1942.

⁹⁰ Basutoland News, 1 January 1942, the names of the last two spit fires were not revealed by the source.

As a result of Mantšebo's support for the British war effort, King George VI and family visited Basutoland on the occasion of their visit to South Africa in 1947. On this occasion King George bestowed Mantšebo with the Order of the British Empire (O.B.E).⁹¹

3.5 Mantšebo resists the chieftaincy Reforms.

Similarly during the 1940s and 1950s, Mantšebo had to deal with the ongoing chieftaincy reforms that resulted in a reduction in the number of chiefs, and the establishment of the National Treasury which started during the reign of Griffith Lerotholi. Mantšebo resisted the reforms that embattled the Basutoland Chieftaincy. At this time, Chieftaincy had already been dealt a heavy blow by the reforms that came with Proclamations No.61 and No. 62 of 1938.⁹² These Proclamations made them lose the little authority they had in the society. These reforms had a far reaching impact on the structure of chieftaincy, especially at the lower end of the hierarchy. For the headmen and sub-chiefs having their courts closed down meant that they lost their means of survival obtained from the court fines.

The major reform during Mantšebo's reign was the establishment of the Basutoland National Treasury in 1946 at Matsieng. The idea of the National Treasury was proposed in 1942 but it was only established in 1946. This was because Mantšebo

⁹¹ Basutoland News, 'The Royal Family in Basutoland' 20 July 1947. O.B.E stands for Officer of the most excellent Order of the British Empire. This was an award created during the 1st world war that to reward services to the war effort by the people not on the front line.

⁹² LNA/426/III, Proclamations and Notices, 1938-1943. Proclamation No.61 of 1938 meant that, the High Commissioner recognized the Paramount Chief as the Native authority and according to this proclamation, about 1330 chiefs, Sub-chiefs and headmen were also 'recognized' or 'gazetted' but they were subordinate to the paramount chief. This Proclamation effectively prevented multiplication of authorities as was formerly popular among chiefs. The placing system was put to a halt. Any placing had to be approved by the Government through the advice of the Paramount chief. In the same way multiplication of Native courts was controlled by the latter, the 1330 recognized chiefs were the only ones that were given the right to hold court and were to be given a warrant but this number was later cut from 1330 to 117.

refused to accept it for the fear that it was going cause more damage to the chieftaincy that was already fragile. Chiefs would no longer keep the fines and fees from court proceedings because all such income would go to the Treasury. This implied a further reduction in gazetted chiefs as only those whose task justified payment would be gazetted. A revised list, published in 1950, recognized 11 principal chiefs, 12 ward chiefs, 270 chiefs and 859 headmen. The total was 1152, a reduction of 188 compared with the list drawn up in 1939.⁹³

From the start, Mantšebo tactically showed her disapproval by persistently sabotaging, obstructing and evading this plan⁹⁴. Between 1942 and 1945, the British experienced frustrations and surprises thrown at them by Paramount Chieftainess Mantšebo. While they were busy pushing the formation of the National Treasury, Mantšebo kept on demanding more powers. For example she demanded the power to veto all Proclamations affecting the territory including the taxation of Europeans, customs duties, and the maintenance of law and order in the Government Reserves (areas under colonial control).⁹⁵ To the greatest dismay and fury of the colonial officials, she even raised the issue of Self-government by directly linking it to Atlantic Charter of the UN which held professed granting of self-Government to all colonized nations.⁹⁶

3.6 The terror and crisis of *Liretlo* (Medicine murders)

The 1940s and early 1950s was not only a period of chieftaincy reforms but also saw the outbreak of *Liretlo* (medicine murders) leading to terror and crisis. In 1945

⁹³ Lord Hailey, *Native Administration in British African territories, Part V, A general Survey of the System Native Administration* (London, H.M.S.O., 1953, p.95)

⁹⁴ Interview with Morena Potfol Letsoela, June 2021.

⁹⁵ Basutoland National Council Proceedings, Legilastion without Consultation, 27August 1943, p.45

⁹⁶ Basutoland National Council Proceedings, Legalization without Consultation, 27August 1943, p.45

seventeen murder cases of Liretlo were reported to the government,⁹⁷ while between 1946 and 1948, the number of reported murders had escalated to thirty-seven.⁹⁸

While it is true that people were found mutilated and dead, what remained a serious controversy was who actually carried out *liretlo* and what were the reasons behind *liretlo*. Some scholars pointed to chiefs, on whom the reforms that started in 1938 took away much of the prerogatives they previously enjoyed as well as the authority they had in the society.⁹⁹ As a result it was believed that chiefs resorted to *liretlo* for magic medicine that could help them regain what they lost. The most common phrase of that time was *Marena a faotsoe*¹⁰⁰, translated (*Chiefs are castrated*).

Other scholars blamed Mantšebo on account that there were about seven murders cases that took place in Mokhotlong which was her ward.¹⁰¹ It was alleged that chief Matlere Lerotholi and Ntšebo (Malebona Nkhahle Lebona)¹⁰² were her accomplices in the two murders of which Mantšebo was accused.

The allegations against Mantšebo's involvement in the medicine murders were never proved in the courts of law and she was never convicted especially on ritual murders that happened in her Mokhotlong ward. Further, even the people closer to her such as her daughter Ntšebo and Chief Matlere, won the cases in which they were accused of medicine murders. For instance, Ntšebo won a case on the 16 January 1949 where she was accused of the murder of her uncle Malebanye Lebona who died on the 18 December 1946 at the village of Ntjepeleng in the Mhales hoek

⁹⁷ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 10 August 1946.

⁹⁸ Basutoland News, 31 May 1949

⁹⁹ E. A. Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa; Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho*, (London, University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), p.199.

¹⁰⁰ Leselinyana, 12 October 1949.

¹⁰¹ C. Murray and P. Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, p.163.

¹⁰² Ntšebo was the daughter and the only biological child of the regent. She was also known as Malebona Nkhahle Lebona after marrying chief Nkhahle Lebona.

district¹⁰³. Similarly Chief Matlere won a case on the 18th February 1953 where he was accused of the murder of T'soeunyane Rabolae, an adult male at Mohlaoli's village in the Mokhotlong district. T'soeunyane was found dead on the October 1952¹⁰⁴.

When the problem of *liretlo* surfaced, it seemed Mantšebo also believed that indeed chiefs indulged in medicine murders that is why in her first circular of 1946 she charged that chiefs were perpetrators of *liretlo*,¹⁰⁵ and were orchestrated by chiefs in their bid to obtain medicine that could help them retain their chiefly positions¹⁰⁶. She dissuaded people from conniving with chiefs who carried out those murders and ordered people to fully cooperate with the police so that perpetrators could be charged in the courts of law.¹⁰⁷ At the same time she warned people to be careful of the information they gave to the police. The information given to the police was to be truthful with no element of implicating others¹⁰⁸.

Mantšebo continued in her bid to thwart *liretlo*. She held several meetings with the colonial authorities to discuss how they could be ended. However, in the 1950s she adopted a policy of involving the chiefs in solving the *liretlo* problem. In this regard, she issued a number of letters to them. For instance in a letter dated 19 June 1950, Mantšebo informed the chiefs that ritual murders commission led by G/J.I. Jones would start its investigation, and chiefs were instructed to make people aware of this development and to encourage people to cooperate and help the commission by all

¹⁰³ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 25 January 1949.

¹⁰⁴ Basutoland News, "Ritual Murder Charge: verdict of not guilty", 4 November 1952.

¹⁰⁵ Royal Archives and Museum. "Regents Correspondence to chiefs", Circular No.1 of 1946.

¹⁰⁶ Royal Archives and Museum. "Regents Correspondence to chiefs", Circular No.1 of 1946.

¹⁰⁷ Royal Archives and Museum. "Regents Correspondence to chiefs", Circular No.1 of 1946.

¹⁰⁸ Royal Archives and Museum. "Regents Correspondence to chiefs", Circular No.1 of 1946.

possible means.¹⁰⁹ This shows how much Mantšebo was determined to work with chiefs in order to curb *liretlo*.

In 1953, Paramount chieftainess and the Resident Commissioner convened A Round Table Conference where two major sections of Basotho were represented, namely, chiefs and commoners¹¹⁰. The result of this conference was the formation of A Medicine Murders Commission with the following mandates:

- The Resident Commissioner and the Paramount chieftainess should together tour the whole country holding *lipitso* and addressing people on the subject of medicine murders and that these *lipitso* should be followed up by other organized BY district commissioners and principal chiefs. The Paramount chieftainess was asked to instruct as many women as possible to attend these *lipitso*.
- Publicity campaigns should be started with the issuing of pamphlets and circulars which will be widely distributed as soon as possible.
- February should be observed as an *anti -liretlo* month and should be marked by coordinated activities such as prayer sessions, preaching, intensified publicity and lectures in schools.
- Three *anti-liretlo* slogans were adopted:
 - *Liretlo- a re liripitleng!* (Ritual Murders- let us combat them!)
 - *Lesotho le ea timelong- tsohang!* (Lesotho is going to ruin- Beware!)
 - *Moketa ho tsosoa o itekang!* (You can get help if you make an effort!)

¹⁰⁹ Royal archives and Museum, Regents letter to chiefs, 1949

¹¹⁰ Basutoland News, "Round Table Conference", 22 August 1953.

Besides circulars, pamphlets that had her message were also issued to further make people aware of the horrors of *liretlo*. In these pamphlets Mantšebo made a foreword and signed at the end. Her foreword in one of the pamphlets, dated September 1953, read as follows:

“I made statements to the Basotho Nation about these horrible and devious ritual murders. The Resident commissioner and I talked to the Sons of Moshoeshoe and the National Council about this issue. The High commissioner also made a statement on the same issue before the National Council. However ritual murders still continued.

Today the Resident Commissioner appeals to the nation to fight against this enemy.

I, your Paramount Chief, I am challenging all of you, every man and every woman to take caution of this notice because it is urgent. I support this notice with all my heart¹¹¹.

Mantšebo also held *lipitso* around the country where she encouraged people to act against *liretlo* by cooperating with the police during investigations. She also encouraged girls and women to travel in groups so as to guard against the perpetrators of *liretlo*. Lastly, Mantšebo appealed to people to avoid giving untrue statements that implicated others¹¹². Holding *lipitso* throughout the country made her determination to end *liretlo* even more powerful. In the areas that she visited, it is reported that people attended in large numbers and this enabled her to reach out to those Basotho who did not access the pamphlets and other written documents about *liretlo*.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Morija Museum and Archives, *unpublished Pamphlet on liretlo*, 09 September 1953.

¹¹² Moeletsi oa Basotho, 12 June 1949.

¹¹³ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 1 November 1949.

3.7 CONCLUSION

Mantšebo's regency was the most difficult because she had to face and deal with too many challenges. It is fair to conclude that she dealt with them fearlessly and successfully.

Mantšebo won a decisive victory in the race for regency over her brother-in-law; Bereng Griffith. This resulted in a rift between the Sons of Moshoeshoe, but most importantly the regency debacle signified the beginning of a new dawn. A woman became a Paramount Chief, something that was unexampled in the history of Basutoland. Mantšebo's accession of the regency assured that the seat of the Paramountcy remained within Seeiso's family. She firmly held that position and secured it until the heir apparent Bereng Constantine Seeiso was of age.

The challenges that Mantšebo faced during her regency from within the royal house did not destroy her, rather they toughened her as a family woman and the leader of the nation. As they say 'rough surfaces sharpen the best'. In the feud Mantšebo had with Mabereng over who should take care of Bereng, Mantšebo remained firm that the heir apparent would be raised by her so that she could prepare him for chieftaincy of Basotho in future. Mantšebo ensured that the young Bereng was protected by all possible means at home and at school. Mantšebo remained unshaken in carrying out her main duty of raising and protecting heir apparent.

