TOWARDS A RECONSTRUCTION OF SOME ASPECTS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL HISTORY OF THE SOUTH-SOTHO COMMUNITIES IN THE SOUTHERN HIGHVELD, 1500-1800

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ABSTRACT

Some aspects of the Environmental History of Sotho speaking communities in the Southern Highveld between 1500-1800 have not been well documented. So far, the main focus of existing literature of these groups is on the socio-political and economic history. There is less attention on their interaction with environment during this period. This study reconstructs some aspects of the Environmental History of these Sotho-speaking groups to examine their nature of their interaction with the environment. The study argues that the environment influenced their migration pattern, economic formations, political organisation as well as their belief systems. The study used available records and literature to carry out this research. The findings reveal that these communities were strategic and intentional about their choice of settlements. They selected landscapes that ecologically supported their trade patterns and survival. Political and socio-cultural forms were embedded and interwoven with their environment, with a strive to attain a degree of mutually reciprocity and sustainability. Not much was always in their control; conditions of ecological catastrophe and depletion often led to scarcity, poverty and internal conflicts that often bred secessions of various forms.

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Special thanks go to my family, my parents and siblings. Their love and support has kept my spirits and motivation high during this process. I further give thanks to my friends, colleagues and lecturers for the encouragement, motivation and support.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Ntate Ntoahae Mahao and ’Mè ’Manthomeng Mahao. Thank you so much for motivating me to pursue my dreams.

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my original work. It has not been previously submitted, in whole or in part, for the award of any degree. Each significant contribution in it from the works of other people has been duly acknowledged.

Liako Mahao .....Date.....

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that the candidate has met all the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Arts in History under the Department of Historical Studies, National University of Lesotho in December 2023.

Supervisor ..... Date .....

External Examiner ..... Date .....

Head of Department ..... Date .....

GLOSSARY

Balimo: Ancestors

Bohali: Bridewealth, is an exchange of cattle between two families whose children wanted to get into a covenant of marriage. When a woman got married, her father received bride-wealth (*bohali*), which was a certain number of cattle from the family of the groom as compensation and a symbol of gratitude.

Khotla*:* A space set within the proximity of a chief, enclosed by natural landmarks such as boulders or trees. *Khotla* was a general place where men spent their time and occasionally, elderly men. It served as a central communal meeting place for villagers.

Liboko: (singular. s*eboko*) Is a Clan. Sotho speaking groups associate and identify themselves through clan names, which are usually symbolised by such as animals or objects.

Lifaqane/Mfecane: A period of conflict, migration and state formation in the early nineteenth century, which caused disruption in southern Africa.

Liremo: A class of plants, bushes or trees which is of domestic utility and economic value, but which is not cultivated and is not private property, and which may be cut and collected in accordance with Basotho custom.

***Maboella* (singl. *Leboella*):** These are seasonally reserved areas restricted from livestock grazing, or human activity such as harvesting of thatching grass, or reeds. In line with Basotho's traditional environmental management strategies, *Maboella* are meant for land recuperation. Contraveners of such orders were liable to punishment.

Mafisa: was a cattle-loaning system wherein a wealthy person, or the chief, loaned livestock to impoverished subjects in return for political allegiance. In the *mafisa* system, subjects to whom

cattle were loaned enjoyed benefits such as milk, using oxen for ploughing fields and carrying load.

***Matsema*:** Communal work parties where men and women were expected to carry out communal duties that entailed working the fields of the chief, hunting and procuring exotic animal products such as horns, skins and feathers for their leader.

Mohlongoa-fatše: Corbelled beehive house structure and the thatch dome hut .

***Molimo**:* (plural. *Melimo*) God

Pitso: A public gathering which is usually convened by the leader of a chiefdom to discuss and preside over important matters.

Tlatla-macholo: A name given to God in Sotho spirituality.

Bakoena: People of the crocodile, a Sotho-Tswana clan whose people venerate the crocodile.

Bakhatla: A Sotho-Tswana clan, which descends from Bahuruste.

Bahurutse: Are one of the three founding sub-division of the Sotho-Tswana group.

Batlokoa: The wild cat people are a Sotho-Tswana clan who descend from Bahurutse

Bafokeng: People of the dew, are a Sotho-Tswana clan whose people venerate the hare.

Barolong: A Sotho-Tswana clan whose people descend from Morolong.

Bataung: People of the lion, are a Sotho-Tswana clan whose people venerate the lion.

Basia: People of the cat, are a Sotho-Tswana clan whose people descend from Bakhatla.

Makhoakhoa: An offshoot of the Bakoena.

Batlhaping: A Tswana clan whose people venerate fish.

Lihoja / Bakubung: A segment of Bataung who venerate hippopotami.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This study retraces and examines the Environmental History of South-Sotho speaking communities in the Southern Highveld, particularly south of the Lekoa/Vaal to present-day Lesotho between the 1500s and the 1800s. The study focuses on reconstructing some aspects of their Environmental History, and their interaction with the environment in the Southern Highveld. In southern Africa, the Southern Highveld is the area within the Free State Province of the Republic of South Africa, and Lesotho. It is essentially the area between the Lekoa/Vaal and Senqu/Orange rivers. It includes the western portion of the Maluti Mountains of Lesotho, stretching from the Mont-Aux-sources to the southern parts of the Lesotho.

The patterns, settlements, socio-political formations and economic productivity of the Sotho were shaped by their environment, which they shaped as well. Thus far, history studies have focused on the political, social and economic aspects at the neglect of the environment.[1] This study seeks to fill this lacuna.

The history of these South-Sotho communities between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries in the Southern Highveld has been eventful. Primarily, it was a period when the Sotho-Tswana groups separated. The Tswana groups moved further up north, towards the western parts of the

[1] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld 1500-2000," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002); E. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975).

region, while the South-Sotho groups moved further down south into the area between the Lekoa/Vaal River and the Mohokare/Caledon River. This period was also characterised by more centralisation and expansion of different clans into more defined chieftainships. Mothibe observes that the period between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries saw the movement and establishment of new communities in the Southern Highveld and current Lesotho areas.[2]

This study is situated within the nascent discipline of Environmental History. The discipline has grown and evolved into models, approaches and perspectives different from the ones originally developed for the context of the United States. There is no universal definition of Environmental History. Hughes, one of the pioneering scholars of Environmental History, defines it as a discipline that is concerned with the study of humans and nature over long periods of time.[3][4] This branch of history seeks to understand human beings as part of the environment while living and working, as well as their relationship with the rest of nature through change across time.[5] McNeill defines Environmental History as "…the history of the relationship of human societies and the rest of nature on which they depended".[6] Worster adds that Environmental History proceeds on three levels, which are: the study of nature itself, human modes of production, and patterns of human perception, ideology and value. These definitions explain distinctly attributes of the history of Sotho communities of the Southern Highveld that this study is concerned about.

[2] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld 1500-2000," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.

[3] His works include his seminal work *What is Environmental History* (2006) as part of a series introducing various fields of history and is an introductory textbook to the study of Environmental History; Ecology in Ancient Civilizations (1975) this book was particularly concerned with the early civilizations and declared to be the first broad introduction to the Environmental History of the ancient world; Environmental Problems of the Ancient Greeks and Romans (1996) which became a classic

[4] Review of J. Donald Hughes: Ecology in Ancient Civilisations (Albuquerque: Universty of New Mexico Press, 1976) in Antiquity 50, no.197 (1976): pp. 78-79; J. Donald Hughes, "J. Donald Hughes," *Environmental History* 15, no. 2 (2010): p. 305

[5] J. Donald Hughes, *What is Environmental History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), p.1.

[6] J.R.Mcneill, "The Historiography of Environmental History,"

In his book, *What is Environmental History?,* Hughes breaks down the study of Environmental History into three themes that focus on, how the environment shapes human history, how attitudes towards the environment influence human actions, and how these actions bring about environmental changes.[7]

At a global level, Environmental History emerged as a subject of interest in the United States around the 1970s. It started as a result of growing environmental concerns that surfaced after the World War II.[8] The introduction of Environmental History was a self-conscious movement that was influenced by activists and scholars' awareness of global environmental problems that included environmental negligence, disease, pollution of water and air by pesticides, and the effects of greenhouse emissions on the ozone layer.[9]

The term "Environmental History" was first used in 1972 by an American historian, Roderick Nash.[10] Even though the field is a little older than this, reference to the field using this term was developed later on. According to Carruthers, Environmental History arrived on the international historiography platform in the 1960s and 1970s when Rachel Carson published a comprehensive

[7] J. D. Hughes, *What is Environmental History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), p.1.
[8] S. Sorlin, "The Contemporaneity of Environmental History: Negotiating Scholarship, Useful History and the New Human Condition," *Journal of Contemporary History 43*, no.3 (2011): p.610
[9] D. Worster, *The Ends of the Earth. Perspectives on Modern Environmental History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1998); Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).
[10] S. Sorlin and P. Warde, *The Problem of the Problem of Environmental History – A Re-reading of the Field and Its Purpose* (University of Cambridge: Centre for History and Economics, 2005).

book, *Silent Spring* in 1962.[11] Carson's work drew attention to the environmental damage by anthropogenic activities related to "development", which happened over a short period of time.[12]

Hunt supports Carson's main concerns on environmental conservation. Her book was fiercely opposed by chemical companies. Despite that, she had illuminated the dangers of humans using insecticide to control nature and the effects of harsh chemicals on declining bird populations.[13] Carson's main message was the need to identify and care for fragile ecosystems, which were facing threat caused by dangerous technology.[14]

When it started, issues of conservation were at the core of Environmental History discussions. With time, the scope broadened to include a larger spectrum of universal topics on social and scientific disciplines. This further affirmed the interdisciplinary nature of Environmental History draws inspiration from a number of subjects such as anthropology, zoology, geography and biology, to name but a few.

It is evident that some of the most influential studies in Environmental History emanated in the United States. This is where most pioneers emerged, and where the majority of active practitioners in the field are based.[15] From the US, it spread to the rest of the world. Since the 1970s, Environmental History has captured the interests of thousands of scholars and students, globally. McNeill, however, argues that the degree to which Environmental History spread

[11] R. Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002) First published in 1962.
[12] J. Carruthers, "Environmental History: Complex Connections Around the Constancy of Change," *Historia* 54, no.2 (2009): p.100.
[13] M. H. Hunt, *The World Transformed: 1945 to Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp.215-217.
[14] Ibid, pp.215-217.
[15] S.Sorlin and P. Warde, "The Problem of the Problem of Environmental History: A Re-Reading of the Field," Environmental History 12, no.1 (2007): p.108.

across professionals internationally differed from one place to another and each at its own time.[16] In other words, it took longer for historians in other parts of the world to incorporate environment in their research.

Van Eeden maintains that in as much as Environmental History was thriving through collaborative research elsewhere in the world; this was not the case among the limited number of environmental historians in South Africa.[17] Locher and Quenet concur that even though Environmental History had won the interest of a large audience globally as early as the 1990s; it remained under developed in other European countries such as France.[18]

In the 1980s, there was a rise of a second generation of environmental historians including the likes of Richard White and William Cronon whose works had a phenomenal impact in the field.[19] White and Cronon brought different perspectives into the study. Their writings shifted the focus of Environmental History towards climate change, arguing that it was impossible to separate humans from their environment.[20]

[16] J.R. McNeill, "The State of the Field of Environmental History," *The Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 35 (2010): p.351.
[17] E. S. van Eeden, "Environmental History within a Revitalized Integrative Research Methodology for Today and Tomorrow," Interdisciplinary Science Reviews 36, no.4 (2011): p.315.
[18] F. Locher and Gregory Quenet, "Environmental History: The Origins, Stakes, and Perspectives of a New Site for Research," Revue D'histoire Mordene Contemporaine 56-4, no. 4 (2009):p.7-38.
[19] R. White, *Land Use, Environment, and Social Change: The Shaping of Island* County (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1980); R. White, *The Roots of Dependency: Subsistence, Environment, and Social Change among the Choctaws, Pawness, and Navajos* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983); W. Cronon, *Changes in the Land: Indians, Colonists, and the Ecology of New England* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1983).
[20] F. Locher and Gregory Quenet, "Environmental History: The Origins, Stakes, and Perspectives of a New Site for Research," *Revue D'histoire Mordene Contemporaine* 56-4, no. 4 (2009):p.7-38.

Around the same era, Carolyn Merchant introduced ecofeminism[21] as a subfield in Environmental History. Drawing inspiration from her predecessors such as Rachael Carson, author of *Silent Spring* (1962) and Betty Friedan author of *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Carolyn Merchant introduced a new notion of gender sensitivity and awareness to the study of Environmental History. Merchant's main argument is that man has no power over nature. She maintains that the pre-modern concept of nature was a feminine concept. She further points out that patriarchy in society could explain the exploitation of both women and the wider natural habitats. In her book, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980), Merchant argues that the patriarchal structure of the society has resulted in the oppression and exploitation linked with gender and the natural world. She goes on to emphasise that if the concept of nature is to be revived and if humans are going to avoid the perils of climate change, the relationship between how gender norms and roles will require significant reconstruction. Merchant also shows that a significant number of ecologism and environmentalism have roots in the masculine view of both nature and science in general.[22]

There is a significant lack of specific literature that treats the Environmental History of ancient societies of Southern Africa, especially Southern Sotho. Therefore, this thesis makes significant contributions to the Environmental History of southern Africa with a specific focus on areas of the Southern Highveld in South Africa and Lesotho.

[21] Ecofeminism is a political ideology concerned with the relationship between politics and ecology. It is linked with mainstream feminist theory, which seeks to understand and analyse the relationship between gender and the environment. Ecofeminism highlights and challenges societal inequalities and the destruction of the natural environment.

[22] F. Bacon (1561-1626) is most famous for his work in philosophy of science. He argued that controlled scientific experimentation is essential for understanding nature.

There are other significant literatures that the study draws from. Scholars of Basotho history such as Mothibe, Gill, and Sanders amongst others shed light on the customs, norms and traditions of Basotho as well as the historical foundations and the nation state of Lesotho. They also shed light on wars such as Lifaqane that initiated the process of displacement, migration and the unification of various clans under one great chief, Moshoeshoe I.[23]

Several scholars discuss the origins of the Sotho speaking groups. Amongst them, Leggasick and Eldredge raise awareness about the separation of the Sotho from the Sotho-Tswana group. They acknowledge the uniqueness of the Sotho-Tswana group as one of the groups of Bantu speaking groups. Furthermore, they both assert that distinct features of totems, intra-cousin marriages and language are some of the attributes that set the Sotho apart from other groups in the Southern Highveld.[24]

Although they wrote decades apart, Maylam and Mothibe shed light into the causes or factors that influenced the split of the Sotho-Tswana group in the Lekoa/Vaal. They clearly indicate how the Sotho groups further broke into several other groups known as clans.[25] In agreement with Maylam, Sanders and Maggs outline the chronology of the arrival of the Sotho speakers in the Southern Highveld from the Lekoa/Vaal. They are all in agreement that the Bafokeng were the first to arrive at Ntsoanatsatsi, a place which the southern Sotho consider as the cradle of their origins situated

[23] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld 1500-2000," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule ans Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.4; S.J. Gill, A Short History of Lesotho (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.46; P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe: Chief of the Sot*ho (London: Heinemann, 1975); D.F Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.11.

[24] M. Leggasick, "The Sotho-Tswana Peoples before 1800", in *African Societies of Southern Africa*, ed. L. Thompson (London:Heinemann, 1969); E. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.19.

[25] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London:Croom Helm, 1995); T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld 1500-2000," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.4

in eastern Free State between Namahadi/Frankfort and Vrede.[26] Maggs furthers the discussion about settlement chronology by providing archaeological evidence as part of his research findings at Ntsoanatsatsi. He outlines the settlement patterns, settlement zoning and architecture of the Sotho speakers by studying the ruins of Bafokeng and others who followed them to Ntsoanatsatsi.[27]

Eldredge, Collins and Burns explored how the livelihoods of the Sotho people were intertwined with their environment. Their means of subsistence farming combined animal husbandry and crop production.[28] Ellenberger brings to light that the Sotho speakers diversified their economy by also trading with their neighbours.[29] This notion is supported by Collins and Burns who show that inter-relations between the Sotho and their hunter-gatherer neighbours entailed marriage and exchange in iron pottery, agricultural produce, livestock, game meat and medicine.[30]

McCann, Pwiti and Wood wrote about the introduction of exotic commodities such as maize and beads into the economy of the Sotho communities. They acknowledge that this is indicative of how extensively the Sotho traded with other traders in the region, going as far and wide as the Indian Ocean.[31]

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[26] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London:Croom Helm, 1995); P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe: Chief of the Sotho* (Edinburgh: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975), p.3; T. Maggs, *Iron Age Communities of the Southern Highveld* (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Museum, 1976), p.308.

[27] T. Maggs, "Iron Age Patterns and Sotho History of the Southern Highveld: South Africa," *World Archaeology* 7, no.3 (1976): p.328.

[28] E.A.Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth - Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.14; R. O. Collins and James O. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.163

[29] D.F Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.11.

[30] R. O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.163

[31] J. McCann, "Maize and Grace: History, Corn and Africa's New Landscapes, 1500-1999,"*Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no.2 (2001), p.248; M. Wood, Interconnections: Glass Beads and Trade in Southern and Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean -7th to 16th Centuries AD (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2011), p.34.

The study also makes use of literature by Ducan and Thabane who shed light into systems such as land tenure and the cattle loan (*mafisa*) which the Sotho used for the management and allocation of resources.[32] They both argue that the life of pre-colonial Sotho speaking communities relied heavily on the land they occupied, and so they had established functional systems such as (*liremo*) and (*maboella*) in order to regulate its allocation and use.[33] Their arguments fortify the notion that these communities had close ties with their environment.

This research is interested in finding out how environment inspired belief systems and customs of the Sotho speaking communities of the Southern Highveld. Major contributions about religion of the Sotho is made by Ellenberger and Casalis. They argue that the pre-colonial Southern Sotho people believed in the existence of God (*Molimo) and* ancestors whom they also believed were responsible for different things in lives. Apart from that they clearly show how environment was one of the main composites of Sotho spirituality, who performed certain rituals in honour of their ancestors after successful harvest.[34]

In agreement with Ellenberger, Kgari-Masondo makes a contribution to this study by discussing the sacredness that the Sotho places on nature. The literature by these two authors suggest that certain animals were used as symbols of representation, or identity, hence, considered to be sacred.

[32] P. Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1960), p.87.
[33] M. Thabane, *Who Owns the Land in Lesotho? Land Disputes and The Politics of Land Ownership in Lesotho* (Roma: ISAS, 1998), p.1.; Patrick Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1960), p.57.
[34] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.14-15; E. Casalis, *The Basutos*, (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p.251

It was therefore blasphemous for one to mistreat, or kill an animal that represented their totem or (*seboko)*[35].

Rakotsoane is another scholar who studied the worship systems which honoured the sacredness of natural places. He sheds light on worshipping of the water serpent *Tlhahla-macholo,* which is venerated in the traditional prayer of the Sotho speakers.[36]

Furthermore, other historians such as Gill, Sanders, Thompson and Machobane provide a detailed discussions on the political organisation of the Sotho communities. They argue that the Sotho people had defined governance structures and models such as the chief's court (*lekhotla*) and public gathering (*pitso*) which harmonised relations between leaders and their subjects.[37] In consensus with Thompson, Thabane argues that *pitso* was a consultative tool which chiefs used to validate their political power as leaders of their chiefdoms.[38] Though they focused on the political formations, their work is important in this study. Traditional political institutions were indispensable in the management of natural resources.

Methodologically, this study depends on archival records and secondary sources. It is based largely on materials which early historians relied on in their interpretation of the history of South-

[35] M.C. Kgari-Masondo, "Sotho-Tswana Mythic Animals: Stratagem for Environmental Conservation," (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2014).
[36] F.C.L. Rakotsoane, "Traces of Snake Worship in Basotho Culture," (National University of Lesotho).
[36] F.C.L. Rakotsoane, "Religion of the Ancient Basotho with Special Reference to "Water Snake", Masters Thesis, (University of Cape Town, 1996), p. 47.
[37] L.B.B.J. Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.ix; S.J. Gill, A Short History of Lesotho (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.46.
[38] L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975), p.63; M.Thabane, "Social Relations in the Nineteenth Century ," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.71-72.

Sotho communities of the Southern Highveld. It employs qualitative analysis methods to collect, collate, analyse and synthesise existing literature into a body of knowledge that forms the foundation for further research on pre-colonial Sotho speaking communities' migration and interaction with their environment.

In addition, the study uses old newspapers such as *Leselinyana la Lesotho. Leselinyana la Lesotho* was the first newspaper in the country. It provides a series of articles by Azariel Sekese from 1894 to 1923/25 on some of the earliest writings about the history of the South-Sotho speaking communities.

Apart from that, the study makes use of secondary sources in the form of books and journal articles covering the history of southern African societies, with a specific focus on the Sotho of the Southern Highveld. It specifically incorporates historical sources compiled by early scholars and enthusiasts of Sotho history such as; D.F Ellenberger, J.C Macgregor and J.M Orpen. This early work provides an invaluable foundation; however, their shortcomings and inaccuracies are noted. Eldredge and Gill highlighted the inaccuracies in order to get different perspectives.

Since the study covers a historical period when southern African societies were not literate, and there were no written records, archaeological sources were incorporated to prove the authenticity of some historical accounts. Archaeological sources are important in understanding ancient history because they provide tangible evidence of past societies which cannot be obtained through written records alone. In this case, works of archaeologists such as T. Maggs and T.N Huffman have been

helpful in the reconstruction of the history of the Southern Sotho because they are validated by archaeological evidence.[39]

The study also makes use of oral literature in the form of folklore. From time immemorial, the Southern Sotho have used folklore or fables to convey their history, customs and traditions, hence this attribute makes them a viable source in this study. Although fables cannot be dated and their authors remain unknown, Phindane argues that they were important among illiterate societies and could also be inherited from one generation to another, that is why they still exist in most societies.[40] Iyanda also affirms that fables are some of the earliest forms of oral literature, which date back many centuries, and their role is significant in almost all philosophies across the world.[41] Some of the fables in Litšomo tsa Basotho by Jacottet which were originally oral, depict animals that behave and speak like human beings, the context of these stories is cleverly given to highlight human behaviour and the physical environment.[42] Since the study covers a pre-literate period, fables provide in-depth information, some of which has not been documented.

Chapter Outline

The study is organised in six chapters. **CHAPTER ONE** introduces the study and covers the study background and literature review. **CHAPTER TWO** provides the historical background of the formation of Southern Sotho groups. It focuses on tendencies of incorporation and division of

[39] T.N. Huffman, "Archaeological Evidence and Conventional Explanation of Southern Bantu Settlement Patterns," *Africa* 5, no. 3 (1986): p.280
[40] P. Phindane, "An Analysis of the Sesotho Folklore Kgubetswana Le Talane Using Binary Opposition Approach, " *Southern African Journal of Folklore Studies* 29, no.2 (2019): p.1.
[41] R.O. "Fables as Panacea to Unethical Behaviours in Societies," *Electronic Research Journal of Literature* 1 (2019): pp.1-2.
[42] E. Jacottet, *Litšomo tsa Basotho* (Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Depot, 2015), pp.1, 16-18

these groups immediately after their split from the larger Sotho-Tswana. It shows the causes of the constant pattern of amalgamation and division of the main clans the Sotho groups.

CHAPTER THREE examines the migration of Bantu speaking groups to Southern Africa and how Sotho communities established themselves spatially and structurally within their environment in the sub-region. This is done by carefully examining their migration and settlement patterns in the southern African Highveld. Further focus is given on factors that influenced migration and settlement patterns over a course of their history in the pre-Lifaqane period. Attention is also placed on landscape zoning, architecture and place naming practices.

CHAPTER FOUR unpacks the political organisation of the Sotho speaking communities. It covers the traditional system under which communities were politically organised and protocols that existed within them. This chapter brings to light tools of governance like the *pitsos* or public gatherings, which were platforms through which chiefs and their subjects interacted freely to discuss public matters. Methods through which resources were distributed such as the cattle loan system of *mafisa* and *bohali* are also covered in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE discusses the economic practises through which the Sotho speaking groups sustained a livelihood despite the ecological constraints on their environment. It also discusses patterns of trade which took place in the region based on the demand and supply of commodities.

CHAPTER SIX investigates the South-Sotho relationship of their environment. It shows how traditional beliefs and spiritual practises were pivotal in the conservation of the environment. This

chapter also discusses how Sotho speakers drew inspiration for their identity and belief system from the environment through the hereditary identity of clan totem and how they carefully selected elements which represented their totems from nature**.**

CHAPTER SEVEN discusses the rise and fall of other Iron Age societies. It also brings forth the emergence of the upheavals of Lifaqane which destabilized the Southern Highveld, especially the Sotho at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This chapter further discusses the process of nation building or the unification of Sotho and some Nguni speaking groups under one paramountcy in response to Lifaqane. **CHAPTER EIGHT** is the conclusion. It weaves together the salient aspects of the study and its main argument.

CHAPTER 2

History of the Sotho-Speaking Communities of the Southern Highveld

Introduction

The Sotho or Basotho are a prominent linguistic and cultural group of the Sotho-Tswana ethnic group in the Highveld of Southern Africa. They are primarily found in significant populations in South Africa and Lesotho. This chapter gives a background of the Sotho speaking groups of the Southern Highveld who lived in places which are modern-day Free State and Lesotho. It discusses the origins, formation and separation of these groups or clans which ultimately were consolidated into a single chiefdom. Leggasick argues the formation of all cultures and populations entails a mixture and absorption of new elements.[1] The social and cultural changes undergone by the Sotho speaking groups in the Southern Highveld were instigated by both external and internal forces.