Chieftainess Mantšebo survived the challenge posed by the Second World War where she had to maintain local administration without British financial assistance. Mantšebo surprised the British by the support she gave to them in their war effort where she encouraged young Basotho men to enlist in the Native Pioneer Corps so as to help Britain in the Second World War. In her bid to support Britain, Mantšebo

established a War fund through which war planes were procured and handed to the colonial government as a gesture of loyalty to the queen. Consequently this earned Mantšebo Order of the British Empire award in 1947. Significantly, this also offered an assurance of support to the Basotuland Paramountcy from the government.

Mantšebo did not take chieftaincy reforms laying down, she was strongly opposed to them especially the establishment of the National Treasury. In her resistance, she threw femininity stunts like bursting into tears, throwing a fit when she was pushed to the verge.¹¹⁴ In this way she frustrated and obstructed British plans. Mantšebo stood firmly for the interests of Basotho and that continued to surprised the British because they never expected such a fierce resistance from Mantšebo.

The crisis of *liretlo* that befell Basutoland from the 1940 until 1950s brought a lot of fear and confusion among Basotho. However Mantšebo took a strong line against *liretlo* as she released circulars condemning them and even went out holding *lipitso* throughout the country to raise awareness to the people about the scourge of *liretlo*. Based on the steps she took to end *liretlo* it is absolutely unfair to render Mantšebo weak. The period at which Mantšebo reigned was tumultuous and very challenging but I still maintain that she out-smarted the colonial authorities in their reform program. She was a phenomenal woman.

¹¹⁴ M.Epprecht, 'This matter of women is Getting very Bad', p.114

CHAPTER 4

Mantšebo and the Empowerment of Women

4.1 INTRODUCTION

When confronted with the challenges of the 1940s and 1950s, Mantšebo was able to manage them as shown in chapter three. In this chapter, we will show how she stood against the plight of Basotho women who for a very long time were marginalized because they were considered minors and therefore denied opportunities to better themselves. This she did by empowering Basotho women socially, economically and politically. Socially she fought against customary marriages such as *lekenelo* and *lebota*¹¹⁵ which denied women a choice. She also agitated for the protection of girls against *chobeliso* (elopement). Economically, she agitated for the right of women to inherit their husbands' property as opposed to the custom that made only men legible for inheritance. She further supported Basotho women who migrated to the urban areas in search of a living in the absence of their husbands who were migrant workers in South Africa. Politically, Mantšebo became an example of women's aspirations to traditional leadership positions in Basutoland.

4.2 Social empowerment of Basotho women.

Once in power Mantšebo set out to fight against *Lekenelo* and *Lebota*. *Lekenelo* was one type of Basotho customary marriage where a widow was forced to marry a

¹¹⁵ A type of customary marriage whereby a girl is married to a dead man's name and thereafter any male relative of the dead man could have the right of access to her.

brother of her deceased husband.¹¹⁶ In *Lekenelo*, the brother to the deceased assumed all the responsibilities of a man in the family such as providing for the family and even producing children. Mant'sebo got this practice abolished by rejecting *lekenelo* to her brother in law, Bereng Griffith. She refused that because Bereng wanted to use that as his leverage to ascent to the regency¹¹⁷. By rejecting Bereng's proposal, she set precedence for women to stand against *lekenelo*. The stance taken by Mantšebo left many people perplexed as that was an old custom which had never been challenged. Significantly this refusal of *lekenelo* was supported by Chief Justice Lansdowne who declared in his judgement of 1943, that *lekenelo* was a decadent custom which proved to be less desired by the society in general.¹¹⁸ To a common Mosotho woman a precedence was set that she was also at liberty to reject or accept *lekenelo*.

Lebota was another type of Basotho customary marriage where a girl was married in a family where there was no boy child. A woman married through this type of marriage was accessed by any family member so as to bear children and expand the family¹¹⁹. The Paramount Chieftainess moved a motion in the National Council that this type of marriage be abolished as it was not only unfair but also exposed girls to ill treatment by the in-laws. Moeletsi oa Basotho in support of this stance had the following headline:

*Ha e sa le toka hore ngoanana a etsoe lekhoba ka ho mo qobella ho ea bohali ha monna a shoele.*¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ A.Z. Sekese, *Mekhoa le Maele a Basotho*, (Morija, Morija Sesuto Depot, 2002)p.7.

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Eldredge, *Power in the Colonial Lesotho*, p.165.

¹¹⁸ The Regency Case Verdict, 1943

¹¹⁹ LNA, National Council Proceedings, 1947,p.29.

¹²⁰ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 25 October 1949.

[Translated] It is no longer fair that a girl should be made a slave of her In-Laws even when her husband had passed on.

The Paramount chieftainess motion was supported by a majority of the councillors. Those who supported this motion added that *lebota* was not only unfair to the girl but to the in-laws because children born out of *lebota* marriage had unknown fathers yet they had rights of inheritance within the family that their mother was married into.¹²¹ They also stated that *lebota* marriage could be abolished provided that the cattle would be returned to the man's home by the family of the girl¹²².

In the end, a resolution was reached whereby the Council agreed that *lebota* marriage be abolished on condition that if a man died before taking the wife home, cattle for *bohali* was to be returned to the family of the deceased. Consequently, that would leave a girl at liberty to marry any man of her choice¹²³. In this regard Mantšebo succeeded in safeguarding women's right of choice on the issue of marriage.

The Paramount chieftainess also played a crucial role in fighting against *chobeliso* (abduction)¹²⁴ which was also termed seduction¹²⁴ in the record of National Council Proceedings of 1948¹²⁵. *Chobeliso* was accompanied by violence which ranged from beating to raping a girl by a man who intended to marry her. Through the agitation of the Paramount chieftainess this practice was prohibited by the Basotholand Women and Girls' Protection Proclamation No.14 of 1949.¹²⁶ This proclamation also set out a

¹²¹ LNA, National Council Proceedings 1947, p 87.

¹²² LNA, National Council Proceedings 1947, p 87.

¹²³ LNA, National Council Proceedings, 1947, p. 110.

¹²⁴ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org> abduction refers to an act of making a person go somewhere with you, especially using threats or violence. In the case of Basotho this was a common practice amongst young men when marrying a girl.

¹²⁵ LNA, National Council proceedings, 1948, p.31

¹²⁶ Basutoland Proclamations and Notices, 1949, p.6.

sentence of six head of cattle and a one year imprisonment for those who breached it.¹²⁷ The first case of *chobeliso* to be heard in court following the Proclamation was where two young men, Lenka Moshoe (18 years old) and his cousin Ernest Moshoe (17 years old) of Ha Moshoe in Teya-Teyaneng were charged with the breach of Proclamation No. 14 of 1949 and were each fined six head of cattle and a fine of one year imprisonment by Mr. Pott, Deputy Resident Commissioner for Teya-Teyang¹²⁸.

4.3 Economic empowerment of women

During her regency Mantšebo empowered women economically by agitating for their rights to inherit their husbands property as well as their migration to urban areas in search of living. One of Mantšebo's earliest agitations was on the issue of inheritance of property by a female, be it a widow or a daughter of the deceased where there was no boy child. In this regard, in 1947, the Paramount Chief moved that the National Council amend issue 11 and 14 of the Laws of Lerotholi which bestowed all inheritance rights on the male child. She proposed that women and girls could have rights to inheritance of property.¹²⁹ Mantšebo's main support came from Makopoi Api of Ramabanta, and Mamohlalefi Bereng Sekhonyana of Kolo, the only female chiefs in the National Council in 1947.¹³⁰ It was only in 1948 that Mantšebo got a breakthrough on this issue when the National Council agreed to revise the laws of Lerotholi by adopting a resolution that provided for the following:

- Widows were allowed to inherit property and estates of their husbands.

¹²⁷ Basutoland Proclamations and Notices, 1949, p.7.

¹²⁸ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 21 July 1949.

¹²⁹ LNA, National Council Proceedings, "Succession and Inheritance", Vol3, 1947, p. 41.

¹³⁰ LNA, National Council Proceedings, Vol.3, 1947, 41.

- The heir would take control of the property after the death of the widow.
- In a case where there was no heir to the house, the heir to chieftainship should inherit the property after the death of the widow and should use it for the benefit of the dependents.
- Minor heirs should be protected from the dissipation of their inheritance by widows.¹³¹

This resolution changed the old tradition where after the death of their husbands, women were answerable to their in-laws and could not inherit the property of their husbands. The credit for this resolution went to Mant'sebo for she was the first Paramount chief to agitate and succeed in protecting the rights of women in Basutoland.

When Mantšebo took the reins of power in 1941, there were women who had settled in urban areas then known as camps as well as those who left the country and settled in Kimberly and Transvaal in South Africa. (gold and diamond mining areas respectively).

In those urban areas, they started businesses as brewers and sellers of illicit liquor and sex¹³². As a result they were labeled prostitutes and were harassed by authorities who spilled their liquor, closed their business and those outside the country were arrested. Locally they were also harassed by the general public who were influenced by the 1939 resolution of the National Council which stated that;

'Mosali ke nku kapa khomo ea monna oa hae, ka hoo tšoanelo ke hore ha mosali a ile "botekatse" monna oa hae a be sebete, a 'matle a be a mo

¹³¹ LNA, National Council Proceedings, Vol.2 1948, p 102.

¹³² Moeletsi oa Basotho, 10 October 1949.

*fumane, a mo hulele makhotleng a molao, a mo hobose mahlong a e monyenyanane le e moholo 'me lefat'se lohle le tsebe hore mosali eo o mobe, o koenehela likano tsa hae, o thunthetsa lenyalo'.*¹³³

[translated] “A wife is the property of her husband, she is like a sheep or a cow to her husband, therefore it is proper that a wife who turned to prostitution be searched for all over by her husband and be brought before the law. In this way he would have harassed and embarrassed her before the young and the elderly alike. This would be a sign that this woman was ill-behaved and that she had turned against her marriage”.

It was this harassment that led Mantšebo to agitate for the passing of Basotho Women and Girls Protection Proclamation of 1949 which not only outlawed harassment of women but also targeted men who bought sex by imposing a hefty fine of £500 or six years imprisonment for anyone who contravened it.¹³⁴

In addition, the Paramount chieftainess moved a motion in the National Council that women brewers be allowed to pursue their business as that was their means of livelihood.¹³⁵ This motion was supported with an amendment that a license could be introduced for the sale of Sesotho beer at certain beer-shops whose site as well as proprietor should be approved by the District Licensing Advisory Council.¹³⁶

4.4 Political empowerment of Basotho women.

Mantšebo's ascension to the Paramountcy was significant because it encouraged women to occupy leadership positions. She was the first woman to become Paramount Chief, and as such she became the epitome of change against the old

¹³³ Moeletsi oa Basotho , 21 November 1949.

¹³⁴ Basutoland Proclamations and Notices, 1949.