Split of the Sotho-Tswana Groups

According Leggasick, Sotho speakers are part of the Sotho-Tswana group, a sub-division of the Bantu group that distinguished themselves linguistically from others in Southern Africa.[2] Their unique identity through totems, rearing of cattle, intra-cousin marriage, house structures are some of the specific features that differentiated the Sotho-Tswana group from other Bantu groups in the Southern Highveld. Another distinctive feature among the Sotho groups was the manner in which

[1] M. Leggasick, "The Sotho-Tswana Peoples before 1800", in *African Societies of Southern Africa*, ed. L. Thompson (London:Heinemann, 1969), p.93.
[2] Ibid., p.86-87.

royal marriages were carried out and the significant role the 'Queen Mother' assumed.[3] Among the Southern Sotho speaking communities, the Queen Mother took on the role of a regent of behalf of her son who was still a minor. She assumed the position of a political leader within her society and had to ensure the survival of her polity.[4] For example, after the death of chief Mokotjo of the Batlokoa clan, his widow 'Manthatisi assumed power as regent and ruled the chiefdom on behalf of her son Sekonyela who was still a minor.[5]

Moreover, Eldredge emphasizes that the unique cultural bond between the Sotho-Tswana groups was indicative of common origins which were characterized by extensive periods of cultural exchange and trade, thus having an impact on their socio-political context.[6] She argues that even though Sotho-Tswana speaking communities scattered over a wide geographic area after their split; patterns of settlement, production and trade which characterized the Sotho speaking communities, reflected ancient methods of production and exchange of the nucleus Sotho-Tswana people.[7]

Another similarity of the Sotho-Tswana groups is the ancestral genealogy of the Bakoena and Bakhatla clans. Most Sotho-Tswana lineages trace their origins to one of the three main founding ancestors, namely Morolong, Masilo and Mokhatla.[8] The lineage of Masilo split into two more

[3] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London:Macmillan, 1982).
[4] A. Adjei. "The Role of Women in the Political Development of Pre-colonial Africa". In S. Ademola Ajayi and J. Kehinde Ayantayo, eds. *Women in Development Yesterday and Today: Essays in Memory of Professor Dorcas Olubanke Akintunde*. (Ibadan: John Archers Limited, 2015) pp. 17–40.
[5] P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe: Chief of the Sotho* (Edinburgh: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975), p.20; A. Adjei. "The Role of Women in the Political Development of Pre-colonial Africa". In S. Ademola Ajayi and J. Kehinde Ayantayo, eds. *Women in Development Yesterday and Today: Essays in Memory of Professor Dorcas Olubanke Akintunde*. (Ibadan: John Archers Limited, 2015) pp. 17–40.
[6] E. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.19.
[7] Ibid., p.18.
[8] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London:Croom Helm, 1995), p.45.

divisions of the Bahurutse and the Bakoena. Many Sotho-Tswana lineages trace their origins to the Bakoena branch who were some of the most powerful chiefdoms in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[9] The Bakhatla lineage which emerged from Mokhatla, also divided into other numerous chiefdoms including the Batlokoa chiefdom which could be found in a number of areas within the southern and western Highveld.[10] Morolong gave rise to too a number of fissions too, and these included the Tau (people of the lion) lineage. Although most of the ruling lineages of the Sotho-Tswana descended from these three main founders, not all of the Southern Sotho stemmed from these lineages.[11]

The Sotho-Tswana people lived together in the Transvaal until around the fifteenth century when they split. This separation resulted in the migration of the Sotho speaking groups from the Transvaal to the Southern Highveld where they settled in large numbers.[12] Although Sotho speaking groups emerged from a common ancestry, they broke into innumerable smaller clans or chiefdoms. Constant divisions caused by power struggles were common among Sotho groups; and these made them vulnerable to attacks by outsiders. These divisions could go on for as long as there were enough resources to sustain everybody; more surplus meant further splits and growth in population of individual clusters.[13]

[9] Ibid., p.45.
[10] Ibid,. p.45.
[11] W.F. Lye and Colin Murray, *Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and Southern Sotho* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980), p.26.
[12] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld 1500-2000," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule ans Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.4.
[13] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London:Croom Helm, 1995).

The first group to migrate was the Bafokeng people who were later joined by the Bakoena clan, who lived in densely populated communities of about a thousand residents.[14] Nonetheless, the origins of the Sotho communities of the Southern Highveld is centred around two principal branches of the Barolong and Bafokeng clans. The Bafokeng broke into numerous minor groups, while the Barolong split into several other Sotho groups of the Bakoena, Bataung, Batlokoa, Basia, Makhoakhoa.[15]

According to Mothibe, after the separation, one faction of the Bafokeng continued to reside in the Transvaal, while the other broke into several smaller chiefdoms and migrated towards the eastern part to settle in the Mohokare/Caledon valley.[16] Which is the area within present-day Orange Free State and Lesotho.[17] Before moving further south, the Bafokeng settled at Ntsoanatsatsi (Rising Sun), between modern day Namahadi/Frankfort and Vrede in the province of Free State, South Africa right after they broke off from the nucleus group.[18] Approximately between the fifteenth and sixteenth century, other Sotho speaking groups of Bakubung (people of the hippopotamus) and Bataung also came to settle in the area south and west of Ntsoanatsatsi, while Batlokoa and related Bakhatla groups settled towards the south, east and north of the area.[19]

[14] Ibid., p.19.
[15] P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe: Chief of the Sotho* (Edinburgh: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975), p.3.
[16] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld 1500-2000," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.3.
[17] S. J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives,1993), p.23.
[18] T. Maggs, *Iron Age Communities of the Southern Highveld* (Pietermaritzburg: Natal Museum, 1976), 308.
[19] S. J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives,1993), p.23.

The Arrival of Sotho Groups in the Mohokare/Caledon Valley

At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Nguni groups descended from the Tugela River banks to join the Sotho groups in the Mohokare/Caledon valley. However, the first Bantu groups to occupy present day Lesotho were three small clans which originated from the area around the Tugela River. These were Nguni groups of Maphetla, Mapolane, Baphuthi, which transcended the eastern parts of the Drakensberg. They settled around important river valleys in the north, and east parts of modern day Free State.[20]

The pioneering Sotho and Nguni groups that migrated into the Southern Highveld met the Khoi-San hunter-gatherers predecessors, who had been living in the region for a very long time. The new comers' interaction with the hunter-gatherers resulted in a cultural exchange through inter-marriage and trade.[21] Other Sotho groups of Bakoena, Bataung and Bakhatla from whom the Makholokoe, Maphuthing, Batlokoa, Basia and Bakubung originate, arrived in the Mohokare/Caledon valley to join the groups which were already living there.[22]

Around the seventeenth and eighteenth century, an influx of more Sotho speaking groups such as Lihoja, or Bakubung, proceeded to occupy the land south of the Free State. The group of Lihoja had previously lived in the north of Lekoa/Vaal just like the Bafokeng.[23] According to Walton, the Lihoja and Bafokeng people were some of the earliest Bantu groups to reach the Orange Free

[20] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto:Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.21
[21] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London:Croom Helm, 1995).
[22] P. Jolly, "Strangers to Brothers: Interaction between South Eastern San and Southern Nguni/Sotho Communities," Masters Thesis, (University of Cape Town, 1994).
[23] L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Oxford:Oxford University Press, 1975), p.17-18

State after crossing the Lekoa/Vaal, even though the Lihoja settled west of the Free State while the Bafokeng went east.[24] The Lihoja settled at Lithakong, which is in the west of the Orange Free State; however, their stay there was disrupted by the Batlhaping people. The intrusion compelled the Lihoja group to move east towards the Lekoa/Vaal, where they settled among San hunter-gatherers. Their relations with these hunter-gatherers were disrupted by constant attacks by the Bataung people of Chief Moletsane, who were relatively late comers in the region. The Lihoja were eventually conquered and assimilated into the Bataung of Moletsane.[25]

Towards the end of the eighteenth century most Sotho speaking groups had moved into the Mohokare/Caledon valley. They lived there peacefully with minor conflicts and battles, which lasted not longer than two days between neighbouring clans.[26] This minor conflicts did not pose major threats to Sotho groups until the 1820s when Nguni groups from the Bokone[27]/Natal area attacked them during the violent upheavals known as the *Lifaqane Wars*. As will be shown, these Nguni groups were later incorporated into the Bakoteli chiefdom by Moshoeshoe during quest for nation building.[28] The *Lifaqane Wars* had remarkably devastating effects on the Sotho. They drastically transformed the economic, political and social life of the Sotho speakers, who at the end of turmoil had been united under a single chiefdom by Moshoeshoe of the Bakoteli, a sub-group of the Bakoena.

[24]J. Walton, *Early Ghoya Settlement in the Orange Free State* (Bloemfontein: National Museum Bloemfontein, 1965), 1.
[25] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.53.
[26] G. Tylden, The Rise of the Basuto (Cape Town: Juta, 1950), 3.
[27] T. Mofolo*, Chaka* (Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Depot, 1945), p.1: Mofolo makes reference to Bokone as the land between the mountains and the sea.
[28] J.M. Orpen, *History of the Basutus of South Africa* (Mazenod : Mazenod Book Centre, 1979), 22.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the origins and separation of the Sotho speakers from the main Sotho-Tswana group in the Transvaal. It discussed the separation patterns of various clans into a number of chiefdoms, and sub-clans as well as the causes of such divisions. The upheavals of the *Lifaqane* were a force which compelled the Sotho speaking communities of the Southern Highveld to consolidate into a single polity formed by merging diverse Sotho and Nguni chiefdoms.

CHAPTER 3

Migration, Landscape Settlement, Architecture and Place Naming among the Pre-colonial Sotho Speaking Groups

Introduction

The interaction between humans and their environment requires careful interrogation in order to understand how human beings view their surroundings, and how the environment shapes their lives. Southern Sotho communities valued their environment and so they had ways of integrating it into their daily lives for survival. This chapter examines how Sotho communities established themselves spatially and structurally within their environment. This is done by carefully examining their migration and settlement patterns in the southern African Highveld. The chapter examines landscape zoning, architecture and place naming practices among the Sotho speakers. Particular focus is placed on factors that influenced migration and settlement patterns over the course of their history in the pre-Lifaqane period.

Migration, Land Occupation and Settlement

The proto-colonial Sotho speaking groups south of the Transvaal significantly transformed patterns of settlement and livelihood in their landscapes.[1] This transformation was driven by political, economic and ecological factors in a search for suitable places to occupy. Significant

[1] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p.10-11.

occupation of the Southern Highveld by the Sotho-speaking groups began in the fifteenth century, as shown. They preferred to settle on sites with elevated landscapes, hills and mountains. Before this period, earlier Bantu-speaking communities who were also agro-pastoralists, preferred low-laying areas with adequate rainfall and fertile soil for their crops.[2] Initially, they occupied the eastern parts of the region, along the coast and river valleys. Later on, a shift in land occupation led to widespread preference of upland settlements towards the south-west. This shift was influenced by the gradual population growth of humans and herds, thereby, forcing the Bantu speaking people to consider expanding into new spaces in the grasslands of the Southern Highveld.[3]

The upland settlements extended into the Southern Highveld of the area south of Transvaal and present day Free State, including the high laying parts of the Bokone/Natal. Shillington argues that, as these Bantu speaking agro-pastoralists migrated, they occupied areas which were sparsely inhabited by the nomadic Stone Age hunter-gathers.[4] He elaborates that since these were farming communities, soil fertility, good pastures and rainfall determined the choice of settlement. In addition, the environment too had to be safe to allow younger generations to roam around.[5] In other words, the quality of soil and grass, the availability of water and security were important aspects in the selection of a suitable settlement. The choice of a settlement was in most cases a deliberate and strategic exercise.

[2] Ibid., p.11.
[3] R.O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.162-163.
[4] K. Shillington, *History of Africa* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p.59.
[5] Ibid., p.59.

The Bantu-speaking communities in the region trace their origins to the Great Lakes in East Africa, and further west, in the area known as Cameroon today.[6] Their migration is traceable through distinctly similar linguistic dialects and identical pottery by a number of routes between these regions and Southern Africa.[7] These dialects form part of the sub-groups of South Eastern Bantu group of languages which fall within a division of the Niger-Congo language family.[8] The Niger-Congo language family is a group of languages distributed widely across Africa from the area south of the Sahara desert all the way to South Africa.[9] The most widely spoken Niger-Congo languages are Yoruba, Igbo, Fula, Ewe, Fon, Ga-Dangme, Shona, Sesotho, Xhosa, Zulu, Akan, Moore and Swahili, which has the highest number of speakers.[10]

It is not clear whether the first Iron Age settlers of Southern Africa were Bantu speakers or not, but historical evidence suggest that these groups found the 'Khoisan' communities already living in the region. Although there is no direct link between early Iron Age Bantu speakers and the late Iron Age Bantu Speakers, Gill suggests that it is likely that the Sotho and Nguni speaking groups stem from the late Iron Age speakers who were preceded by the early Iron Age societies.[11]

Available historical sources demonstrate that there were cultural exchanges between agro-pastoralists and indigenous hunter gatherer communities. These cultural exchanges were centred around big extended family structures and clans, however, the new comers turned out to be more dominant. Initially, when the Bantu speaking Iron Age pioneers arrived in the savannah, south of

[6] R. O. Collins and J. M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.163
[7] Ibid., p.163
[8] Ibid., p.163.
[9] J. Good, "Niger-Congo Languages," University of Buffalo, December 2023.
[10] R.O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.162.
[11] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.12.

the Limpopo Valley around 200 AD, they were out-numbered by the Stone Age populations. It was in part through the Iron Ages communities' advanced technology that they ultimately gained dominance.[12]

These agro-pastoralist Bantu speaking groups migrated in small groups and lived in sparsely populated settlements, situated in fertile river valleys along the eastern coast of the Bokone/Natal. This landscape provided abundant fertile soil for their crops, wood for smelting iron and green pastures for their livestock.[13] Unlike the hunter gathering San and sternly pastoralist Khoikhoi, the newcomer agro-pastoralists were a lot more self-sufficient because they made their own iron implements and weapons which were essential in food production, security and warfare.[14]

Bantu speakers preferred to inhabit agricultural settlements that enabled them to cultivate a variety of food crops that consisted of grains such as sorghum, millet, legumes, beans and cowpeas. Their diet was supplemented by fishing, hunting and gathering to meet their sustainability.[15] Because of their advanced food production methods, the Bantu speaking agro-pastoralists gained dominance over the San and the Khoi communities. This enabled them to expand rapidly into upper territories of the Southern Highveld.

Overtime, the settlement of elevated grounds seemed the most ideal landscapes to inhabit by these Iron Age groups. It seems a number of factors influenced the preference to settle on higher laying

[12] R.O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.162.
[13] Ibid., p.162.
[14] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.39.
[15] R.O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.162

lands. Firstly, they preferred to build houses on ridges overlooking river valleys where building materials such as wood, reeds and grass were easy to procure. Secondly, higher laying settlements offered reliable sources of clean water, ample pastures for their livestock all year round, fertile soil, and the warmth of the sun as well a strategic position for defence purposes in times of war.[16]

Apart from that, population growth propelled these communities to seek alternative places to inhabit. The grassland though not as fertile as the coastal lands for crop farming, emerged as the ultimate option for their livestock. Archaeological research by Morelli reveals the gradual transition of early Iron Age settlements towards the late Iron Age settlements in the period around the end of the first millennium Common Era (CE) was characterised by settlement patterns shifting further from riversides towards hillsides and hilltops.[17]

According to Maggs, expansion towards the grasslands was towards elevated grounds. It was centred in valleys near major rivers and some of their tributaries. Such data demonstrates that early Iron Age settlements were higher than 1000m above sea level.[18] Maggs shows that early Iron Age communities were careful in selecting settlement areas. For one, there had to be provision for ecological needs. Access to fertile soil and adequate rainfall for their crops and livestock were given priority. Migration into the upland grasslands reached the Transvaal at around the fifth century; however, after that, there is no clear link between early Iron Age Bantu groups and late Iron Age Bantu groups in Southern Africa.[19]

[16] S.J Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.29.
[17] E. Morelli, "The Wind that Dries up the Land War, Power, and Slavery of the Southern African Highveld c.1500-c.1800," PhD diss., (University of London, 2018), p.92.
[18] T. Maggs, "The Iron Age Sequence South of the Vaal and Pongola Rivers: Some Historical Implications," The Journal of African History 21, no.1 (1980), p.6.
[19] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa : From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London : Croom Helm, 1995), p.9.

A lucid history of the late Iron Age Bantu groups emerged from around the fifteenth century. This period was marked by extensive settlements of the Southern Highveld, with the occupation of higher ground parts of the Bokone/Natal, the Transkei and Ciskei precincts in modern South Africa.[20] Largely, migration of these societies was often sparked by internal conflicts and power struggles that prompted seceding groups to seek alternative fertile agricultural land and livestock pastures.

Murombedzi argues that migration, or split of polities, was sometimes instigated by scarcity of resources due to population growth, or an economic activity, which propelled expansion into unoccupied spaces in search for abundant resources.[21] Eldredge supports that following the split between the Sotho and the Tswana speaking groups the fifteenth century, the Sotho moved into the Southern Highveld.[22] Oral traditions and archaeological evidence suggest that a hill south of the Lekoa/Vaal, Ntsoanatsatsi, was the earliest settlement of the Sotho speaking groups. According to Maggs, this settlement was first occupied by the Bafokeng clan following a split in the early fifteenth century.[23] Between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Bafokeng people were joined by the Bakoena clan, who co-existed and intermarried.[24]

[20] Ibid., p.10.
[21] J. Murombedzi, *Pre-colonial and Colonial Conservation Practices Southern Africa and their Legacy Today*, 2003, p.1.
[22] E. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom : The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.37.
[23] T. Maggs, "Iron Age Patterns and Sotho History of the Southern Highveld: South Africa," *World Archaeology* 7, no.3 (1976): p.328.
[24] D.F Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), pp.17-20.

Settlement Zoning among Sotho Communities

Among the Sotho speakers, the settlement and zoning of a landscape were determined by its practicality in meeting the needs of its occupants. As seen above, their settlement patterns reflected survival needs. Availability of building resources, fertile land for crop production and good pastures for their livestock were a priority, as shown. Moody substantiates this as she notes that safety and food security for both humans and livestock were carefully considered when selecting a site in any given landscape.[25]

Early Sotho communities already had a sense of planning and zoning land in accordance with their needs and spatial organisation. Sites were set aside for farming, burials, social gatherings, grazing and residential purposes. In his description of the organisation of the Sotho speaking communities, Casalis states that his first encounter with Sotho speakers' settlements, organised around villages, indicated that these groups had a long history of migration and settlement.[26] He further demonstrates that the Sotho carefully considered elevated landscapes with constant rainfall patterns for their subsistence.[27]

Furthermore, land was a communal property among pre-colonial Sotho communities; neither an individual nor a chief held private rights over land. However, to organize the spatial occupation and use of land, it was the chief, a traditional clan leader, who allocated sites to his followers. This means that such a figure had administrative and controlling rights. A standard village was a

[25] E. Moody, *Towns and Villages in Lesotho: Basic data on the Level and Range of Services* (Pretoria: Africa Institute, 1974), p.i.
[26] E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p.123.
[27] Ibid., p.123.

reflection of communal ownership of land where space was shared. A typical Sotho settlement as an enormous circle, with the middle part reserved for livestock and huts surrounding it.[28]

Other accounts show that the Sotho speakers of the Southern Highveld organised themselves into densely populated groups of about 1000 people across an average of 100 houses.[29] The numbers on which villages were formed showed a level of population growth among the Sotho people. According to Huffman, the diversity of Bantu-speaking communities in Southern Africa was mainly stimulated by collective numbers and the spread of a particular group over a geographical stretch.[30] Which means that the settlement of a landscape was determined by the capacity of a group and the vastness of land it occupied.

Early forms of interaction between the San and the agro-pastoralist Sotho speaking communities illuminated a mutual understanding that land was a communal property. In fact, the former were nomadic, maintaining loose ties and claims to land. To avoid conflict between the two cultures, the understanding was that the agricultural practices of the Bantu people should not interfere with the hunter gatherers way of life.[31] Despite some of these commonly held understandings, communal ownership of land remained a problematic issue which occasionally incited intra and inter group conflicts. In this regard, Thabane indicates that ownership of land among the Sotho people has always been ambiguous. However, wars over land were settled on terms that it was

[28] Ibid., p.123.
[29] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld 1500-2000," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.8.
[30] T.N. Huffman, "Archaeological Evidence and Conventional Explanation of Southern Bantu Settlement Patterns," *Africa* 5, no 3 (1986): p.280.
[31] M. Singh, "Basutoland: A Historical Journey into the Environment," *Environmental and History* 6, no1 (2000): 36.

communal property. More often than not, the land tenure system was that "the king holds the land in trust of his whole people".[32]

The Sotho groups of the Southern Highveld maintained strong cultural similarities with Tswana groups even after their separation around the fifteenth century. One of the practices the Sotho upheld was the land tenure system. Within the Sotho-Tswana land tenure system, the duty of the chief was to allocate land to his male subjects for cultivation and construction of houses. A chief also maintained complete authority on where kraals and houses were placed and could expropriate land from anyone as he pleased.[33] Not only was the chief the principal administrator of land, but he was also directly involved in its planning and zoning. Some of the duties of the chief involved reserving special communal grazing areas known as "*Maboella*". These were sites set aside temporarily from livestock grazing or human activity like harvesting of thatching grass or reeds for the benefit of land recuperation and contraveners of such orders were liable to punishment.[34]

When it came to arable land, the chief allocated fields to married men during the ploughing season and would open such land for communal grazing after crops had been harvested. In Sotho customs, the occupant could only plough the field upon approval by the chief in order to avoid any trespassing by livestock owners.[35] As much as a chief enjoyed the privilege of administering land, his authority did not, however, extend beyond his jurisdiction. Given the constant migratory life

[32] M. Thabane, *Who Owns The Land in Lesotho? Land Disputes and The Politics of Land Ownership in Lesotho* (Roma: Institute of Southern African Studies, 1998), p.1-2.
[33] Elizabeth A. Eldgredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp.36-37.
[34] Basutoland Laws of Lerotholi (Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Depot, 1955), p.13-14.
[35] P. Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960), p.86.

of the Sotho speaking groups, people had the liberty of migrating and resettling under a different jurisdiction, or seek entirely new places to settle for factors already discussed before.[36]

Sotho speaking communities' kraals were more than just structures for keeping livestock, they were a central space for social activities. A kraal was a domain for men, a social meeting place and a burial ground.[37] According to an old Sotho tradition, elderly people and owners of cattle were buried inside a kraal because it was believed that the wealth, which in this case was cattle, should not be separated from its owner. Other people were nonetheless buried in designated grave sites which were appointed by the chief.

Sotho Architecture

Architecture played a pivotal role in how Sotho speaking groups expressed themselves within their environment. It was a distinct cultural expression of norms and traditions which embodied their social organization and identity as people. Generally, house designs conformed to climate, topography, availability of materials and skills. The architecture of the Sotho speaking communities had some resemblance with that of the Tswana because of a common past between these two cultures. To Sotho speaking groups, architecture did not only encompass the structure but also embellishment patterns, settlement patterns and the use of such structures.[38]

[36] E.A. Eldgredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.37.
[37] J. Walton, Sotho Cattle Kraals," *The South African Archaeological Bulletin* 13, no.52 (1958):133.
[38] M. Morojele, *The Role of Architecture in Giving Identity to a People*, Morija Museum Archives.

Two house styles seem to dominated in pre-colonial Sotho settlements; the corbelled beehive house structure and the thatch dome hut known as *mohlongoa-fatše.* According to Walton, the corbelled beehive structures were predominant in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. These kinds of huts were built from boulders of dolerite, or sandstone. The entrance was closed with a flat stone slab. The huts were adjoined to a kraal.[39]

The corbelled hut structure appears to have gained popularity over the grass huts, so much so that it may easily be presumed that grass huts were a later invention. Dreyer, however, contradicts this perception by highlighting that, on certain pre-*Lifaqane Wars* Iron Age sites, there was evidence of burnt mud bricks and imprints of perishable material like reed and grass being used in building of houses.[40] In the post-*Lifaqane* period, Casalis gives a description of a typical Sotho house. He describes it as a thatched oval shaped dome, which could only be entered in a crawling position in order to deter predators and cold winds from infiltrating.[41]

Landscape Memory and Place Naming

Like other societies the world over, Sotho groups assigned names to topographical features in their proximity.[42] Places were distinguished by names associated with the memories and sentimental attachments occupants held on such spaces. Names were picked in reference to events, physical landscape features, biodiversity, or someone deemed important, who once resided at a place. Memories that people cherished about a particular place helped retain oral traditions that were

[39] J. Walton, "Corbelled Stone Huts in Southern Africa," *Man* 51 (1951):45.
[40] J. Dreyer, "The Basotho hut: From Late Iron Age to Present," *South African Journal of Ethnology 16*, no.3 (1993):79.
[41] E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives), p.19.
[42] Republic of Botswana, Place Names Commission, Second List of Names and Recommended Spelling, p.1.

associated with that culture. Which means memory does not idle on its own; it relies on trigger effects which are known as mnemonic devices. These reminders enabled the recollection of oral traditions by use of objects, smell, sounds, or space. Rubin advances that oral traditions are susceptible to alteration over an extensive stretch of time due to their reliance on memory as they descend from one person to the other.[43]

Similarly, Vansina indicates that given the uniqueness of "unwritten" sources, whose main form of transmission is oral, memory becomes significant in safeguarding and relaying such traditions from one generation to the other.[44] For instance, although it exists physically and was at some point occupied by the Bafokeng and Bakuena people, Ntsoanatsatsi, which means "Rising Sun," is believed to be a place where the Sotho people originate. Legend has it that "…there is a cave there surrounded by marshes and reeds from which they believe themselves to have come in some miraculous manner."[45] In this regard, Ntsoanatsatsi is a greatly significant place among the Sotho speaking groups, existing historically and mythically. Though altered by the passing of time, its memory is deeply etched in narratives of their identity. This a good example of places being named according to memories and a sentimental value they hold in a cultural group.

Among the Sotho speaking groups, places were named as landmarks. In some instances, a place could bear more than one name; one given by its dwellers and another given by outsiders. In other cases, the latter name could easily override the original if a significant occurrence or a person was associated with a particular place.[46] For example, in the oral traditions of the Maphetla, a pioneer

[43] D. C. Rubin, *Memory in Oral Traditions : The Cognitive Psychology of Epic, Ballads and Counting Rhymes* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1995), p.3.
[44] J. Vansina, *Oral Traditions: A Study of Historical Methodology* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961), p.1.
[45] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.18.
[46] D.W.Lucas, "Villages in Lesotho: Their Names and their Location," *Lesotho Notes and Records* no. 6 (1966-67): 12.

Bantu group to first occupy present day Lesotho after crossing the Drakensberg westerly, bound from the Tugela falls in the east around 1600. The name of a place well known by Basotho as Ntlo-kholo, was home to the San wife of Matelile who refused to relocate when the rest of the clan descended to lower benches of the settlement because she preferred a cave dwelling. By virtue of being the dwelling of the principal wife, the name 'Ntlo-kholo' meaning the 'Principal House', emerged and remains popular.[47]

According to Jordan, place names are primarily ascribed to function as description of landscape characteristics, its formation and how people identify with it.[48] The concept of place naming however, has always been dynamic. It has continually been governed by social norms and evolution. At times, travellers, or late comers in the area, would either adopt and embrace the original name of a place, or give it a new name in their own dialect, then it becomes known by different names if not completely by new ones.[49] A fitting example of the above concept is 'Kaqhoha', a mountain originally named by the San had its name changed to Botheta by the Maphetla because of their defence mechanism of rolling down boulders to crush their enemies.[50] The name Botheta is derived from "*ho theta*" which means "to roll".

[47] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.22.
[48] P. Jordan, "*Landscape and Names: The Role of Geographical Names in Space and Space Related Identity Building*," Folia Geographical 16 (2010): 47.
[49] Republic of Botswana, Place Names Commission, Second List of Names and Recommended Spelling, p.1.
[50] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.22.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as part of the Bantu agro-pastoralist Iron Age population, the pre-colonial Sotho speaking groups of the Southern Highveld relied heavily on the land they occupied. A history of their migration and settlement shows how they selected landscapes to accommodate and sustain their livelihoods and livestock. They had devised ways of surviving and practising their norms and traditions. It is quite evident that as they relocated from one place to another, they carried with them memories of those places. From the above discussion, it is evident that the Sotho groups were aware of their environment and had developed sophisticated ways of managing their environmental resources.

CHAPTER 4

Environment and Political Organisation of the Sotho Speaking Groups

Introduction

Environment has an influence on how people organise themselves on the landscape. This chapter examines institutions of governance among pre-colonial Sotho speaking groups of the Southern Highveld. The basis of African political systems was on kinship and lineage. The political organisation and relationships stemmed from the belief in a common ancestor which appears in the mythical stories of human origins.[1] These formed the foundation upon which societies and ethnic groups were built. Different forms of governance existed within pre-colonial African societies before the arrival of colonial powers. Africans built their governance systems based on their values, traditions and norms. Machobane describes indigenous institutions of governance among Sotho speaking communities as

> …the chieftaincy as an institution of political leadership; the traditional counsellors according to their various function; the pitso (the all-male public assembly; and the *makhotla* (courts or councils) and their functions in the formulation of policy, law-making, and dispute settlement.[2]

Sotho speaking communities were governed in almost the same way despite the size of each chiefdom.[3] This chapter demonstrates that their political stratification was to some extent flexible,

[1] G. Martin, "The Political Ideology of Indigenous African Political Systems and Institutions from Antiquity to the Nineteenth Century," In, *African Political Thought* (New York: Pelgrave Macmillan, 2012), p.11.
[2] L.B.B.J. Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.ix.
[3] L. Thompson, *Survival in the Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe* of Lesotho 1786-1870 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), p.15.