¹³⁵ LNA, Proceedings of the 44th Session of the Basutoland National Council, 1948, p. 30., See also Epprecht, 'This Matter of Women is getting very Bad', p.190

¹³⁶ LNA, Proceedings of the 44th Session of the Basutoland National Council, 1948, p. 30.

beliefs that such positions were reserved for men. It was during her tenure as the regent Paramount chieftainess that a number of female chiefs increased to 12.5 percent in 1955 from a low 2 per cent before her reign in 1911.¹³⁷ At the same time, four women out of twenty two principal chiefs became part of the Sons of Moshoeshoe institution. These were Chieftainess Makopoi Ramabanta Api who became regent on behalf of her Son Api in 1941. She ward was Ramabanta¹³⁸. There was Chieftainess Mamohlalefi Bereng Sekhonyana who became regent on behalf of her son Mohlalefi following the death of her father in-law in 1942.¹³⁹ Her ward consisted of the areas of Masite, Boikhutso, Seroeng and Kolo in the district of Maseru. The other one was Mamakhabane Boshokane Peete who became a regent on behalf of her son Makhabane in 1944. Her ward consisted of Koeneng and Mapoteng areas in the district of Berea. In 1949 Mamathe Gabasheane Masupha was confirmed as the regent following the death of her husband Gabasheane.¹⁴⁰

Scholars like Phoohlo contend that Mantšebo's success as a transformational figure in women political empowerment was partial as this operated in favour of a specific class of women which is that of chiefs¹⁴¹. The real issue, however, is that it was during Mantšebo's regency that women from the commoner class also began to seek their space in politics. As a result, they joined political parties. For instance, Miss Mohapeloa and Mrs Khaketla joined BAC in its earliest years.¹⁴² Thus in the 1950s when other new political parties emerged, women were seen attending

¹³⁷ M.Epprecht, *Women's Conservatism in Late Colonial Lesotho*, p34.

¹³⁸ Morija archives, *Basutoland Lesotho*, n.d.

¹³⁹ Royal archives and Museum, "Regent Letter written to the Resident Commissioner about confirmation Mamohlalefi Bereng Sekhonyana as the Regent", 1942. Mamohlalefi's husband, Bereng Sekhonyana died before he could access the throne of his father however Bereng's son was still a minor so Mamohlalefi assumed the regency.

¹⁴⁰ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 12 December 1949. Gabasheane was hanged after being convicted of medicine murder in 1949.

¹⁴¹ Tlali.M.Phoohlo, *Gendered Consciousness as Watershed of Masculinity: Men's Journeys with Manhood in Lesotho*, PhD Thesis(University of South Africa,2011)p.47.

¹⁴² Mohlabani, 1955.

political rallies¹⁴³ This was an indication of women's desire to partake in politics. Women were the ones that made political rallies enticing with their songs and praise poems¹⁴⁴. Within the structures of the BAC also, there was the Women's League whose mandate was to make BAC known to the people.¹⁴⁵ As more political parties emerged more women joined. The Basotho National Party formed in 1958 under the leadership of Leabua Jonathan also saw many women joining it to an extent that Mokhehle of BCP derogatively called it a 'party of women'.¹⁴⁶ This proved that indeed women were politically conscious.

4.5 Conclusion

Mantšebo played an important role in improving the lives of Basotho women who for a long time were oppressed by customs. Through her refusal to *lekenelo* by her brother in law, she influenced women to reject customary marriages such as *lekenelo, lebota and chobeliso*. Consequently women could decide on the issues of marriage. Through her efforts Basotho Women and Girls Protection Proclamation of 1949 promulgated to stop harassment and neglect of women by the society.

Economically, her contribution towards women right to inheritance and ownership of property cannot be overlooked. Although her proposal on this matter was not immediately accepted in the National Council, Mantšebo made a statement of desire for more rights of women and girls. The impact of migrant labour on women evinced Mantšebo's understanding of the difficulties faced by women in the absence of their husbands. Hence she fought tooth and nail with the colonial authorities against

¹⁴³ Leselinyana, 10 February 1953.

¹⁴⁴ M.Epprecht, *Women's Conservatism in the late Colonial Lesotho*, (oxford, Cambridge University Press, 1993),p.44, Journal of African studies.

¹⁴⁵ Mohlabani, 1956.

¹⁴⁶ Mohlabani, 06 January 1959.

harassment of brewers in the camps. In this way she boosted the financial independence of Basotho women amid tribulations of the migrant labour system.

Mantšebo became very instrumental in igniting the urge for more political involvement among Basotho women. This was manifested by a rising number of female regents during her regency. For instance, by 1955 there were four regent chieftainesses who were members of the Sons of Moshoeshoe. Commoner women also found their place in partisan politics in the 1950s when political parties emerged. Some joined the BAC and became actively involved in its running through the Women's League, while others joined BNP in large numbers.

For all intents and purposes, Mantšebo contributed immensely in empowering Basotho women during her regency. Marginalization of women in general was addressed effectively.

Chapter Five

Mantšebo and the empowerment of Basotho.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Paramount Chieftainess Mantšebo's empowerment efforts did not end with women only but were extended to Basotho in general. In this chapter we demonstrate how she led the empowerment of Basotho at the social, economic and political levels. Socially, she played an important role in the growth of higher education in Basutoland. Economically, she was actively involved in the colonial programme of curbing soil erosion. Politically, the National Council became more representative with her support and in this regard she also agreed to consult the National Council on matters that affected the land before issuing orders,¹⁴⁷ thus upholding the Sesotho phrase *Morena ke Morena ka Sechaba*.¹⁴⁸ She further welcomed the existence of political parties by persuading chiefs to allow political parties to hold rallies in their areas without obstruction.

5.2 Mantšebo on improvement in Education.

Education in Basutoland from primary to secondary schools as well as teacher training colleges was for the most part in the hands of missionaries. However the major development to higher education during the reign of Mantšebo was the establishment Pius XII Catholic University College in 1945. When the Catholic Bishops proposed the idea of a College in 1941,¹⁴⁹ she, together with the National

¹⁴⁷ L.B.B.J. Machobane, Government and Change, p.246.

¹⁴⁸ Sesotho phrase that denotes that the chief rules in the interests of his people.

¹⁴⁹ LNA/ 3522 & 3626, Pius XII University College News Letter, 1940.

Council, welcomed this idea because she saw an opportunity for Basotho students who would fit in the corporate world and serve Basutoland.¹⁵⁰

The other reason for her support of the establishment of Pius XII University College was to rescue Basotho students from harassment and discrimination they suffered in universities in the Union of South Africa,¹⁵¹ where education was deeply segregated and Basotho students were restricted access to study in the University of South Africa only.¹⁵² Fort Hare College in the Cape Province in South Africa, the only popular African University, was the only one that admitted Basotho students.

Paramount Chieftainess Mantšebo not only supported the idea of establishing Pius XII Catholic University College but also allocated land in the area of Roma Ha-Maama for the construction of necessary buildings¹⁵³. On the 8th April, 1945, Pius XII was officially opened. At the Episcopal Meeting of the Ordinaries of South Africa Delegation held at Roma in Basutoland in 1945, Mantšebo expressed her appreciation to the Catholic Bishops in this way:

“It is with great pleasure that I express thanks here on my own and on behalf of the Basotho nation in appreciation of the work of the opening of a University College in my territory of Basutoland for which we have assembled here today... here in Basutoland, because sound education is our first requirement... the college will undoubtedly be of great help not only to us in this territory but to fellow Africans outside Basutoland”¹⁵⁴.

Mantšebo’s support for the college was commended by Pope Pius XII, after whom the college was named, in a newsletter of 1958 where he said:

¹⁵⁰ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 14 February, 1950.

¹⁵¹ LNA/3522 & 3626, Pius XII University College News Letter, 1940.

¹⁵² LNA /2290/1/2/V, Minutes of the National Council, 20 June 1945.

¹⁵³ LNA/3522 & 3626, Pius XII University College News Letter, 1940.

¹⁵⁴ Episcopal Meeting Minutes, Roma Basutoland, 5th-9th 1945.

'Chieftainess Amelia Mantšebo Seeiso Griffith, Regent of Basutoland; we know that in your capital city you have established a school of university studies that carries our name. We wish all the success and we like to hope that it will have a long life...'¹⁵⁵.

No better word than the above statement acknowledges the role that Mantšebo played in the establishment of Pius XII Catholic University College.

Following the establishment of Pius XII Catholic College, Mantšebo continued her unwavering support for higher education learning when she released a circular imposing a levy on all people. This was in order to reach a target of £100,000, as agreed in the special session of the National Council,¹⁵⁶ for funding the expansion of institutions of higher learning and sponsorship of students who qualified for admission in Pius XII Catholic University College in 1952 as well as other institutions in South Africa.¹⁵⁷

Mantšebo, realising the importance of agriculture to Basotho and the economy, moved a motion in the National Council in 1952 that an Agricultural College be established in Basutoland so as to arm Basotho with such skills.¹⁵⁸ Although this idea was not put in place immediately, she set the tone that displayed her wish for the betterment of education that would develop Basotho for the better. It was only in 1954 when what is now known as Lesotho agricultural College was established as a department of the Ministry of Agriculture.¹⁵⁹

Mantšebo's support and efforts towards expansion of higher education learning demonstrated her commitment to the development of the Basotho nation which

¹⁵⁵ LNA/ 3522 &3626, Pius XII University College Newsletter, May 1958.

¹⁵⁶ Basutoland News, Circular No.18/52. 30 September 1952.

¹⁵⁷ Basotuland News, 30 September 1952.

¹⁵⁸ National Council Proceedings, Paramount Chief's address at the opening of 48th Session of the Basutoland Council, 1952.

¹⁵⁹ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 06 Dec 1954.

would ensure socio-economic independence of Basutoland in the future. In recognition of her efforts in higher education, Lerotholi Technical School named its hostels after her and these were opened on the 18th March 1952.¹⁶⁰

5.3 Mantšebo and Economic Empowerment of Basotho.

Paramount Chieftainess Mantšebo worked tirelessly in the economic improvement of Basotho. A notable achievement was diamond prospecting in 1955 by Colonel Jack Scott, a South African citizen and geologist. Scott was awarded a diamond prospecting contract in accordance with Basutoland Mines and Mineral Proclamation of 1951 which stated that prospecting contracts will be given to an individual who held licenses.¹⁶¹ The specified areas for prospecting were in the mountainous areas of Let'seng la Terai in Mokhotlong, and Kao in the district of Botha-Bothe. Scott's contract on prospecting of diamond in Basutoland was highly supported by the Paramount chieftainess Mantšebo on account that there would be economic development in the country.¹⁶² However, the news about diamond prospecting was met with mixed feelings among different groups of Basotho. Chiefs and nationalist questioned the circumstances that influenced the government's decision pertaining to Scott's contract. There were fears that Scott being a South African had ulterior motives. Specifically they feared that Scott appointment would lead to involuntary incorporation of Basutoland into the Union of South Africa.¹⁶³ There was an out-cry among Basotho that those who had desire to prospect were cut out completely so that their role would only be that of labourers in their own country as the union of

¹⁶⁰ Basutoland News, 23 March 1952.

¹⁶¹ LNA, Proclamations and Notices, 1951.

¹⁶² Moelets'i oa Basotho, 30 September 1955

¹⁶³ Mohlabani, 1955.

South Africa¹⁶⁴. They questioned the secrecy with which this was done as the National Council was never allowed to discuss the terms Scott's contract.¹⁶⁵

Regardless of the negativity, Mantšebo remained stern and resolute, conveyed her support for the project by condemning those who questioned the project as the haters of development.¹⁶⁶ In 1956 she released a circular to all chiefs where she ordered them to encourage cooperation of Basotho, to assist Scott by leading his representatives to where Basotho found diamonds.¹⁶⁷ This significantly shows that Mantšebo was able to stand for what she believed would be of benefit to the nation. Diamond prospecting was one of the earmarked projects that were geared towards economic improvement of the Basutoland. In June 1955, diamonds were found at Sekameng in Mafeteng while others were found in Kao in the district of Butha-Buthe.¹⁶⁸ The success in prospecting revealed the economic potential of Basutoland thus it is without a doubt that Mantšebo's insistence in undertaking this was a step in the right direction.