Thompson argues that there was fluidity to move up or down depending on various circumstances.[4]

Lineages and Chieftaincy

Pre-colonial Sotho speaking communities were predominantly patriarchal.[5] Men were dominant in matters of government and ownership of wealth.[6] Among the Southern Sotho groups, governance started at family level and expanded to include a community. Male figures within a family were regarded as leaders and decision makers who acted in the best interests of their homestead. Casalis affirms that:

> The father, the eldest son, and, in some tribes the maternal uncle, govern and protect the family. The authority of the father is acknowledged as supreme as long as he is in his vigour, but weakens as he advances in age; and, at his death, devolves entirely upon the eldest son.[7]

The father involved the eldest son in making decisions on important family matters. According to Sotho customs, by virtue of birth, the eldest son became the heir to inherit his father's property and responsibilities upon his death. Typically, this arrangement often caused sibling rivalries,

[4] Ibid., p.15.
[5] A patriarchal society is a society in which men hold positions of control, dominance and ownership of property. In patriarchal society women are considered minors who depend on men.
[6] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.49; T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld 1500-2000," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.9.
[7] E.Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p.179.

especially in families where the father was a polygamist. Conflict usually came about in cases where male first-borns of different wives wanted equal rights with to eldest male sibling from the first house, a senior wife. However, in a polygamous marriage, the eldest male assumed the role of head of family as soon as the father died.[8] On occasions where the father died while the eldest son was still a minor, one of the paternal uncles would act as head of family until the heir was of age.

Women were confined to domestic responsibilities. On a daily basis, they were responsible for agricultural production, preparing meals for their families, taking care of children and collecting water.[9] Despite all these, they remained minors who were dependent on men legally, socially and economically. They were prohibited from participating in deliberations and decisions that affected society. Apart from that, they were denied political power and a say in making decision that affected their lives.[10]

Apart from the authority men had over their families, other similar relationships existed on a larger scale of governance. Chieftainship was one of the most important institutions of governance of the Sotho speakers. Among the Sotho speaking groups, governance revolved around the chieftainship and the homestead. Just as men headed their families, a chief[11] ruled over a ward, or a settlement.[12] As a result, a group of related homesteads made up a chieftaincy, ruled over by the head of the senior lineage, who was undoubtedly wealthy, and owned the most cattle. Other groups

[8] Ibid, p. 179.
[9] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.47.
[10] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld 1500-2000," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.9.
[11] A chief is a traditional leader. Usually head of a senior lineage who rules over a settlement.
[12] S.J. Gill, A Short History of Lesotho (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.46.

could still choose to attach themselves to a chiefdom even if they were not related to the ruling lineage. Such groups got integrated into settlements as additional population under the ruling chief, hence resulting in settlement expansion.[13]

Just as with lineage succession, succession within the institution of chieftainship was by birth right. The right to chieftaincy inheritance was patrilineal. It was hereditary through the male line, and normally passed down from father to son.[14] However, given the continuous split and regroup tendencies of the Sotho speaking groups due to succession disputes within the ruling family, or the expansion of settlements. The right to chieftaincy in some instances was not always based on lineage succession because of certain exceptions and variations which did not naturally follow the basic principles of succession. In some cases an unsatisfied member of the lineage or chiefdom could break away from the main group by gathering his followers and cattle to establish a new settlement elsewhere.[15] The leader of the breakaway group therefore became a chief. This shows that chieftainship was not strictly hereditary; there was flexibility to install a chief from a noble background based on his competence.[16] Kimble supports that:

> A chief was a man who could attract followers, hold feasts, feed and clothe the impoverished, organise and provision military expeditions, conduct diplomatic negotiations, and run a costly administrative structure.[17]

[13] K. Shillington, *History of Southern Africa* (Edinburgh:Longman, 1987), p.18.
[14] H. Ashton, *The Basuto* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p.193.
[15] Ibid, p.15.
[16] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.49.
[17] J. Kible, "*Towards an Understanding of the Political Economy of Lesotho: The Origins of Commodity Production and Migrant Labour, 1830-1885*," Masters diss, (National University of Lesotho, 1978), p.68.

The numerous clans of the Sotho speaking groups had several chiefdoms of different sizes. Within each chiefdom, the main role of the chief was to oversee the welfare of his followers and to allocate land, pastures, reeds and trees. The chief also held an executive role in legislative and judicial matters.[18] Wealth and cattle were necessary for a chief to remain relevant among his followers. Otherwise, he risked being abandoned by his followers for a much wealthier chief. As much as the chief expected his subjects to pay tribute by providing communal labour (*matsema),* which were used in cultivating and harvesting his fields, the generosity towards his people secured his popularity. People were easily attracted to a wealthier and generous chief, and would willingly leave a stingy, or cruel chief.[19] Chiefs displayed generosity towards their poorer subjects by sharing their wealth through the system of cattle loaning known as (*mafisa*). They also helped with paying dowry, or marriage cattle (*bohali*) on behalf of poor followers who wanted to get married.[20]

Acts of generosity by rulers encouraged loyalty from their subjects and could easily attract even more followers hence the expansion of chiefdoms. Sanders gives a suitable example of how the law of succession was sometimes modified by external influences such as the popularity and followership of a suitable candidate. He mentions that given the popularity of Mokhachane (Libenyane),[21] he superseded his elder brother, Libe, who by virtue of birth, or seniority, should have ruled over him. Libe was, however, a stingy and inconsiderate man, who did not cater for the needs of his people as expected . Mokhachane was able to win over the majority of his brothers' followers because of his public display of generosity and hospitality. As a result, his brother, Libe, lost influence on his people even though he continued to rule over a few who still

[18] S.J.Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.49.
[19] Ibid, p.49.
[20] Ibid, p.60-64.
[21] Mokhachane was Moshoeshoe's father and the chief of Bakoena of the Mokoteli, a minor or very junior branch of the Bakoena.

adhered to him. [22] This example shows that not all successors to the throne were in the direct line of descent of chieftainship. Most importantly, harmonious interactions between chiefs and commoners were beneficial to both parties; one could not prosper without the other. In other words, political governance among the pre-colonial Sotho speaking groups was rooted in mutual respect and support between subjects and their rulers.

Furthermore, the pre-colonial Sotho speakers believed that a great chief was also a 'rainmaker'. His religious and political authority was judged on his ability to make rain. A chief, therefore, was also a spiritual leader, who had close contact with the spirits of ancestors. During rainmaking ceremonies, he could summon ancestral spirits to ask for good rain and harvest on behalf of his subjects.[23] He performed his duties through the support of elders from leading families, traditional healers and councillors as stipulated by custom.[24]

Councillors (*Matona*)

Institutions of governance, distribution and control of authority, legal systems and territorial integrity existed among the pre-colonial Sotho speaking communities.[25] Traditionally, the chief was not the sole decision maker on matters pertaining to governance. He ruled with the help of other men of the clan, or tribe, known as the 'right hands of the chief' (*Matona*).[26] Other than that, institutions such as the chief's council, spiritual healers and community elders were

[22] P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho* (London: Heinemann, 1975), pp.5-6.
[23] K. Shillington, *History of Southern Africa* (Edinburgh:Longman, 1987), p.15.
[24]L.B.B.J. Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.14; S.J. Gill, A Short History of Lesotho (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.49.
[25] Ibid, 27.
[26] P. Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1960), p.47.

important actors in governance. Such institutions were established to counterbalance the chief's authority in order to curb any abuse of power.[27] As much as the chief was the highest authority within a polity, his power was shared among and controlled by members of his court (*Lekhotla*).[28]

Even though there was no fixed allocation of duties, the chief could appoint men within his counsel for special duties such as the commander of forces (*Molaoli oa Mabotho*) . A commander was chosen based on his courage and skills. Most of the time, this was someone closely related to the chief. Another important member of the chief's council was a bellman (*Seboholi*). Their duties included announcing, or calling people for public meetings. Apart from that, the chief also had sentries, or watchmen, who guarded the main entry point of the village.[29]

The chief received a lot of assistance and advice from his counsel. He could also consult individuals within his lineage. These were individuals with special knowledge on a particular issue, or even seek wisdom from commoners and strangers. Although all these advisers were often considered as councillors, however, they did not belong among the official advisers whom the chief formally picked. Consultations with such councillors were discreet and were held in private places like the chief's hut. It was very rare that the chief would hold public meetings with these informal advisers.[30]

[27] E. E. Evans- Pritchard, "Introduction", in *African Political Systems*, ed. M. Fortes (London: Oxford University Press, 1940), p.11.
[28] L.B.B.J. Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.19.
[29] P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe: Chief of the Sotho* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 14; Hugh Ashton, The Basuto (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p.214.
[30] H. Ashton, *The Basuto* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p.215.

Chiefs were not expected to perform most of their chiefly duties themselves therefore they could delegate. Only a few chief carried out their duties in person. It was common for a chief to have principal councillors whom he trusted to perform certain duties on his behalf. For example, among pre-colonial Sotho speaking communities there was no private ownership of land. Residential, cultivation and grazing lands were held and administered by the chief on behalf of his people. As a result, the chief usually got assistance from a few members of his council.[31] According to Machobane, it was important for a chief to have a hierarchy of administrative official working under him. It was even more important that the chief delegated part of his duties to his council in accordance with established traditional institutions and principles.[32]

The Role of Traditional Healers in Governance

Traditional healers had an important role to play in governance. Apart from their regular responsibility of healing spiritual and physical ailments, they also served as community advisors and protectors. Most importantly, they fortified the chief's influence and power by making a special 'tribal horn', which also benefited the community. The tribal horn (lenaka) could be the medicine container itself, which was the horn of an animal or medicines that used for protective purposes.[33] According to Ellenberger, every tribe had a special tribal horn, which contained medicine and other secret ingredients only known to the chief.[34]

[31] P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe: Chief of the Sotho* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p.13.
[32] L.B.B.J. Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.3.
[33] H. Ashton, *The Basuto* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p.306.
[34] D. F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto : Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archive, 1997), p. 259.

This mystical potion could purify defilement, stop and repair past evils, as well as to prevent adverse future accidents.[35] The horn was a sacred and respectable item to every tribe, or clan. All chiefs owned one. A selection of ingredients such as plants, certain animals' flesh, and an ox, which was sacrificed to consecrate the mixture, were included in preparing the 'tribal horn'. The ingredients were chosen based on the natural traits of plants and animals they were taken from. They were then burnt to ashes, which would then be mixed with gall and stored in the horn.[36] Accordingly, the chief kept this treasured medicine. He administered it to his people on occasions such as the breakout of an epidemic, threats of war, or if public affairs went wrong.[37] The above discussion demonstrates that traditional healers relied heavily on the environment, they harnessed natural resources as some of the basic components in their practice because they had an enhanced knowledge of the healing abilities of the environment.

Traditional healers occupied respectable statuses within their communities. Their importance was heightened by the recognition they received from the chief who trusted them to intervene and offer advice on public affairs. They were called upon by the chief to put off natural disasters, prevent the spread of epidemics, ward off witchcraft, forewarn people on looming crises, strengthen warriors before war, and purify them upon returning from war.[38]

The responsibilities of traditional healers also entailed protecting the settlement, its major paths and passes with charms to prevent witchcraft and physical attacks by enemies.[39] The ritual of

[35] E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p. 256.
[36] D. F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto : Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archive, 1997), p. 259; E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija : Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p. 256-257.
[37] Ibid, p.259-260 ; p. 257.
[38] S. J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p. 52; D. F. Ellenberger, History of the Basuto : Ancient and Modern (Morija: Morija Museum and Archive, 1997), p. 260.
[39] L.B.B.J. Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p.

"pinning down the town" or "to peg the town" (*ho thakhisa motse*) was the doctoring of a village, performed by pinning into the ground small pegs of wood coated with medicine from the tribal horn around various quarters within the village.[40] This formality was necessary and strictly observed when a chief changed his residence to settle on a new site with his people.[41]

Lekhotla and the Rule of Law

The institution of *Lekhotla* (chief's court) existed as both a physical place and a system of dispute arbitration among the pre-colonial Sotho speaking communities. *Lekhotla/Khotla* was synonymous with the chief. Physically, *Lekhotla* or *Khotla* was a space set within, or not far from the residence of the chief, enclosed by natural landmarks such as boulders or trees. *Khotla* was a general place where men spent their time and occasionally, elderly men. It was a central communal meeting place for villagers where important matters were discussed and communal work was conducted. This was also where the chief spent a lot of time in the company of his advisors, or counsellors (*Matona*), discussing public affairs, meeting visitors and trying cases.[42] *Khotla* was strictly a men's domain. Women were restricted from entering *Khotla.* They could only go near it when they brought food to their husbands. On rare occasions, women were allowed to enter *Khotla* as witnesses, or accomplices in a lawsuit.[43]

[40] D. F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archive, 1997), p. 260; E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p. 257.
[41] E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p. 257.
[42] E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p. 124-125; Scott Rosenberg and Richard F.Weisefelder, *Historical Dictionary of Lesotho* (The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013), p.208.
[43] D. F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archive, 1997), p. 266.