Another important aspect of economic development which Mantšebo supported was prevention of soil erosion which was recommended by the Pim Report of 1938 so as to increase food production which would alleviate poverty. In 1948 another survey on agriculture was taken in Basutoland by the department of Agriculture. The report stated that soil erosion remained a primary source of low food production in Basutoland.¹⁶⁹ It further explained that for many years the lowlands were overstocked and that caused soil erosion on a large scale and also depleted the

¹⁶⁴ LNA, National Council Proceedings, 1955.

¹⁶⁵ Mohlabani, 1955.

¹⁶⁶ LNA, National Council Proceedings, 1955.

¹⁶⁷ Moeletsi oa Basotho, Circular No.1/56, 14 November 1955

¹⁶⁸ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 3 Dec 1955.

¹⁶⁹ LNA, National Council Proceedings, Report on Agriculture, 10 September 1949, p.81.

amount of winter feed for livestock.¹⁷⁰ It also showed that soil erosion was a result of Basuto's failure to use arable land efficiently and to bring about ways to its regeneration.¹⁷¹

In response to this problem, Mantšebo toured the country encouraging Basotho to adopt a set guidelines for prevention of soil erosion which included, planting trees in dongas so as to hold the soil together. Another guideline was reduction of livestock such as cattle, donkeys and small stock due to lack of grazing lands and ravages of soil erosion. Lastly Rotational grazing was suggested as another measure through which soil erosion could be curbed. By this, grazing areas would be divided into parts so that one part is allowed to seed and grow new grass while the one part was used for grazing.¹⁷² Even in this case, the number of stock was limited to what it could carry to avoid further deterioration of the soil.

This endeavor for development was very much unpopular among Basotho who complained that some of the strategies took away their already scarce land and that aggravated erosion of top soil as the water collected in the terrains or buffers flow at a heavy volume and velocity, eventually eroded the soil.¹⁷³ On account of these, there was covert resistance from many Basotho. Regardless, Mantšebo persevered to encourage Basotho to adopt soil conservation measures as suggested by the Director of agriculture. She ordered chiefs to ensure that their people complied with soil conservation measures.¹⁷⁴

Mantšebo further supported the country's development when she called on chiefs to cooperate in the building of more and better roads and bridle paths. In December

¹⁷⁰ LNA, National Council Proceedings, p. 81.

¹⁷¹ LNA, National Council Proceedings, p.81.

¹⁷² National Council Proceedings, Vol. II, 1953

¹⁷³ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 03 December 1955.

¹⁷⁴ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 03 December, 1955.

1959, Seaka bridge was constructed and a bridle path from S.t Michaels to Thaba-Tseka was opened.¹⁷⁵ In her address to the National Council, Mantšebo outlined the benefits that came with those infrastructural developments as thus;

- “It will be possible to pay much the same price for crops and wool in the mountains as in the lowlands, where we know prices are on the whole very much better on account of the present expensive transport from the mountains.
- Crops and wool can be brought out more easily and cheaply by motor transport and damage to them will be much less than under present conditions when animal transport is used.
- Agricultural implements can be more easily introduced into the areas which at present are very inaccessible.
- The maloti area for the first time will be easily accessible.
- Medical assistance will be more accessible.”¹⁷⁶

By her willingness to support development projects, Mantšebo won herself a grudging respect from the British. Not only that but her efforts also helped improve infrastructure of a mountain rugged Basutoland for easy and safe movement of Basotho from one place to another. This also consolidated her position as the Paramount Chieftainess under which Basotho united.

5.4 Mantšebo and the Political Empowerment of Basotho

Politically, Mantšebo supported Basotho to have a greater say in the governance of their country. In this regard, she supported the reformation of the National Council into a more representative institution. It was during her reign that district councils

¹⁷⁵ Moeletsi oa Basotho 1959.

¹⁷⁶ LNA, National Council, Paramount Chief’s address, September 1959.

were established and became statutory bodies in 1948.¹⁷⁷ District councils elected two representatives to the National Council which increased to four in the 1950s.

Mantšebo also showed her willingness to cooperate with the National Council and Heads of Districts Committee on Constitutional reforms established in 1943 resolved to bring the office of *Morena e Moholo* (Paramount Chief) under the control of the National Council. she declared that,

“I, as the Paramount Chief of the Basuto nation, confirm that it is the policy of the Paramountcy to consult the Basutoland Council before issuing orders or making rules especially affecting the life or welfare of the Basuto people and the administration of the Basuto”¹⁷⁸.

In this statement Mantšebo displayed her respect for people that she led because the National Council was the body that represented the people and worked in the interest of the people. By agreeing to consult the National Council, Mantšebo was basically working in line with the Sesotho phrase '*Morena ke Morena ka Sechaba*' (meaning the chief takes the mandate from his/her people.) As such Mantšebo understood the ideals of what it meant to be the chief/chieftainess of Basotho. This in essence empowered Basotho through the National Council to have a greater say in the governance of their country. It ensured that there would not be a repeat of Proclamations that would be approved and passed without the knowledge of National Council.

In the 1950s when Basutoland experienced the birth of political parties that became a new mouth piece of the people. The first political party formed was the Basutoland African Congress(BAC) in 1952. Other Political parties that followed were Marema-

¹⁷⁷ Hailey, OP.CIT. pp 96-97.

¹⁷⁸ LNA, Basutoland National Council proceedings, 1943, p.108.

Tlou Party formed in 1957 which merged with the Freedom Party to form Marema-Tlou Freedom Party (MFP) in 1962. The other prominent party was Basotho National Party (BNP) formed in 1958. Mantšebo supported the birth and existence of political parties and ordered chiefs to allow them to hold rallies without any kind of obstruction whatsoever.¹⁷⁹ An example of her acts in supporting political Parties was seen when she made a directive that the Basutoland African Congress be allowed to hold a rally in Kolo in 1955.¹⁸⁰

Mantšebo supported Basotho's desire to have the National Council as a Legislating body in 1954 and the Administrative Reform Committee led by Sir Henry Moore was set up to work on reforms that had long been demanded by the National Council and Basotho in general.¹⁸¹ However, when the report on reforms was released, there was no mention of legislative powers conferred to the National Council. Mantšebo together with the National Council opposed the Moore report. The issue of the Legislative Council became a national debate and Mantšebo together with the National Council put pressure on the Resident Commissioner to bring reforms that would be appealing to Basotho.

Mantšebo supported and stood for Basotho's opinions. Epprecht also confirms that the regent played an important role in rejecting the Moore recommendations. He cites a comment made by one nationalist who claimed that Mantšebo sat behind the Resident Commissioner and used sign language to indicate to members that Resident Commissioner was lying when he told the Council that she agreed with him to accept Moore's recommendation.¹⁸² Chief Leabua Jonathan showed how

¹⁷⁹ Mohlabani, October 1955.

¹⁸⁰ Mohlabani, October 1955 following the word from the Regent about freedom to hold rallies, Mokhehle dedicated an article in every issue of Mohlabani where he protected the Regent instead of criticizing her.

¹⁸¹ Mohlabani, 12 July 1955.

¹⁸² Epprecht, 'This Matter of Women is getting very bad', pp.119-120.

Mantšebo rejected Moore Report even when the Resident Commissioner persuaded her alone to accept it on behalf of the people by quoting her as follows:

“Ha ke sa phethahatse litakatso tsa sechaba, boemo ba ka e tla ba bofe sechabeng see?”¹⁸³

[TRANSLATED] “If I don’t do what my people want, what will be my position in front of my people?”

In 1955 the National Council resolved that a new constitutional reform committee be set up. Consequently the Constitutional Reform Committee led by Professor Cowen was set up in 1958 to lead the reform process.¹⁸⁴ Mantšebo led the way in this issue by ordering chiefs to invite national opinion about the new constitution. In a letter she wrote to chiefs, she ordered that suggestions of the people be submitted to the chiefs, or district councillors or to the office of the Paramount Chief.¹⁸⁵ Mantšebo’s role in this regard showed that she was determined to stand for the will of her people. Mantšebo went to London together with other Basotho delegates. Amongst them was Leabua Jonathan. Their visit was meant for them to discuss the new constitution recommended by Cowen with the British government in 1958.¹⁸⁶ See *appendix 4*. In 1959 Cowen Report was released and below are some of its crucial recommendations.

- Establishment of a unicameral Legislature which was to compose of eighty members, forty of these would be elected indirectly by the voters through the District Councils.
- The remaining forty will be made up of twenty-two principal chiefs , fourteen chiefs nominated by the Paramount Chief, four British officials.

¹⁸³ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 2 April 1964. Leabua Jonathan was giving a speech about Mantšebo at her funeral. Leabua spoke on behalf of the National Council.

¹⁸⁴ Mohlabani ,18 November 1958.

¹⁸⁵ Royal Archives and Museum, *Paramount Chiefs Letter to the chiefs and District Councils*, 6 June 1955.

¹⁸⁶ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 7 April 1959.

- The National Council become a Legislative Council.
- The Paramount chief would be responsible to the Legislative Council.¹⁸⁷

It is noteworthy that this was the constitution that appealed to the needs of Basotho; the main demands of the people were met: National Council became a Legislative body; Paramount chief agreed to work hand in hand with the National Council. During Mantšebo's funeral IN 1964, Chief Leshoboro Majara who spoke on behalf of the all the chiefs referred to Mantšebo's comment regarding the Constitution of 1959 where she said

“Ke mohlanka oa sechaba. Haeba sechaba se khahloa ke ho nka matla a ka, ke khotso ke hona.”¹⁸⁸

[TRANSLATED] “I am a servant of the people, if it pleases my people to take away all my powers so be it”

This proves that indeed Mantšebo was a leader who held strong to her principles that she ruled on behalf of the people.

5.5 Conclusion.

We have proved in this chapter that the regent supported and encouraged empowerment of Basotho socially, economically and politically. She contributed largely to the improvement in education especially in the higher learning where she led the establishment of Pius XII Catholic University College in 1945 and the Lesotho Agricultural College in 1954. While some scholars look down upon her by pointing that she lacked formal education whatsoever, Mantšebo loved education

¹⁸⁷ Mohlabani, 23 June 1958.

¹⁸⁸ Moeletsi Oa Basotho, 2 April 1964

and was dedicated to its improvement with a clear understanding that education formed the basis for economic development in a country. Due to her massive contribution in enhancing higher learning education, Lerotholi Technical School hostels were named after her.

Mantšebo proved versatile to learn and lead her people towards economic improvement. In the mining of diamonds, soil conservation and infrastructural developments, she tirelessly encouraged the chiefs and the people through *lipitso* to support such developments. Mantšebo became a backbone upon which the success of development projects depended.

It was during Mantšebo's regency that the government was decentralized through the establishment of District Councils from which elected members joined the National Council. In addition associations were allowed to send their representatives to the National Council thus making it more representative. Further she agreed to work hand in hand with the National Council to ensure that interests of Basotho were protected.

In the 1950s, the winds of change were blowing across the African continent, nations were demanding independence from colonizers. This was the case with Basotho as well. Change cannot be stopped rather it should be allowed to make a headway; as such Mantšebo allowed the existence of political parties like BAC, BNP and MTP that made Constitutional Reforms and attainment of independence a national debate. It is therefore appropriate to acknowledge Mantšebo as an adaptive and progressive leader of her time who allowed new political forces such political parties to contribute in political matters of her territory.

Chapter Six

Mantšebo and the incorporation of Basutoland into South Africa

6.1 Introduction

One of the biggest threat to the Paramount chieftainess Mantšebo was the Union of South Africa founded in 1910. The main issue about the Union of South Africa was its intention amongst others to incorporate High Commission Territories. However that did not materialize immediately after the formation of the Union mainly because both the British and the Union government differed in opinions as to how and when the transfer ought to take place.¹⁸⁹ In 1948, three years after the Second World War, a new turn of events took place in South Africa. The Nationalist Party led by D.F. Malan won the elections in the Union of South Africa and introduced a policy of apartheid (separate development).¹⁹⁰ Significantly, the apartheid government, just like other white led governments before, stated its intention to incorporate Basutoland and other High Commission Territories (H.C.T) into South Africa. This was based on the Union Act of 1909 which stipulated that the High Commission Territories would be incorporated into the Union of South Africa.¹⁹¹

It was this intention that led to the fierce resistance led by the Paramount Chieftainess Mantšebo. In this chapter, we discuss the background of the formation of the Union of South Africa and its initial intention about the H.C.T. This chapter also

¹⁸⁹ H.M. Glass, *South Africa's Policy towards Basutoland*, (Johannesburg, University of Witwatersrand, 1966), pp 13-14.

¹⁹⁰ R.O. Collins and J.M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007) p.350. Apartheid or separate development was a racial policy introduced by the National Party in 1948. This policy entrenched racial discrimination deeply in South Africa by passing pieces of legislation that segregated Africans in all aspects of life. For instance, education, marriage, employment, land and health services were all segregated.

¹⁹¹ D. Hobart Houghton, *the Significance of the Tomlinson*, (Johannesburg, University of Witwatersrand, 1966) p.24.

looks into the justification given by the apartheid government of Dr. D.F Malan to incorporate Basutoland into South Africa. We then discuss the measures that Mantšebo took to oppose the incorporation. This entailed her objections to the Resident Commissioner regarding the incorporation, where she requested the issue to be debated in the National Council. Secondly she wrote petitions against incorporation and personally went to Britain in 1951 to present the last of the two petitions to the British Colonial Secretary. Lastly, she opposed the hiring of South African born officials in Basutoland. This chapter further shows how Mantšebo continued to support Basotho in the Union of South Africa regardless of its ruthlessness towards Basutoland. The bitter reaction of the Union of South Africa was due to Mantšebo's adamant disapproval of the transfer of Basutoland to the Union of South Africa.

6.2 Historical Background of the Union of South Africa-1910-1948

Moves towards the formation of the Union of South Africa began after the South African War of 1899 to 1902 also known as the Anglo-Boer War. This war was ended with the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging in 1902 by British and Afrikaner representatives. Following this, the British embarked on a program of rebuilding destroyed infrastructure and the mining industry. They pointed that this could be successful if both the British and the Boers worked together.¹⁹² Thus the British proposed their plans for a unified South Africa.

After several years of negotiations and hard bargaining between the leaders of Afrikaner republics and the British government, the Union of South Africa was founded in 1910. The Act of the Union of South Africa was passed in Britain granting

¹⁹² <https://www.Sahistory.org.za>, *Constructing the Union of South Africa, negotiation and contestations 1902-1910*, 21 March 2011.

dominion to the white minority over Natives, Indians and Coloureds.¹⁹³ This Act brought the colonies and republics; Cape Colony, Natal, Transvaal and Orange Free State together as a single state. The Union Act also made a provision that the Union remained British territory but with home-rule for Afrikaners.¹⁹⁴ Each of the four unified states was allowed to keep their existing franchise qualifications and the Cape Colony was the only one which permitted voting by non-whites.¹⁹⁵

The most significant to this study was clause 151 of the Union Act.¹⁹⁶ By this clause, the High Commission Territories of Basutoland, Bechuanaland (Botswana) and Swaziland were excluded from the Union but it was hoped that at some point, the political situation would be right for incorporation, at this time they remained under the British rule.¹⁹⁷ The British government was reluctant to transfer the territories because it was worried about the status of indigenous populations under the new constitution. Quite frankly Britain treated the inhabitants of the HTC differently as compared to the natives in the Union of South Africa.¹⁹⁸ The natives of the Union lost all their rights and opportunities through the Union act, but the British allowed the Natives of the HCT a certain degree of power as per its policy of indirect rule, this policy also stipulated the policy of 'consultation' between the British authorities in the

¹⁹³ R.O.Collins & J.M.Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.344.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*,p.345.

¹⁹⁶ The Union Act of 1909 sealed the formation of the Union of South Africa and one of its provisions stipulated that High Commission Territories of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland would be transferred to the Union. See for example, 'Section (151) provided that the king may transfer to the Union the government of any territories belonging to or under the protection of His Majesty's and inhabited wholly or in part by Natives, and upon transfer the Governor –General in Council may undertake the government of such territory upon the terms and conditions embodied in the Schedule Act'

¹⁹⁷ <https://www.Sahistory.org.za>, *Constructing the Union of South Africa, negotiation and contestations 1902-1910*, _21 March 2011.

¹⁹⁸ Basil, Davidson, *Modern Africa*, (London, Longman, 1983) pp.32-33.

territories and African chiefs.¹⁹⁹ Also just for a fact that they were administered by the High Commissioner, it meant that the territories held the similar position with the Union of South Africa which is that of being a dependent.

Nonetheless the question of transfer of the HCT was raised repeatedly since the formation of the Union by the leaders of the Union government. For instance, in 1913, Botha, the union Premier raised the issue of the transfer of the territories. However this was dismissed on the grounds that the transfer could not take place without the approval of the British parliament after it had consulted the inhabitants.²⁰⁰

The insistence for the transfer was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War and attention was diverted to the war. This debate continued again after the war. The most memorable attempt was made by J.B.M Hertzog, the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa from 1924-1939. Hertzog raised Basotho fears in 1936 by announcing his desire to incorporate Basutoland into the Union of South Africa. There was intensive correspondence between the British colonial office and the Prime Minister Hertzog over the issue of transferring the High Commission territories to the Union.²⁰¹ In Basutoland the Resident Commissioner shared these wishes with the National Council and the Paramount chief.²⁰² Basotho rejected Hertzog's proposal and this was communicated by the High Commissioner to the Union government that the people strongly opposed incorporation.²⁰³ Again the discussions over this issue were interrupted by the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939.

¹⁹⁹ R.O Collins and J.M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa*, p.299. Indirect Rule was a British popular colonial policy whereby the British ruled through the local authorities especially chiefs. The British were responsible to the foreign policy and Legislation while chiefs were responsible for local administration.

²⁰⁰ H.M. Glass, *South Africa's Policy towards Basutoland*, p.27.

²⁰¹ LNA S/310/I, *Native Policy in the Union*, 1936.

²⁰² LNA 2190/1/1/VII, *Minutes of the National Council*, 1936.

²⁰³ LNA, *Proceedings of the National Council* 1936.

6.3 Nationalist Party and the incorporation of Basutoland into the Union

The debate over the transfer of Basutoland and other High Commission Territories was raised again from 1948 following the National Party's victory in South Africa. This transfer was a follow up of repeated but unsuccessful attempts since the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 by successive South African governments to persuade Britain to transfer the three territories to the union.

The apartheid government under Malan pointed out two main reasons for its desire to join Basutoland to the Union. First, the Union government argued that this desire was based on economic reasons. It was suggested that control of Basutoland ought to be transferred to South Africa to ensure economic cooperation. For instance it was argued that Basotho would have access to jobs. Union politicians added that Basutoland was already treated as one entity with South Africa and that Basotho would still be treated like the Natives of the Union of South Africa.²⁰⁴

Second, the apartheid government was of the view that strategically Basutoland was at the heart of South Africa and all the challenges she faced also affected South Africa. Nationalist party leaders argued that it was incumbent upon South Africa to ensure that Basutoland was protected and this could only be achieved through incorporation of Basutoland into South Africa. Malan pledged that if the territories could be transferred to the Union the Natives of the protectorates would get the privileges that the Natives of the Union got.²⁰⁵

The Nationalist Party passed a series of apartheid legislation and the one which directly affected Basotho was the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951.²⁰⁶ This Act provided

²⁰⁴ Basutoland News, 14 November 1953.

²⁰⁵ Basutoland News, 10 June 1952.

²⁰⁶ LNA, The Friend Newspaper, 1952.

for the establishment of tribal regional and territorial authorities entrusted with the advisory functions only in Black reserves. Significantly it proposed that the three British High Commission territories of Bechuanaland, Basutoland and Swaziland and the existing black reserves in the Union should be consolidated in seven ethnic homelands of Tswanaland, Vendlaland, Pediland, Swaziland, Zululand, Xhosaland and Sotholand.²⁰⁷ In explaining the Act, Malan indicated that,

“this act was passed to give blacks increasing self-government in their own territories as they achieved the necessary ability and sense of responsibility in their own territories. Africans will always stand under the guardianship and domination of the white man in South Africa”.²⁰⁸

Powerful support for territorial separation came in the report of the Tomlison Commission published in 1955. The report laid out plans to create ethnic Homelands or Bantustans with calls for increased funding for development in areas reserved for Africans. The report emphasized the need to develop the native areas so as to ensure complete separation between Europeans and non- Europeans.²⁰⁹ This was the trick that the Union government used to attract and convince the British to hand over the High Commission Territories to the Union. However this was just in vain as Africans in these Territories especially Basotho were far from accepting their transfer to the Union of South Africa.

6.4 Mantšebo’s resistance to the incorporation of Basutoland into South Africa.

When Mantšebo took power as the Regent, she had to deal with the threat from the Union Government in its attempt to incorporate Basutoland. Most daunting to her

²⁰⁷ Deon Geldenhys, *South Africa’s Black Homelands: Past Objectives, Present Realities and Future Development*, Institute of International Relations, 1981, pp.3-5.

²⁰⁸ LNA, The Friend Newspaper, 1955.

²⁰⁹ LNA, The Friend Newspaper, 1955.

was the fact that the British administration in Basutoland showed willingness to cooperate with the union of South Africa on issues like employment of white South Africans administrative positions in Basutoland and allowing South Africa to construct a radar stations.²¹⁰ This cooperation made the Regent and Basotho in general feel that the British we were willing to transfer Basutoland to the Union of South Africa.

In her bid to thwart incorporation plans, Mantšebo's first step was to write a petition together with thirty-two members of the National Council in 1949 requesting the British Government to remove all white South Africans from administrative positions in Basutoland.²¹¹ Below are some of the demands held in the petition of 1949.²¹²

- Preference be given to Basotho in all service vacancies except the post of Resident Commissioner, Government Secretary, Heads of Departments, District Commissioners and Police officers.
- In every public Department in Basutoland, an assistant to the senior official should be a Mosotho.
- Salaries payable to Government officials both European and African, should be equal as long as they have attained qualifying education and their ability to prove it.

This request was triggered by the newly introduced anti-native policy(Apartheid) in 1948 under the leadership of Dr Malan in the Union of South Africa. Mantšebo feared that if Basotho were included in that Union, then the same policy would apply to

²¹⁰ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 24 February 2022. See also Scott Rosenberg, Promises of Moshoeshoe, p.51

²¹¹ LNA, National Council Proceedings, 1949, p.92, see also S.Rosenberg, Promises of Moshoeshoe, p.66.

²¹² LNA, National Council Resolutions, 1949,p.75.

Basotho.²¹³ Also, she feared that by employing South Africans in Basutoland colonial service, Britain was preparing transfer of Basutoland to the Union of South Africa. Most importantly Basotho were worried that white officials in Lesotho were there to secure interests of the Union of South Africa at the expense of Basotho.²¹⁴

In 1950 Dr D.F Malan raised the issue of incorporation again and pressed that Basutoland and other two High Commission territories be transferred to the Union of South Africa, and argued that

“It was no longer tolerable for the Union of South Africa to be compelled to harbour territories belonging to another country”.²¹⁵

During this time, it would seem Malan was not going to be deterred from this issue. He wanted to implement an arrangement made in 1909 regarding the transfer of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland. The reports of the conversation between the Prime Minister of the Union of South Africa and the British Minister of State about the transfer of Basutoland to the Union perturbed Mantšebo and the National Council so much that a resolution was made in the National council that another petition be made to the British.