The institution of *Khotla* was the backbone of justice. *Khotla* was a place where criminal offences and lawsuits were heard and judged.[44] It was a place specially dedicated to conflict and dispute resolution by the chief and his counsellors (men of the court, or courtiers). This was also where the chief was met even by the meanest of his men and was equally willing to hear cases, or complaints brought by the most humble, or the poorest among his subjects. For example, Thompson mentions that Moshoeshoe spent most of his time in his *Lekhotla* listening to the latest gossip among his people. He describes this as a display of humility by a chief to his people, regardless of their social or political status.[45]

Lekhotla and the Curatorship and Distribution of Natural Resources

In the pre-colonial Sotho speakers land tenure, *Khotla* was an important institution through which natural resources were managed. For example, land could only be allotted by a chief or headman through his powers in the *lekhotla* and in public. The economy of the Sotho speaking communities was centred around chieftainship and household production. It was from these two domains that resources were allocated accordingly. The socio-economic status among the southern Sotho relied on the ownership of livestock, control of labour and land.[46] Although the chief could not claim ownership of land, he was the main administrator on issues concerning its allocation. Apart from that, the chief was also in charge of some economic activities that involved land, while at the same time each household still had to retain its livelihood.[47]

[44] E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p. 124
[45] L. Thompson, *Survival in the Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe* of Lesotho 1786-1870 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), p.212.
[46] E. A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.34.
[47] S. J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.46.

Communal work parties, *matsema,* were some of the ways through which resources were produced and distributed among the southern Sotho. These work parties were usually performed by subjects as a way of paying homage to their chief. The nature of *matsema* work parties was such that; men and women were expected to carry out communal duties that entailed working the fields of the chief, hunting and procuring exotic animal products such as horns, skins and feathers for their leader.[48] The *matsema* work parties did not only benefit the chief but his subjects too. The harvest from the chiefs fields was used to feed the poor among his followers, travellers or visitors passing by the chief's place and the army.[49]

These communal duties to the chief also involved accumulating and safeguarding wealth through raiding of cattle among others. Moreover, such tribute included provision of security to the wealth of the chief and his followers. The acquisition of more cattle and other commodities that were associated with wealth were important to chiefs because they guaranteed status and more followers. Apart from that, these communal work parties were an expression of political allegiance by subjects to their chief. By providing free labour, they were guaranteed land for their own use and other community services or benefits from their chief.[50]

Since wealth was generated from a household level, its accumulation varied from one family to another. Because of this, there were still those within the society who could not generate enough wealth to sustain their living. While others, unfortunately lost their wealth because of cattle raiding

[48] Ibid., p.47.
[49] M. A. Kapa, "Consolidating Democracy Through Integrating the Chieftainship Institution with Elected Councils in Lesotho: A Case Study of Four Community Councils in Maseru," PhD Thesis, (University of Rhodes, December 2010), p.115.
[50] Ibid., p.115.

or natural disasters. It was under these circumstances that the southern Sotho groups distributed resources through a system called *mafisa. Mafisa* was the loaning of cattle by the wealthy, or the chief, to his impoverished subjects in order to gain their loyalty.[51] In line with the *mafisa* system, subjects to whom cattle were loaned enjoyed benefits such as milk, using oxen for ploughing fields and carrying load.[52]

Within this arrangement however, the loaned herds remained property of the chief, or the rich cattle owner. It was usually flocks and herds acquired through raiding or during war that were used in the *mafisa* custom.[53] At times, after selecting the ones he preferred, the chief would then distribute the remaining ones among his subjects. This way, even the poor of the poorest had an opportunity to obtain cattle.

The *mafisa* cattle loan practice may be argued to have been exploitative, or in favour of the wealthy and chiefs. Despite such arguments, it allowed the beneficiary to acquire livestock.[54] Among the Sotho where cattle were a significant measure of wealth, *mafisa* was not seen as exploitative, in fact, it was a system that served the social and economic security of the poor.[55] Even though the system was created to restore the socio-economic dignity of others, it lacked balance. It gave the rich cattle owners and chiefs excessive dominance and power over their beneficiaries. With this being the case, *mafisa* is critiqued for creating dependency and a lasting

[51] S. D. Turner, "Sesotho Farming : The Condition and Prospects of Agriculture in the Lowlands and Foothills of Lesotho, " PhD Thesis, (University of London, 1978), p.126.
[52] E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p.155.
[53] Ibid., p.155.
[54] T. Mothibe, "State and Society, 1824-1833," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.21.
[55] E. A. Eldredgre, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century* Lesotho (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 34.

state of liability to the borrower, with implications such as being treated as a junior to the cattle owner, who could also arranged his marriage if circumstances dictated as such.[56]

Marriage was another way through which resources were acquired and allocated. As a result, it was a significant social and economic arrangement. Wives and off-spring provided much needed labour in agricultural production and the reproduction of society which offered economic benefits in return. The Sotho marriage custom of *bohali,* which was an exchange of cattle between two families whose children wanted to get into a covenant of marriage, sufficed in wealth distribution. When a girl got married, her father received bride-wealth, or *bohali,* which was a certain number of cattle from the family of the groom as compensation and a symbol of gratitude.[57]

Apart from *bohali* being a transfer of cattle between two families, it served as a means through which new trade routes were established. For example, some marriage arrangements happened between families of different cultures and geographical backgrounds who would eventually find commodities to trade. Furthermore, through *bohali* the family into which the girl was getting married acquired human capital in the form of a bride.[58]

In the Sotho land tenure, marriage qualified a man to be apportioned three fields by the chief, of which the receiver would keep one for himself and give two to his wife.[59] The allocation of land

[56] L. Thompson, *Survival in the Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Glasgow: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.12.
[57] L. Thompson, S*urvival in the Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Glasgow: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.11.
[58] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld, 1500-1800," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.10.
[59] P. Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1960), p.90

to a married man gave him an economic advantage because his household could produce more. Women who were not married could be allocated land legally only if they have been freed from the status of being a minor.[60] Because of patriarchy, spinsters in Sotho speaking communities were considered minors who remained under the wing of their father and therefore could not be allotted land unless the status of being a minor was annulled. People who were not yet married could be emancipated from the status of being minors through *lebollo* (traditional initiation school)[61]. *Lebollo* is a rite of passage meant for young adults (girls and boys) to facilitate transition into adulthood or maturity. It came with benefits such as one gaining rights, opportunities, responsibilities and statuses in families and communities.[62]

Wealth distribution among the Sotho groups however had its flaws. Despite women being the main producers, or the anchors of wealth and its accumulation, it was men who controlled it.[63] The economy was designed to favour men regardless of their marital status in comparison to women. For example, since men were dominant in society, they were in charge of livestock and agricultural produce. Men were decision makers who also controlled most economic activities and resources.

The Role of *Pitso* in Governance

[60] P. Duncan, *Sotho Laws and Customs* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1960), p.87.
[61] L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.7.
[62] N. Mohlabane, "(Re)-Construction of Womanhood in Lesotho: Narratives of 'Unmarried Basotho Women (Methepa)," PhD Thesis, (University of Pretoria, 2020), p.34; T. Matobo and E. E. Obioha, "Continuity of Traditional Initiation Practice of Boys and Girls in Contemporary Southern Africa,"Studies of Tribes and Tribals 7, no.2 (2009): pp.105-113
[63] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld, 1500-1800," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.9.

Pitso[64] (plural, *Lipitso*) was a public gathering. It was convened by the chief to discuss and make decisions on national affairs. A chief could call this mass gathering whenever he had important matters, or problems, to discuss with his initiated adult male subjects.[65] These kinds of assemblies were platforms where people could raise their concerns and express themselves freely, even if what they had to say was not in favour of the chief and his councillors. As a political formation, a *pitso* enabled communication downwards from the government to the people and upwards from the people to the government. It allowed freedom of speech to everyone just as Sesotho proverbs express that "*mooa-khotla ha a tsekisoe*", meaning 'he who speaks his mind at the chief's courtyard cannot be blamed' and "*moro-khotla ha o okoloe mafura*", which means, at the chief's courtyard, things are said as they are.[66]

Lipitso encouraged national unity among people. They were aimed at building a strong partnership between the chief and his subjects. *Lipitso* were so important that their proceedings were filled with festivities. Their proceedings started with the royal praise-singer singing praises to the chief, while warriors sang their praises, individually and in a group, with entertaining performances of war dances. All these performances were followed by the main reason for the gathering, where the chief and his councillors would address the people. On this platform, the crowd could agree or disagree on matters presented to them. There was liberty for commoners to criticize and debate national affairs with their seniors. Nonetheless, the chief always had the last word.[67] Overall,

[64] Pitso is a public gathering which is usually convened by the leader of a chiefdom to discuss and rule over important matters.
[65] T. Mothibe, "State and Society, 1824-1833," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.30; L. Thompson, Survival in Two Worlds (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975), p.15
[66] L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975), p.63-64; T.Mothibe, "State and Society, 1824-1833," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.30
[67] L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975), p.63

pitso was a consultative tool of governance that promoted active involvement and participation of the public, which can also be viewed as democratic.

Lipitso did not just function as consultative meetings between chiefs and their subjects, but they also served as platforms where the chief asserted his political power and influence. They were also occasions where the social position of chiefs was affirmed.[68] For example, whenever a chief convened a *pitso,* not only did he expect his subjects to attend these gatherings, but even minor chiefs under his jurisdiction. These meetings were reassuring of the main chief's authority over all who lived within his territory, therefore reinforcing his social position. Thompson states that every time Moshoeshoe convened a *pitso*, every territorial chief who regarded him as his *Morena-e-Moholo* (great chief) was expected to be present at Thaba-Bosiu, or any other location as assigned by the chief. Such chiefs were supposed to bring along all male adult subjects, fully armed and only a few were left behind to guard their village. These meetings attracted thousands of men.[69]

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to discuss different institutions of governance among pre-colonial Sotho speaking communities. These communities formulated systems or models of governance which were functional in those times. The chapter also outlined how governance was clearly stratified based on traditional institutions and principles that enabled everyone to know their

[68] M. Thabane, "Social Relations in the Nineteenth Century ," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.71-72.
[69] L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975), p.209.

political position within a polity. It also shows the balance of dependence of one on another. That is, how a chief needed followers as much as followers needed a considerate leader who would take care of them.

CHAPTER 5

Economy and Trade in Agro-pastoralist Communities

Introduction

As precolonial Sotho communities in the Southern Highveld organised themselves in their landscape, they had a livelihood to maintain despite of the ecological constraints. The economy of these societies was based on hunting and gathering, agriculture, mining and crafts manufacturing. Although agriculture was the backbone of production, Green argues that hostile environment and scarcity of labour were some of the challenges pre-colonial were faced with.[1] The main way to maintain their livelihoods was to create and nurture an economy that encompassed the socio-economic interests of everyone regardless of their social status. Households were the hub of the economy because this was where decisions that governed wealth and its accumulation were taken. In an effort to learn more about precolonial Sotho speaking communities of the Highveld it is therefore essential to discuss the dynamics of the economy, trade and resource distribution drawing from a broader spectrum of Southern Africa through the lens of the environment

[1] E. Green, "Production Systems in Pre-Colonial Africa," *The History of African Development* (eds) Ewout Frankema and Ellen Hillbom (Lund University, 2015), p.1.

The economy of precolonial Sotho speaking groups

The economy of precolonial agro-pastoralist Sotho speaking communities relied on a mix of agriculture, trade, hunting, raiding and crafts. The Sotho speaking people were subsistence farmers. Predominantly, they derived a livelihood from a combination of crop farming and animal husbandry.[2] Cattle rearing was fundamental in their agro-pastoralist economy. It was conveniently regarded a determinant of wealth. This means that the wealth of a man was measured by the number of cattle they owned.

The value of cattle extended beyond the well-known productive uses of supplying milk, meat and leather. Cattle substituted other wealth generating sources in times of scarcity. Their ability to reproduce or multiply enhanced their economic significance as capital in trading.[3] Apart from that, fertile land for agricultural production and grazing were sought after as resources for sustaining the economy. This is why it was necessary to occupy the most fertile land. Such ecological landscapes provided other natural resources favourable for accumulation of wealth and economic growth. Therefore, the physical environment was the foundation for blooming economies.

Appreciation of ecology by historians makes it easier to understand past societies' life choices and settlement inclinations. Preference to settle in certain landscapes could have either a positive, or a negative, impact on the economy. At times, ecological constraints influenced certain economic activities on human beings' interaction with their environment.[4] To evoke a much more refined

[2] E.A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth - Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.59.
[3] E.A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth - Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.140.
[4] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970s* (London:Croom Helm, 1995), p.6-44.

awareness on Environmental History, Carruthers emphasizes that environment was a historical resource through which stories of human activities could be better understood by historians.[5]

Geographic settlement and positioning on landscape of a society offered alternative economic benefits depending on the use of such land and its resources. Hence precolonial Sotho speaking communities organised themselves across their landscape strategically as a means of amplifying production and accumulating wealth. However, Eldredge advances that the economic prosperity of a society could not be solely attributed to the environment it occupied, but also the environmental restrictions beyond human management.[6] This is the reason why the most preferred geographical sites to settle were on the best arable land in the high-lying areas of the Southern Highveld.

As with most Iron Age societies in southern Africa, the economic history of the Sotho speaking communities cannot be narrated in isolation from their San hunter and gatherer predecessors. On their migration from the Transvaal, the agro-pastoralist Sotho groups came in contact with indigenous hunter-gatherers with whom distinct relationships were forged. These interdependent relations were heavily rooted in both social and economic aspects of the two cultures. The Iron Age newcomers in the area became a reliable source of iron, pottery, agricultural produce and livestock to the hunter-gathering communities. In return, the hunter-gatherers provided game meat, wild fruits and vegetables as well as rendering their services as herders and sharing their admirable knowledge of plants for medicinal and spiritual healing.[7] This extensive cultural

[5] J. Carruthers, "Histories, Ecologies and Societies,"Environment and History 10, no.4 (2004): p.380.
[6] E.A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth - Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.14.
[7] R.O. Collins and J.O. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.163.

exchange and trade between the Sotho communities and the San was also enhanced by inter-marriage relations. Bride wealth in the form of cattle was paid by the agro-pastoralists to the hunter-gatherers in exchange for San women.[8] The interdependence of these two cultures was sustained by substantial reliance on their environment, they provided each other with produce they gathered and harvested from it.

Although popularly referred to as agro-pastoralist, the economy of Sotho speaking groups of the Southern Highveld was a mix. It was governed by their physical environment and its changes. As much as the Sotho were known for rearing livestock, it is important to emphasise that their economy was largely driven by crop production than by pastoralism. This agriculturally inclined economy thrived from the cultivation of food crops such as sorghum, pumpkins, legumes and other non-food crops like reeds and dagga.[9]

In a patriarchal society where men were the main regulators of wealth and economy, the economy of Sotho speaking groups was classified into two domains.[10] In the first domain, men were responsible for herding cattle to sustain the economy while women shouldered the responsibility of working the fields for agricultural production.

Due to patriarchy, the economical contribution of women was not given enough attention. However, Eldredge highlights that among the Sotho speaking, women were at the fore-front of

[8] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.11.
[9] S. J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.45.
[10] E. Morelli, "The Wind that Dries up the Land War, Power, and Slavery of the Southern African Highveld c.1500-c.1800," PhD diss., (University of London, 2018), p.138-139.

agricultural production which immensely contributed towards economic expansion.[11] She further emphasizes how the importance of women's production in accumulation of wealth and development of economy has been ignored by historians along with their labour merely being reduced to household duties.[12] All production cultivation or pastoralism, was geared towards a common goal of sustaining the wealth of a homestead. After all, the diverse economy created socio-economic security through accumulation of wealth which trickled into population growth and extensive occupation of the landscape.

Even though agriculture and livestock rearing were the backbone of the southern Sotho people's economy, there were alternative economic activities they would engage in from time to time to meet their needs. In times of scarcity owing to environmental conditions beyond human intervention, hunting of wild animals in the mountainous terrain and the south-westerly arid lands became an alternative food supplement.[13] Apart from that, crafts made of leather and grass were a good supplement to the economy.[14]

These alternative economic activities such as the production of crafts and hunting were brought about by the challenge of households not being able to sufficiently provide for themselves. When it came to division of labour for economic activities, men were responsible for the production of leather and its by-products while grass work was carried out by women. Crafts which required a

[11] E.A. Eldredge, "Women in Production: The Economic Role of Women in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho," *Signs* 16, no.4 (1991): p.708-719.
[12] Ibid., p.708-719.
[13] E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p.11.
[14] T. Mothibe, "State and Society, 1824-1833," in Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.7.

refined level of skill like leather production, its processing and the weaving of large grain baskets were communal activities since they were labour intensive.[15]

Trade

The Sotho communities of the Southern Highveld maintained a subsistence economy which was also supplemented by trade. To the Sotho, trade was an exchange of commodities which were conveyed from one group to another in all directions.[16] Which means that the Sotho speaking groups were part of trade networks in the region between people of various cultural backgrounds in order to meet their needs. According to Ellenberger, the long distance trade, which reached the coast and local trade set-ups, facilitated the movement of commodities to areas where the demand was high.[17] This way, regions that were rich in goods such as metal ores, animal products, or salt, were the main suppliers in areas where those commodities were scarce.

In addition, it was through the trade of luxurious and exotic goods that some chiefs were able to secure more power and influence over their subjects. A wealthier and generous chief stood a better chance of attracting more followers. During the late Iron Age, trade was affiliated with tribute in the form of commodities such as salt, metal, ivory, livestock, grain, or other exotic goods that subjects paid to their chiefs.[18]

[15] E.A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.82.
[16] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld, 1500-1800," in Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.7.
[17] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.45.
[18] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.23.

Even though there is little evidence of trade in the Southern Highveld before the 1800s, the spread of metal goods suggests that trade was already thriving in the region prior to this period.[19] According to Maylam, the late Iron Age was characterized by an increase in mining of mineral resources in the Transvaal and surrounding areas including places towards the Southern Highveld.[20] Gold, tin, copper and iron were the main minerals that were produced from the mines in these areas. Of these metals, iron was mainly produced to make farming implements and other household tools. This does not rule out the possibilities of its exportation to areas where the demand was high. Metals such as gold and copper were mainly mined for trading, hence the spread of these metals became the centre of trade in the region.

The Barolong, a subdivision of the Tswana, started producing and trading iron south of the Transvaal as early as the thirteenth century.[21] It is for this reason they are believed to have been the earliest suppliers of iron products in the region. Despite all this, it remains unclear how the spread of iron products reached the Sotho speaking groups in the Mohokare/Caledon valley. Although they were already Iron Age people, iron was probably brought to the Southern from north of the Lekoa/Vaal through trade either by the Barolong of Tswana ancestry, or Hlubi and Zizi of Nguni origins along the Tugela River.[22]

[19] E.A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.19.
[20] P. Maylam*, A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970s* (London: Croom Helm, 1995), p.12.
[21] E.A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.20.
[22] E.A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.20; P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970s* (London: Croom Helm London, 1986), p. 44.

Oral traditions suggest that in the early seventeenth century, a number of Sotho speaking groups in the Southern Highveld started acquiring iron goods such as knives, spatulas and hoes in exchange for animal skins, cattle and tobacco from the Zizi when they migrated into present day Lesotho.[23] Likewise, cooper products along with ivory, horns cattle and skins were distributed in the region by the Pedi traders from the north east area of Musina.[24] The Pedi played a significant role of being intermediaries in trade networks within the region because of the links they maintained with other traders in the coast. According to Maylam, the Pedi were middlemen in the exchange of metal products from the lowveld area of Phalaborwa for agricultural and pastoral goods from the Southern Highveld.[25]

The Sotho speaking communities also engaged in the trade of exotic food crops such as maize, which eventually became their staple. As an indigenous food crop of the Americas, maize was introduced to Africa by missionaries, merchants and slave traders around the sixteenth century.[26] Maize was specifically introduced to the Sotho speakers by the Nguni who got it from the Portuguese in the east coast. However some accounts suggest that it disseminated into the Southern Highveld region from Mozambique around the same time as the Cape Colony.[27]

[23] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London:Macmillan, 1982), p.34.
[24] D.F Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.33; E.A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 20-21; N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London:Macmillan, 1982), p.38.
[25] P. Maylam*, A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970s* (London: Croom Helm, 1995), p.50.
[26] J. McCann, "Maize and Grace: History, Corn and Africa's New Landscapes, 1500-1999,"*Comparative Studies in Society and History* 43, no.2 (2001), p.248.
[27] E.A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 68.

However, back then, maize was not a basic food crop like it is today. The Sotho only planted maize along the edges of their sorghum fields, since the later was a much-preferred grain because of its versatility and resistance to drought. Apart from that, maize thrived in areas that received a lot of rain therefore compared to sorghum; it would not grow that well in the Southern Highveld. Other non-food crops like tobacco and marijuana were also widely traded in the region even before the arrival of the first Europeans. As much as its production was labour intensive, the duty of cultivating tobacco was entrusted on old people in Sotho speaking communities and was usually smoked in pipes, which were also commodities of trade in the region.[28]

As far as trade is concerned, the main form of exchange was barter. However, later on glass beads seem to have been circulated extensively in trade as a form of currency in the region.[29] Due to their scarcity, beads apparently were an ideal medium of exchange in trade. According to archaeological evidence, glass beads of different colours and types which were foreign in the region, sufficed as currency in long distance trade relations between Southern Africa and the outside world from as early as seventh and eighth centuries.[30]

Mothibe mentions that around the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, white and dark blue beads worked as currency in the Southern Highveld.[31] Although evidence of beads only resurfaces way later on, the presence of beads in the economy of the Sotho speaking groups

[28] E.A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 69.
[29] E.A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 21.
[30] G. Pwiti, "Trade and Economies in Southern Africa: The Archaeological Evidence," Zambezia 18, no.2 (1991), p.121.
[31] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld, 1500-1800," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.7.

indicates involvement in trade with other traders along the Indian Ocean. This is because before the introduction of European beads in Southern Africa, according to Portuguese records, beads that were in circulation around the fifteenth century were made in India.[32]

Conclusion

In general, the mixed economy of the Sotho speaking groups was rooted in the land they occupied as part of their environment. The landscape of the Southern Highveld provided much needed conditions for a mixed economy to thrive. Their wealth distribution mechanisms promoted social cohesion by catering for even those who were economically disadvantaged. However, being a predominantly patriarchal society there was still some economic bias, especially towards women. Women shouldered the process of wealth accumulation and power even though decisions concerning such wealth lied entirely in the hands of men. This goes on to show the shortcomings of the socio-economic organisation of the Sotho speaking groups of the Southern Highveld.

[32] M. Wood, Interconnections: Glass Beads and Trade in Southern and Eastern Africa and the Indian Ocean -7th to 16th Centuries AD (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2011), p.34.

CHAPTER 6

Environmental Aspects of Spirituality, Folklore and Culture

Introduction

Ancient African communities have long held beliefs that humans are physically and spiritually connected to their natural environment. Spiritualties around nature existed even before the beginning of modern human civilization. Before then, respect of nature based entities and deities were at the core of many spiritual traditions.[1] Like with most African societies around the continent, Southern Sotho communities of the Southern Highveld had perceptions and values about their natural environment. They believed that not everything in their environment was physical, there was the spiritual side too. This chapter highlights the interconnectedness of spirituality and natural environment within Southern Sotho communities; it explores the importance of their indigenous practices in environmental conservation.

Although not much is known about conservation practices of pre-colonial societies in southern Africa, Murombedzi contends that their ecological conservation practices were integrated in the economic, social and religious practices of that period.[2] Therefore this chapter demonstrates that the Sotho speakers had their conservation practices intertwined in their social and spiritual practices, it shows that Sotho speaking communities of the Southern Highveld already had a

[1] C. P. Egri, "Spiritual connection with the Natural Environment: Pathways for Global Change," *Organization & Environment* 10, no. 4 (1997): p.411.
[2] J. Murombedzi, *Pre-colonial and Colonial Conservation Practices Southern Africa and their Legacy Today*, 2003, p.1.

connection with the universe which was the centre of their mythology and other components of their environment.

God, Spirituality and the Environment

It is human nature to make means to survive in nature, it is also human nature to search and find spiritual meaning and purpose of life within nature. Archaeological records of hunter-gatherer and farming communities show that the environment is the primary life support system which is vital for survival of human beings and non-human beings. [3] It entails a network of social, political, economic, natural and environmental features which connect living things to none living things. In other words, aspects of religion, philosophies, political ideologies and popular culture of a society form part of their Environmental History. Rawat and Misra define spirituality as, "… practices and beliefs which govern life of people an enable them to experience sensible realities of the world. Spirituality encompasses many experiences which prove that the behaviours of human beings are influenced by their values and belief, promoted by a particular community…"[4]

Through their socio-cultural constructions, humans are able to understand the Earth and its living systems.[5] Spirituality and environment go hand in hand. Nature in all its forms is woven into spirituality. It is a source of spiritual and cultural inspiration as well as sustenance.[6] In African

[3] C. P. Egri, "Spiritual connection with the Natural Environment: Pathways for Global Change," *Organization & Environment* 10, no. 4 (1997): p.407-408.
[4] G. Rawat and S Mishra, "Spirituality and Environment: Significance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Africa and Challenges," *Literary Endeavour* 12, no.1 (2021): p.56.
[5] J. Donald Hughes, *What is Environmental History?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), p.9.
[6] C. P. Egri, "Spiritual connection with the Natural Environment: Pathways for Global Change," *Organization & Environment* 10, no. 4 (1997): p.4

societies, belief systems and cultural values are part of historical identity of people, and one cannot be separated from the other.[7]

Southern Sotho speaking groups were aware of the physical and non-physical properties of their environment. They were also aware of the need to manage the environment by exercising deliberate care in their interaction with it. Because of these reasons, they held a strong connection that bound their spirituality to their environment. They believed that humanity itself was connected to the wider universe, therefore human beings could experience oneness with the gods, fellow humans, animals, plants and many other spirits which inhabited the hills, rivers and skies.[8]

Early Sotho speakers traced their origins to the universe. Apart from the mythology of their origins from Ntsoanatsatsi[9], they held a holistic belief that their ancestors originated from the heavens.[10] Their awareness and knowledge of the cosmic was passed down from generation to generation since ancient times through oral traditions. Because of this knowledge, the Southern Sotho speakers allowed themselves to be guided by the heavens and as with other Africans, their cosmic knowledge influenced their own philosophies.[11] The stars and the moon were reliable guides which determined agricultural activities and day to day cultural practices in their annual calendar. For example, a very important star system known them as Selemela or Makolobe marked the beginning of the new year in the Sotho calendar. It appeared towards zthe end of July and the beginning of August in the Gregorian calendar. Apart from that, Selemela or Malokobe ushered

[7] G. Rawat and S. Mishra, "Spirituality and Environment: Significance of Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Africa and Challenges," *Literary Endeavour* 12, no.1 (2021): p.56.
[8] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p. 1.
[9] A place which the southern Sotho consider as the cradle of their origins situated in eastern Free State between Namahadi/Frankfort and Vrede in South Africa.
[10] Z. Zulu, " The African Cosmic Knowledge", August, 2015.
[11] Z. Zulu, "The Basotho Origin of Mathematics "(lecture, Central University of Technology, South Africa, 2011).

in the beginning of the summer crop farming season. This set of stars also helped them determine the kind of crops they had to plant.[12]

Pre-colonial Sotho speaking communities of the Southern Highveld acknowledged the existence of a 'Supreme Being', who was the creator of everything in the environment. The Supreme Being who the Southern Sotho called *Molimo* (or God) was a remote and immortal figure that was neither visible nor known. Some missionary accounts suggest that the Sotho speaking groups of the Southern Highveld had an old tradition of speaking of *Molimo* and offering sacrifices without inclinations of any religious attachment.[13]

Other accounts suggest that perhaps the concept of a Creator, or any form of mysterious spiritual powers, never existed among the Southern Sotho.[14] They hold the view that perhaps *Molimo* was the oldest known ancestor of any particular lineage, therefore there could have been many *Melimo,* gods (singular *Molimo*).[15] The Southern Sotho generally believed in a single God, who reigned over all other spirits and could be approached through the spirits of one's ancestors, the *Balimo.*[16]