In 1951 she took another daring step in a bid to bar Basutoland’s transfer to South Africa where she demanded that the Resident Commissioner clarify the position of Basutoland in the National Council as to whether it was a colony or a protectorate.²¹⁶ This debate was based on Mantšebo’s distress regarding the way the British handled Basutoland because The Resident Commissioner did not communicate with the Paramount Chief and the National Council about the incorporation issue. The British

²¹³ LNA, National Council Proceedings, 10th September 1949.

²¹⁴ Basutoland news, February 1952.

²¹⁵ The friend Newspaper, November 1951, see also, H.M. Glass, *South African Policy towards Basutoland*, p. 24.

²¹⁶ LNA, Paramount Chief’s address to the national Council, 29 September, 1956.

close links with Apartheid South Africa caused Mantšebo to think that they had ulterior motives about the fate of Basutoland.²¹⁷ From this time it dawned in the circle of Colonial authorities that the incorporation would never be accepted in Basutoland.

Mantšebo continued to show her resistance by disapproving the appointment of South Africans to the positions of authority in Basutoland. Her resistance was heightened by the appointment of A.G.T Chaplin, a South African national, to the position of Resident Commissioner in 1956 which raised a robust debate in the National Council.²¹⁸ As a result Mantšebo wrote a petition to the Colonial Secretary against Chaplin's appointment and demanded that this appointment be withdrawn.

Mantšebo's petition was firm and forceful in its demands. She reminded the British to give careful consideration to the following words of Moshoeshe when he asked for protection in 1861:

"I wish to govern my own people by Native Laws, but if the Queen wishes after this to introduce other Laws into my country, I will be willing, but I should wish such Laws to be submitted to the Council of the Basuto, and when they are accepted by my Council I will send to the Queen and inform her that they have become law".²¹⁹

She subsequently took a trip to Britain to present this petition herself.²²⁰ Her petition was based on the request made by Moshoeshe in 1869 that British representatives in Basutoland should be born in England and not in South Africa because South Africa was hostile to Basutoland for years before Moshoeshe's death.²²¹ She was also perturbed by British refusal to involve Basotho in the talks regarding incorporation of Basutoland. This, according to Mantšebo, was very undemocratic.

²¹⁷ Mohlabani, 1955.

²¹⁸ National councils proceedings ,29 September 1956

²¹⁹ Mohlabani, Paramount Chief opens the Council, December 1956.

²²⁰ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 12 October 1956

²²¹ LNA, Paramount Chief's address to the National Council, 29 September, 1956.

She emphatically pointed that , “Her Majesty’s Government should recognize the fact that we are a nation and that our views in matters that concern us should be given careful consideration”.²²²

The sustained Basotho’s struggle against the transfer of Basutoland into apartheid South Africa led by Mantšebo ultimately aborted all the plans to incorporate Basutoland. The British through the British colonial officer, Arthur Saunders, accepted this fact when he said that,

“The people of Basutoland need not fear the consistent demands for Dr. Malan for the transfer of their own country. Britain would not force any country under its protection in an unwilling partner with another”.²²³

Mant’sebo and Basotho were assured that transfer of their country would not be a possible move.

6.5 Mantšebo’s support to Basotho in the Union of South Africa.

While the resistance was a great success for the Paramount chieftainess Mantšebo, the Union government did not simply accept the defeat. It imposed difficult measures on Basotho, making their lives difficult in South Africa where many worked on long term contracts. Dr. Malan announced in the parliament in 1952 that if transfer of Basutoland was not granted to South Africa, it will be regarded and treated as a foreign territory. In his speech he made an emphasis that,

“While anxious that transfer should be reopened in a friendly spirit, if this did not succeed, the protectorates would be treated as foreign territory, thereby giving the Union government the

²²² LNA Paramount Chiefs address in the National Council 1956.

²²³ Basutoland News “memoires of Saunders in 1944”, 18 November 1952.

right to demand customs payments and making Africans from these Territories ineligible for South African social welfare benefits when resident in the Union".²²⁴

Following this statement, the government embarked on dreadful measures to enforce territorial separation. Africans were evicted from their unlawful places of residents in the cities to their new areas of settlement or Bantustan as per the Group Areas Act and Bantu Authority Act of the 1950 and 1951 respectively. Basotho who worked in South Africa remained exposed to the same tortures of the apartheid Legislation, in addition, they had to apply for permits in order to cross to South Africa. Failure to do that led to repatriation.²²⁵

Between 1958 and 1959, there were many cases of evictions and repatriations of Basotho who were found outside the allocated Bantustans, others did not have legal documents that placed them in that country.²²⁶ Undeniably this hit hard on many Basotho because of their economic dependence on South Africa.

Mantšebo as the leader and guarantor of Basotho's security wrote a letter to Mr. Vierwoet in 1959 where she pleaded for mercy for all Basotho who were found in South Africa without legal documents or were found out of their specified Bantustan. She blamed this on her failure to communicate to her people about permits when moving to South Africa.²²⁷ By this, Mantšebo displayed the highest degree of diplomacy with the Union government in order to safeguard the interests of Basotho who worked and lived in South Africa. Welfare and security of her people was a priority while at the same time she was cautious not to hamper opportunities of Basotho to make a living in South Africa.

²²⁴ Basutoland News, 21 November 1952.

²²⁵ LNA S/309/VI, Native Policy, 1950

²²⁶ LNA S/309/VII, Native Policy, 1955-9.

²²⁷ LNA S/309/VIII, Native Policy, 1955-9.

In reaction to Mantšebo's resistance against Basutoland incorporation, the Union government banned admission of Basotho pupils into institutions of higher learning in South Africa. This was especially the case with the University of Fort Hare where Basutoland government paid £300 per year for the fees of its own pupils.²²⁸ In response, Mantšebo allayed the fears of Basotho and assured them that the government would device means of ensuring that the education of Basotho children would not be interrupted.²²⁹ See below

“Another problem facing us is the ban reported in the Press which has been imposed by the Union Government on our pupils attending institutions in that country. This has been a grievous blow but we have not been supine and we are already considering ways and means of ensuring that the education of Basotho children should not be interrupted.”²³⁰

For all intents and purposes Mantšebo proved that she could never be intimidated by the Union government.

6.6 Conclusion

The desire of the Apartheid Government to incorporate Basutoland was dashed due to Basotho fierce resistance led by the Paramount Chieftainess Mantšebo. Her resentment to the Union and everything related to it was first articulated during her visit to England in 1951 where she demanded the British government protect Basutoland from the South Africa's menace. Her rejection of South African Natives in positions of authority further demonstrated how vigilant Mantšebo was regarding the issue of incorporation. This was followed by a strongly worded petition to Britain where the Paramount Chieftainess warned the British not to hand over Basutoland to

²²⁸ LNA S/309/VII, Native Policy, 1958.

²²⁹ Basutoland news, 13 February 1958.

²³⁰ LNA, National Council Proceedings, Paramount Chief's Address, 1957, p 102.

South Africa against the will of Basotho. Mantšebo's stance was very firm that she went to an extent of cautioning the British to honour Moshoeshe's plea of 1861 where he asked the British to rule Basutoland in line with the will of Basotho.

Mantšebo efforts to halt the transfer of Basutoland to the Union of South Africa succeeded to a large extent. However the Union government did not take the defeat laying down. In return it made the lives of Basotho difficult by introducing the use of permits for one to cross in to South Africa. Failure to produce a permit resulted in refusal of entry into South Africa and repatriation for those who had who crossed illegally. In the end it would result in refusal of admission of Basotho students into South African Universities. In this matter, Mantšebo applied the highest degree of diplomacy shouldering the blame for not issuing permits for her people and subsequently pleaded for mercy on behalf of her people. She asked for them to be allowed to stay in South Africa until their permits were ready. Mant'sebo was not ignorant of the fact that many Basotho made their living in South Africa hence she sought corporation with the Union government for the sole protection of Basotho who were in South Africa. However, her position against the incorporation remained unshaken. It remains undisputable that Mantšebo remained on of the chiefs of Basotho that fiercly repeled incorporation of Lesotho by South Africa.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

This work documented the Long Regency of Paramount Chieftainess Mantšebo, Matšaba, Moipone Amelia Seeiso which lasted for nineteen years. She was the second longest serving Paramount chief after Griffith Lerotholi and the first female Paramount chief. During her long regency, Mantšebo was successful in maintaining her leadership and ensuring that the position of the Paramount chief survived regardless of the difficulties she faced during her regency. To safeguard the position of the Paramount Chief, Mantšebo successfully obtained the Regency after a fierce struggle with her brother in-law Bereng Griffith. Her victory in this challenge was confirmed by the High court of Lesotho in 1943. This ensured that the seat of Paramourcy remained in the royal family of Seeiso and was not transferred to Seeiso,s brother Bereng. The victory of Mantšebo in this case also signaled a new turn of events where patriarchy²³¹ was defeated in the realms of power. Surprisingly the very colonial authority that confirmed Mantšebo was highly patriarchal just as Basotho. Traditionally Basotho women were minors as they could not make decisions or assume leadership positions but from 1941 there began a new era whereby a woman led men and made decisions on their behalf.

Mantšebo's attainment of the Regency did not sit well with other members of the family especially those who preferred Bereng (her arch-rival) for regency, however the biggest blow came from her sister-wife 'Mabereng. The conflict of the two sister-

²³¹ S. Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, Vol.23, No.2 (Sage, 1990) p.20. defines patriarchy as structures and practices that perpetuate dominance of men over women within a given society and is also related to oppression of women by men.

wives was over guardianship of the heir apparent Bereng Constantine Seeiso. This went to the extent of having to be settled by the Court of appeal on the grounds that Mantšebo was officially appointed Regent therefore care of the heir apparent was also bestowed on her. This is another example where Mantšebo asserted her authority when it was tested by the family. She raised the heir apparent with care and with an objective of preparing him for his future position as the Paramount Chief of Basutoland.

Through this study, it was further revealed that Mantšebo was successful in dealing with administrative challenges such as maintaining the support for the British war effort, administrative Reforms and fighting against *Liretlo*. She took the reins of power during the Second World War, consequently she was forced to continue the support that her predecessor (her husband) portrayed to the British War effort. She achieved this by establishing a War Fund through which two more aeroplanes were procured for the British. Mant'sebo also encouraged young men to enlist in the army. This was a display of loyalty and support to British government. Her efforts paid off because in 1947 when King George VI paid a visit to Basutoland Mantšebo was awarded the O.B.E award for the tremendous support she had offered the British during the war. Mantšebo her outstanding role in the Second World War made the most daring and phenomenal chieftainess of Basutoland.

Some scholars criticized Mantšebo and claim that she was weak because she was a woman and because of the reforms that took place during her reign. On the Contrary, this study demonstrates how strong-willed and democratic she was, for she believed in consultation with her own people before promulgation of

proclamations. Mantšebo allowed the National Council to appoint the majority of the finance Committee overseeing the National Treasury.²³²

Regarding reforms, her critics actually point out that she allowed them too easily. However my findings reveal that the introduction of the National Treasury met Mant'sebo's rage and repulsion. Significantly Mantšebo viewed the National Treasury with suspicion. She feared that it was going to destroy the chieftainship just like other reforms that were introduced earlier. Mantšebo played her part to resist this particular development and to a large extent she managed to frustrate this plan. She sabotaged its formation, by avoiding meetings with the Resident Commissioner as she faked sickness.²³³ In this way she was able to obstruct and delay the formation of the National Treasury. It took the British about five years before they could establish it.²³⁴ By the time it was established Mantšebo had forced the British authorities to clarify their intentions and benefits of the Treasury to the National Council. It is therefore unfair that her efforts regarding the Reforms especially the National Treasury were overlooked.

In the late 1940s Mantšebo's regency was befallen by a dark cloud of *liretlo* (Medicine Murders), *liretlo* sprawled across the country until the mid 1950s. Mantšebo bore the brunt of these inhumane acts. The allegations against her were based on the fact that many people failed to understand how she won the regency. They believed that she used magic to attain that position. Others used murders carried out in Mokhotlong; her ward, as their basis to blame her for *liretlo*. The allegations against Mantšebo were baseless as she was never convicted. Even her

²³² S.Rosenberg and R.Weisfelder, Historical Dictionary of Lesotho, p.305.

²³³ M. Epprecht, 'This Matter of women is getting very bad', p113.

²³⁴ M. Epprecht, 'This Matter of women is getting very bad', pp 112-113. The idea of the National Treasury was first proposed in 1942 but it was eventually accepted by the Paramount Chief and the National Council in 1946.

daughter Ntšebo and Chief Matlere Lerotholi who were purported to be her accomplices won the cases where they were suspected of *liretlo*. The crisis of *liretlo* unleashed Mantšebo's leadership and assertiveness. She set out to thwart *liretlo* by releasing circulars that warned people of *liretlo*. She also held *lipitso* around the country where she dissuaded Basotho from being accomplices to perpetrators of ritual murders. This was even commended by the councilor for Butha-Buthe in 1948 that Mantšebo's action in touring the country to caution people about *liretlo* was phenomenal for she had outdone male chiefs who were dumb-founded by the scourge of *Liretlo*.²³⁵ It is due to these findings that this study affirms that Mantšebo was a phenomenal Paramount Chieftainess and it had been was unfair to blame her for *liretlo*.

This study further demonstrated how Mant'sebo empowered Basotho women and the Basotho nation as a whole. Her first achievement in the issues of women was to get the National Council to agree with her to denounce forceful marriages upon women after the death of their husbands. In 1948 the National Council passed a resolution that *lekenelo, lebota and chobeliso(elopement)* be abolished. In this manner Basotho women were eventually granted freedom of choice regarding marriage. Furthermore, Mant'sebo made a considerable achievement in influencing the National Council to revise the laws of Lerotholi on issues of inheritance and succession. Thus in 1948, the council made a resolution that Women could inherit their late husbands' property, where there was no male child, girls could inherit their parents' property²³⁶. It was not until 1962 that a Select Committee on Wills, Estates and Inheritance was set up to revise the position of women with regard to

²³⁵ LNA, National Council Proceedings, 1948, p.83

²³⁶ LNA, National Council Proceedings, 1948, p.84.

inheritance²³⁷. The credit for this move is deserving to Mantšebo for she was the first Paramount Chief to advocate for the rights of women in Basutoland. Women got the rights and opportunities they had never enjoyed before.

The challenges that were casted by Migrant labour on women prompted Mantšebo to take a strong stance to further protect women who suffered intimidation and harassment from their fellow Basotho and from the colonial administration. During Mantšebo's regency many Basotho women suffered drastically as they were left at home mostly in the rural areas with all the family responsibilities on their shoulders alone. This exposed women to rural poverty that forced many to migrate to the camps and South Africa in search of means of livelihood. These women were however marginalized by the society and were labeled prostitutes.²³⁸ Mantšebo made the issue of women migrants a national agenda in the National Council to protect them against harassment. Even on this issue she scored massively because the Basutoland Women and Girls Protection Proclamation No.14 of 1949 was passed to protect women and girls. This Proclamation made it unlawful for anyone to label any girl or a woman a prostitute or influence any girl or woman into prostitution. The breach of this Proclamation resulted in a fine of £500 or six months imprisonment²³⁹. Her success in changing the status quo in the issues of women prove that 'she was a mover and a shaker'.

Her accession of regency encouraged women within the chieftaincy class to acquire leadership positions. From 1941 Mantšebo confirmed women regents for their own sons; Makopoi Api, Mamathe Masupha, Mamohlalefi Bereng Sekhonyana were amongst the women chiefs that drew inspiration to become regents from

²³⁷ Epprecht, 'This matter of women is getting very bad' p.113.

²³⁸ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 20 November 1949.

²³⁹ Proclamations and Notices, 1949, p.7.

Mantšebo²⁴⁰. The Commoners also began to seek their leadership places in the 1950s when political parties emerged. They became active in organizing political rallies and singing political songs to entice followers. BAC, in its structures had a women's League. When BNP emerged many women joined and became very active. BNP enjoyed a lot of following of women because it advocated for women voting rights. As such Mokhehle BNP's arch-rival, derogatively called BNP a 'Party of women.'²⁴¹ This shows that Basotho women had become politically conscious and wanted to have a say in the political matters of their country. This thesis therefore asserts that Mantšebo was versatile enough to allow sweeping global changes such as giving women an opportunity to be involved in their country's decision making.

The other important issue that this study demonstrated was Mantšebo's achievements in empowering Basotho in general. She touched lives of Basotho in education where she was in the fore front to see to it that education of Basotho improved. This is seen when she supported the initiative of the Catholic Church to establish an institution of higher learning called Pius XII Catholic University College by allocating land for its construction and pleading with the chiefs to support that initiative. She also initiated the establishment of the Agricultural College which was to answer the need for agricultural experts in Basutoland to enhance agriculture in the country. In this way, it became easy for Basotho children to access tertiary education within the boundaries of their own country. Basotho students would serve their country and drive it towards development. Her love for education was honored by the administrator of Lerotholi Technical College who named girls hostels after her.

²⁴⁰ Morija Archives, Basutoland Lesotho.n.d.

²⁴¹ L.B.B.J. Machobane, Government and Change, p.285.

Economically, Mantšebo played a vast role in leading economic developments in Basutoland during her reign. Firstly she allowed diamond prospecting by Colonel Jack Scott of the Union of South Africa. The diamond mines were opened in 1955 at Letšeng- La- Terai in Mokhotlong and at Kao in the district of Mokhotlong. Diamond prospecting became one of Mantšebo's greatest efforts to improve the economy of Basutoland. The success of these an projects meant accumulation of revenue for the country and attainment of jobs for many Basotho. Although the early prospects were poor at first, Mantšebo opened up an opportunity for economic development in the mining sector.

In agriculture Mantšebo took a lead in encouraging Basotho to abide by the strategies that were recommended by the colonial government to curb soil erosion. These strategies included, planting trees in the dongas and planting grass strips on the slopes for prevention of erosion of top soil²⁴². Also rotational controlled grazing was to be instituted by keeping livestock at cattle posts in the mountains during the winter season to allow growing of new grass in the lowlands.²⁴³ This move was strongly opposed by many Basotho who felt that the soil erosion measures were going to aggravate the situation and also that those measures disturbed their usual agricultural practices such as keeping a lot of livestock at home.²⁴⁴ Regardless of the opposition, she announced that all the measures suggested by agricultural officers had to be observed so that land could be used efficiently for both productive cultivation and grazing.²⁴⁵ Mantšebo's leadership in soil erosion prevention earned

²⁴² Basutoland News, 10 April 1948.

²⁴³ Basutoland News, 10 April 1948.

²⁴⁴ Moeletsi oa Basotho, National Council Proceedings, 16 March 1948.

²⁴⁵ Moeletsi oa Basotho, 16 March 1948.

her a lot of respect from the colonial authorities who commended her willingness to enforce prevention of soil erosion measures.²⁴⁶

Politically, a lot was happening in Basutoland, the National Council expanded its membership and demanded to be consulted by the regent before she could pass orders. By agreeing to this demand Mantšebo simply displayed her willingness to rule through her people. Thus she upheld the Sesotho phrase *Morena ke Morena ka sechaba*. In 1948 district Councils were formed with the sole purpose of decentralizing governance allowing more commoners to have a say in the issues of governance. This made Mantšebo one of the liberal chiefs who were willing to share power.

In Basutoland, the 1950s were a time of great changes. After long prayers from the National Council, the Colonial government finally agreed to bring in reforms. Therefore Administrative Reform Committee was set up in 1954 led by Sir Henry Moore. In the same year Moore released recommendations for the new constitution. Moore recommendations were rubbished by Mantšebo and the Basotho, because they were silent about conferment of legislating powers to the National Council. Mantšebo disapproved of Moore recommendations because they were not what her people wanted²⁴⁷. Consequently she put pressure on the colonial authority to bring reforms that the people wanted. In response, the Constitutional Reform Committee was set up in 1956 and released its recommendations in 1958. This report which came to be called the 'Cowen Report' was accepted by all Basotho. Its key features were that the National Council was made a Legislative Council and that the office of the Paramount chief was made responsible to the National Council. By accepting

²⁴⁶ Basutoland News, 10 April 1948

²⁴⁷ Mohlabani, 1954.

this constitution Mantšebo demonstrated her acceptance of inevitable change where democracy was to prevail and co-exist with chieftainship. The issue of a Legislative Council was not her making but what the people chose through the National Council, thus Mant'sebo must be honoured for allowing change to take ground peacefully.

Mantšebo's reign coincided with the rise of nationalism in the entire African continent and in particular, in her own country, Basutoland. Political parties that emerged during her reign were BAC led by Mokhehle, MTP led by S.S Matete and lastly BNP led by Leabua Jonathan. These political parties became a driving force behind desire for independence from colonial rule. Mantšebo embraced the rise of political parties and allowed them to hold rallies without obstruction from chiefs.

Lastly Mantšebo played an important role in resisting incorporation of Lesotho in to the Union of South Africa. As early as 1949, she wrote a petition to the British government requesting that white South African citizens be expelled from administrative positions in Basutoland. In 1951, she challenged the British government to clarify the position of Basutoland and further moved that Basutoland be ruled as a protectorate not a colony. This forced the British government to reassure her that Basutoland was safe and could not be transferred to the Union without Basotho's consent. In 1956 she made another a petition to the British government and flew to Britain where it was read. This petition followed the appointment of A.G. Chaplin to the position of Resident Commissioner in Basutoland. Mantšebo viewed this act as a way through which the British were joining Basutoland to the Union involuntarily. The fierce resistance from Mant'sebo was important as it saved the country from being engulfed by apartheid South Africa.

Out of bitterness, between 1958 and 1959, the Union government imposed the use of permits for all Basotho who worked in or lived in the Union of South Africa. Those who failed to produce them were repatriated. As if that was not enough Basotho students were refused entry in schools and institution of higher learning. This however did not deter Mantšebo from rejecting the Union's proposals for incorporation. On top of that, she devised new means through which Basotho living in South Africa(at work places or in schools) could be supported.

Generally, the work of Paramount Chieftainess Mantšebo distinguished her as the most courageous and tactful national leader who stood for what was best for Basotho at all costs. She refused to be a British rubber stamp, a character that made them respect her. Mantšebo broke the chains of patriarchy by holding a position of such authority which was believed to be a men's position. This was the most daring move in a society that regarded men as heads of families and decision makers. Regardless of being ridiculed as weak for just being a woman, she maintained her leadership over a male dominated National Council and the nation in general. As a result she was highly respected by her people. The poem below was recited when she retired on the 12 March 1960. It conveys the respect, honor and gratitude that Basotho had for her.

Mantšebo oa mali a Sempe!

Mantšebo, of Sempe's blood!

Qhobosheane ea bana ba Thesele:

A fortress for the sons of Thesele:

Tšehlana busa 'm'aea Ntšebo!

Reign Ntšebo's mother!

Thuhloane e busang ka senna:

A Giraffe that rules like men:

Morena ea busang ka Molimo,

The chief who uses God's rule,

<i>Katla u bontše banna ba ka Lesotho.</i>	<i>Reign, show men of Lesotho.</i>
<i>Moanyesi oa bana ba Letlama,</i>	<i>the mother of the sons of Letlama</i>
<i>U holise Bereng le Leshoboro,</i>	<i>Raise Bereng and Leshoboro,</i>
<i>Mohla ba holileng u ke u itulele,</i>	<i>Allow yourself to rest, for you have done</i>
	<i>your part in raising them.</i>
<i>Tšehlana u phomotse letsoele;</i>	<i>Rest beautiful. You have your part in</i>
	<i>breastfeeding</i>
<i>Mona o lebohe Molimo oa khotso,</i>	<i>For this you have to praise God of peace,</i>
<i>Oa toka , kholisong ea Likhosana,</i>	<i>A god of justice, for raising the Princes,</i>
<i>Kajeno lena o phomotse mokoena!</i>	<i>Now you can rest Mokoena!</i>

Adapted from Moeletsi oa Basotho, March 1960

Not only Basotho conveyed respect to Queen Regent Mantšebo but also British officials, Mr. Giles who was the Resident Commissioner. On the 20th March 1964 during the burial ceremony of Queen Regent Mantšebo Mr. Giles pointed that he was impressed by Mantšebo's dignity and shrewdness.²⁴⁸ He further summarized and commended Mantšebo's Regency in these words:

"The Regent carried the authority of the Paramountcy during the dark years of the war... during the nineteen years of her regency, she performed memorable service in guiding and guarding her people and represented them in London while the delegation was discussing the 1959 Constitution. She kept the peace and she kept the pace with the history of the nation. For her work, for her people and for maintaining their friendship and mutual respect with the people of Britain, she was made an Officer of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. Now that she has become history, I pay tribute to a remarkable and a wise woman."

Adapted from the Basutoland News, 7 April 1964.

²⁴⁸ Basutoland News, 7 April, 1964.

The above comments prove that indeed Mant'sebo was a phenomenal woman chief of Basutoland. Her work as documented here, is a manifestation of her courage, selflessness and assertiveness in leading the Basotho Nation. She left a mark that inspired Basotho women to assume leadership positions. Up to now, she remains the longest ruling woman chief in Lesotho. Kristy Coleman provides explanation that best explains why Mantšebo was so able and capable of leading;

Women are believed to have more innate power than men, because they are born with power to reproduce both the human and the material components of the social world.²⁴⁹

Cheftainess Mant'sebo was faced with many challenges that have been discussed in previous chapters, regardless, she rose above them. Being the longest serving Paramount Chieftainess was not a smooth sailing journey, she was forced to find ways of surfing over the most hostile waves of colonial rule in Basutoland. The extract below illustrates how a leader can survive and pursue leadership with ease.

We cannot choose how many years we will live, but we can choose how much life those years will have.

We cannot control the beauty of our face, but we can control the expression on it.

We cannot control life's difficult moments, but we can choose to make life less difficult.

We cannot control the negative atmosphere of the world, but we can control the atmosphere of our minds.

Too often we try to choose to control things we cannot.

Too seldom we choose to control what we can... our attitude.

Adapted from: John.C. Maxwell, Developing the Leader Within you, 1993:104.

²⁴⁹ K. Coleman, Matriachy and Myth, Review article, 31:3, p.251, <http://www.idealibrary.com>. 22feb 2011

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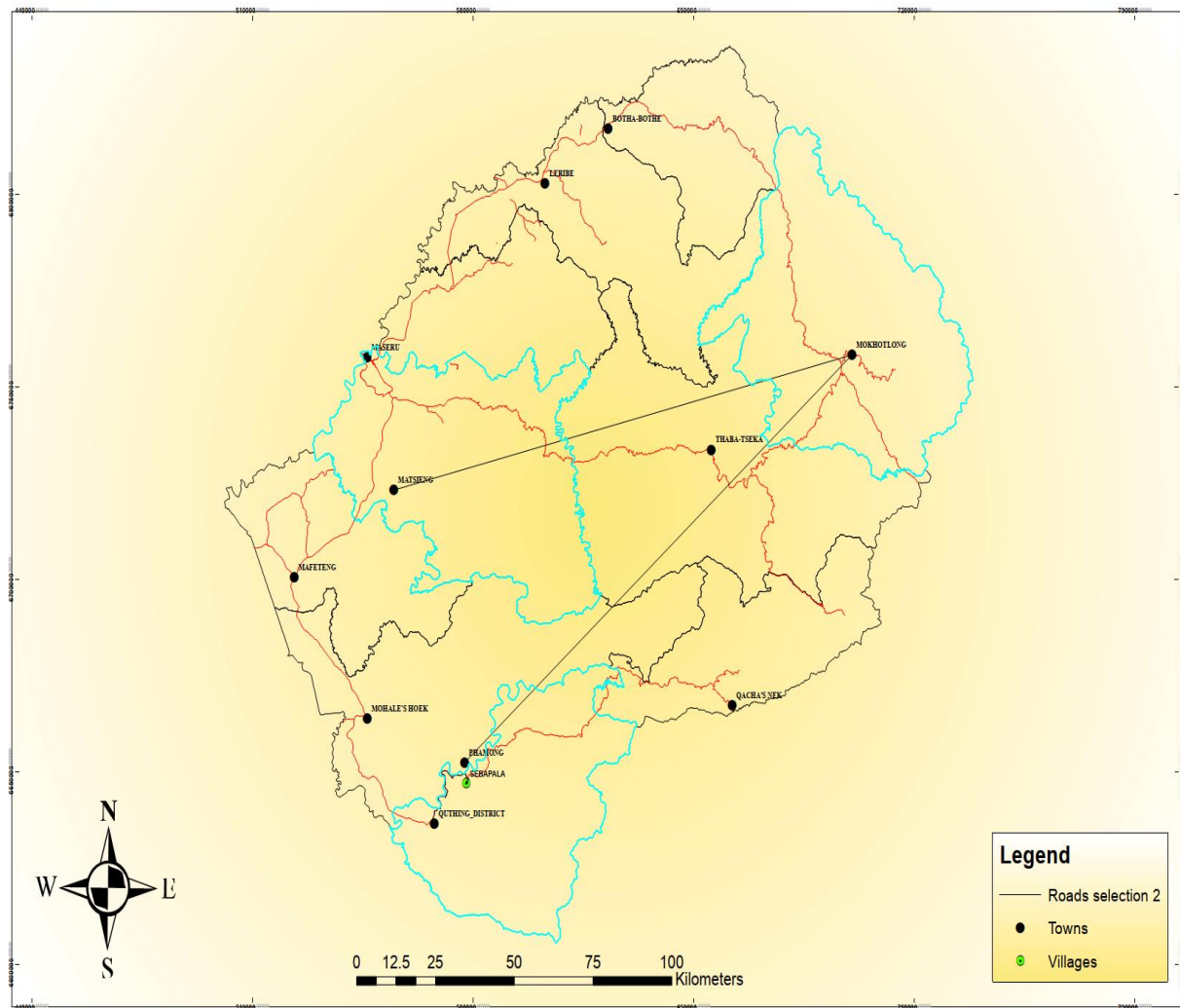
APPENDICES

Appendix 1



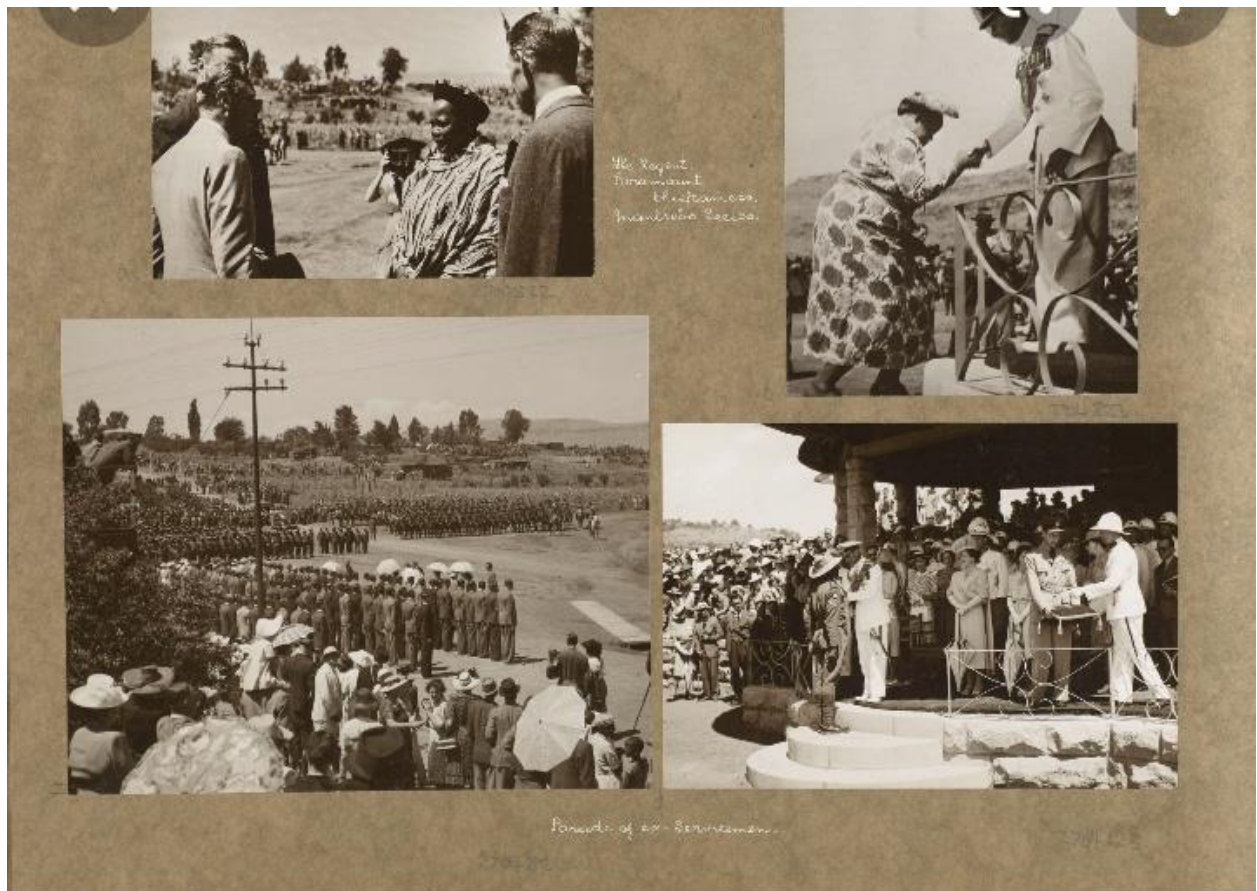
From Moeletsi oa Basotho, 1941. A portrait of Mofumahali Mantšebo when she took power in 1941.

Appendix 2



The map of Lesotho showing Mantšebo's trail from her birth place Sebapala>>Phamong>>Mokhotlong and lastly to Matsieng.

Appendix 3



Adapted from Basutoland Basuto, n.d. King George awarded Mantšebo Order of British Empire (OBE) award at Maseru Pitso Ground in 1947.

Appendix 4



Mantšebo with Chief Leabua Jonathan in England for Constitutional Talks, 11 Nov 1958.