Apart from their belief in the Supreme Being, they also believed in ancestors, *Balimo*, whom they worshiped through different rituals involving the sacrifice of animals, insects, plants and metals.[17] The pre-colonial Southern Sotho believed that *Molimo* and the ancestors were responsible for certain things in life, either good or bad. They also held the belief that disrespect or failure to

[12] Z. Zulu, "The Basotho Origin of Mathematics "(lecture, Central University of Technology, South Africa, 2011).
[13] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.240.
[14] E. Casalis, *The Basutos*, (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p.237-238.
[15] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.51.
[16] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.23.
[17] T. Mothibe, "Early Communities of the Southern Highveld 1500-2000," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.10.

appease *Molimo* and *Balimo* could result in punishment in the form of natural disasters, incurable diseases, and universal catastrophes.[18]

Ancestral Spirits and the Environment

The basis of the Southern Sotho life revolved around the spirit world, where spirits were trusted to guide the living into 'good', or 'evil'. The South-Sotho believed that ancestors held a significant position in the spiritual realm. Through their belief system, they acknowledged the existence of a common ancestor, Mopeli, also known as Tlake, whom they perceived as the first human being.[19] Oral traditions suggest that Tlake is a direct ancestor of Napo, from whom Bafokeng and Bahurutse, the main groups of the Southern Sotho originated.[20] Nonetheless, every clan and chiefdom had its ancestral spirits, believed to be intermediaries and intercessors who could negotiate with *Molimo* to provide good rain, good harvest, children, good health, victory in war and overall protection.[21]

Rituals to appease or remain in contact with the spirit world were maintained through natural events like birth, death, marriage and agriculture.[22] In such instances, members of each lineage directed their prayers to their own ancestors by means of regular sacrifices and purifications. For example, after every harvest, in honour of their ancestors, they held a 'thanksgiving' sacrifice of grain. After grain was threshed and winnowed, it was left in a heap on the floor. It could not be touched until a religious ceremony was done. Then the grain had to be boiled in a new pot. When

[18] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Archives, 1993), pp. 50-51.
[19] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.14-15.
[20] Ibid., p.14-15.
[21] S. J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p. 51.
[22] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.23.

it was cooked, a few handfuls of it was taken and thrown on the heap with the words: "*Ahe, melimo; le hosasane le re fe bohobe*" (Oh gods; even tomorrow please give us bread).[23] It was only after the ritual had been performed that the grain could be eaten and the harvest was considered pure and fit to eat.

The Southern Sotho were very passionate in their beliefs, especially about particular ceremonies. *Balimo* were honoured in almost all their ceremonies. For every ceremony, a portion of the food was always set aside for them to feast on. This was done to appease the ancestors , and to preserve the living. They believed that honouring their ancestors prolonged their lives and secured them favour or blessings.

Pre-colonial Southern Sotho speaking people understood that there were certain practices they had to abstain from in order to avoid evoking the fury of their ancestors. For the Sotho, death was considered a terrible occurrence which came with certain rituals in honour of the departed. Otherwise, failure to comply with these rituals could bring them misfortune. For example, on the day following the burial of a commoner, it was compulsory not only to the immediate relatives of the deceased but to the entire village as well to abstain from doing all agricultural work including tilling land, weeding, or harvesting.

The tradition of "*ho ila mobu*" (literally to abstain from soil) as it was called, was observed because soil had been turned the previous day. As a result, no other tilling of land could be done. If not, the Sotho believed that the crops of the community would be destroyed by a hailstorm as punishment by the ancestors. If the deceased was a chief, everyone under his jurisdiction had to

[23] E. Casalis, *The Basutos*, (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p.251.

mourn the same way they did with a commoner. In this case, the difference was that the abstinence from soil could go on for two to three days, or an entire month.[24] Offenders of such rules were held accountable and given penalties before *khotla*[25] (the court).

The pre-colonial Southern Sotho speaking communities believed that daily activities and certain events in their lives could defile, or weaken them, hence the need to regularly cleanse themselves and their spaces. The main purpose for cleansing and purification was to appease their ancestors, to strengthen themselves, their households, animals, or fields, in order to safeguard prosperity and fertility.[26] Normally, purification was carried out on a sick person, close relatives of a deceased person, or anyone, who came into contact with the corpse, warriors on their return from war, cattle captured in war, physical spaces, and anyone who wished to maintain spiritual hygiene.[27]

There were different types of purification. Purification incorporated ingredients such as blood, plants, smoke and water among others. Usually, a mystic potion made out of animal flesh, evergreen shrubs, snakeskin, lion claws and hairs from its mane amongst other ingredients was prepared by burning all the ingredients into ash, which was then mixed with ox bile. The potion, which was referred to as *lenaka* or tribal horn, could be administered through inoculation, sprinkling or ablution for purification purposes.[28] Fumigation by smoke was administered to animals which were captured in war before they could be allowed to mix with other herds. This was done by isolating captured cattle into a particular spot where they were exposed to smoke of burning wood. Apart from that, fire was also used to purify people who had defiled themselves by

[24] J. Sechefo, *Customs and Superstitions in Basutoland*, (Mazenod: The Catholic Centre), p.7.
[25] Khotla is the chief's public courtyard. It is the general gathering place for men where public affairs were discussed and rulings over law-suits and criminal offences were passed.
[26] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.53.
[27] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), pp.258-261.
[28] Ibid., pp-259-260.

walking or stepping over a grave. The feet of such people were passed through the flame of a small fire to cut off any bad omen which it was believed they were engulfed in.[29]

Sacredness of nature in clan totems (*Liboko)*

The Southern Sotho believed that all natural resources were sacred. They believed that natural resources should be treated with utmost care and respect for continuity between the past, the present and the future. Environmental conservation practises were upheld for the benefit of those who lived in the present and for future generations as well. As previously discussed, the Sotho people believed in spirits whom they supposed had supernatural powers to influence certain aspects of the natural environment. Most Bantu speaking groups believe in spirits of departed members of their lineages. They believed that these spirits dwelled on mountains, forests, pools, trees, streams and other local objects.[30]

The pre-colonial Southern Sotho spirituality and its connection to the environment was a fundamental part of their society, which could be observed through the system of totems and taboos. They honoured the sacredness of natural resources through the adoption of animals as symbols for different clan identities usually referred to as *liboko,* clan totems. They associated and identified themselves through the use of clan names, which specified ancestral origins. Every totem had its poetic recitations within which a clear history, philosophy, tribal characteristics, or historical events unique to the clan were conveyed. They believed that in some miraculous and

[29] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), pp.260-261.
[30] G. Parrinder, *Religion in Africa* (London: Cox & Wyman Ltd, 1969), p.43-44.

incomprehensible way, their existence emanated from these totems, which they regarded as sacred.[31]

The clan names, or totems, were named after animals such as lion, hare, duiker and other natural objects.[32] *Liboko* were symbolic and often bound by mystical relationship, sometimes involving taboos and prohibitions. Animals or natural objects which *liboko* were named after, were carefully selected based on the unique natural characteristics they possessed, the wildness of such animals and how dignified they seemed to the group that they were to represent.

Members belonging to a particular clan were expected to treat an animal, or object symbolic of their *seboko* (plural Liboko) with respect and to abstain from killing, or consuming its meat because it was considered sacred. For example, *Bataung* whose *seboko* is symbolised by a lion would never kill a lion unless they were forced to do so for their own survival. Even under such circumstances, regret and the fear of going blind would consume whoever killed it. They believed that rubbing their eyes with the hide of the dead lion was a sign of respect, and would purify as well as protect them from any dangers.[33]

Ellenberger reports that the Sotho retained the sacredness of animals that symbolised their totems. He indicates that the sacred animals were a symbol of protection. In addition, those who swore by them put their "*stock*" on their shields, domestic utensils and skin mantles. Moreover, it was blasphemous to eat the meat of the sacred animal assigned to one's totem. Anyone who did would

[31] W. M. Tšiu, "Basotho Oral Poetry at the Beginning of the 21st Century," PhD diss., (University of South Africa) 2008, p.23-87.
[32] Ibid., p.13.
[33] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.241.

face the wrath of punishment by the gods.[34] Ellenberger advances that in honour of the sacred animal,

if anyone found the animal which represented his coat armour dead in the field, he would approach it backwards, open the cranium, take out the brain and anoint his eyes with it for fear of being struck blind should he neglect this duty.[35]

In this regard, Kgari-Masondo asserts that pre-colonial indigenous systems placed restrictions on the use of certain animals regarded as sacred. She notes that this was a communal effort usually led by chiefs to ensure preservation of sacred animals and was often successful as several species of wildlife were to be found in areas where indigenous communities lived.[36]

This conservation practice was apparently successful among these societies, hence around the 1830s, Eugene Casalis[37] confirms that he observed the presence of a number of wild animals such as gnus, springboks, elands, quaggas, jackals, and hyenas among others. In one of his travels, he found the area around the Mohokare/Caledon River was teeming with lions.[38] Arbousset and Daumas[39] also give a picture of the state of the environment in some of their travels within the territory of the Southern Sotho. They observed that:

[34] Ibid, p.241.
[35] Ibid, p.241.
[36] M.C. Kgari-Masondo, "Sotho-Tswana Mythic Animals: Stratagem for Environmental Conservation," (University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2014).
[37] E. Casalis was a French Protestant pioneer missionary of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) who with two of his other colleagues established themselves among the Southern Sotho in 1833.
[38] E. Casalis, The Basutos, (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), pp.31-56.
[39] Arbousset and Daumas were pioneer missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) who were sent to explore the country across the Orange River in 1833.

Plenty of water, rich pasture, and abundance of game, these are the three sources of prosperity offered to new inhabitants by the country of which I speak. The blacks seldom seek for more; it would have been an advantage however, if there had also been a little wood….[40]

Depiction of nature in folklore

The existence of animals within the pre-colonial Southern Sotho communities is also evident in their folklore and tales. Sotho folklore covers personified characters of animals like lions, hares, tortoises, jackals, and others. Although they contain fiction, the setting in some of these folktales describes environmental conditions. They give descriptions which inform people about the natural environment and the cultures of past communities. Apart from that, the stories portray natural characteristics of animals and their survival tactics in the wild. For example, in the folktale of *Phokojoe* (jackal) the narrative starts by giving a scenario of a drought that starved animals of water, until they discovered a spring that had never been dug before. All the animals except *Phokojoe*, unanimously agreed to dig the spring so they could drink from it. After this *Hlolo* (red hare) and *'Mutlanyana* (jumping hare) were consecutively appointed to guard the spring so that *Phokojoe* could not drink from it. However, *Phokojoe* cunningly tricked them and ended up drinking from the forbidden spring. *Khulu* (tortoise) whose intelligence was undermined by *Phokojoe,* was appointed thereafter to guard the spring and almost instantly rose to heroism when he successfully caught *Phokojoe* drinking from their spring.[41]

Another animal which was used symbolically in Southern Sotho folklore is the frog (*Nketjoane*). Phindane asserts that, because of the strong agricultural history of the Sotho speakers of the

[40] T. Arbousset and F. Daumas, *Narrative of an Exploratory Tour to the North East of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope* (London: John Bishop, 1852), p.195.
[41] E. Jacottet, *Litšomo tsa Basotho* (Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Depot, 2015), pp.16-18.

Southern Highveld, the frog is associated with rain and food in abundance. In their indigenous knowledge systems, the croak of a frog suggested that rain would soon come.[42]

Sacred Places and the "Water Snake"

Water bodies encapsulate the concept of natural places becoming sacred; they also put into perspective the process of creating or choosing such places by society. In this regard, the Sotho speaking communities of the Southern Highveld had respect for the spirits of waterfalls and springs, or pools, which were often believed to be a resting place of some remote ancestor.[43] Ntsoanatsatsi, which was held profoundly among the Southern Sotho speakers, is a good example of such sacred places. Ntsoanatsatsi is both a mythical and a physical place where Southern Sotho trace their origins, as shown. Currently it bears the Afrikaans name of Tafelkop, and it is described as a flat-topped hill situated in the eastern Free State province of South Africa between the towns of Namahadi/Franfort and Vrede.[44]

Legend has it that ancestors of the Southern Sotho speakers of the Southern Highveld lived at Ntsoanatsatsi, and there is cave surrounded by marshes and reeds from which man sprang miraculously.[45] It is from this popular belief that to-date a reed, or its substitute, is erected outside a hut as a symbol to announce the birth of a child. It was also at this mythical place that the Sotho

[42] P. Phindane, "An Analysis of Sesotho Folktale Kgubetswana Le Talane Using the Binary Opposition Approach," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 29, no.2 (2019): p.4.
[43] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: MacMillan, 1982), p.23.
[44] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.17-18.
[45] E. Casalis, *The Basutos* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p.240; D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.17-18.

speakers believe totem names, or *liboko,* of different clans, were bestowed as a distinguishing mark from other tribes.[46]

The water serpent is among the most important spirits which the pre-colonial Sotho speakers of the Southern Highveld associated with sacred water bodies. To honour such sacred places, Rakotsoane suggests that ancient Basotho worshiped the "water nake", *Nooa ea Metsi*. To them, the water serpent was not just the giver of water, but the giver of fertility to women. The water snake was referred to as *Tlhahla-macholo* the patron of rain and the Creator, the patron of fertility.[47] *Tlhahla-macholo* is venerated in the Southern Sotho speakers' traditional prayer as the giver, or creator of children. It was regarded as a deep water snake because they believed it lived in deep pools that were inhabited by other water snakes such as *Mokebe, Fito, Tlatla-metsi, Mamlambo* and *Koena*.[48] It was believed that through prayers, *Tlhahla-macholo* could turn pool water into rain, this is why it was called the "giver of rain," *Monesa-pula*.[49]

The association of the water snake with fertility goes back to the story of the Southern Sotho origins at Ntsoanatsatsi. Ntsoanatsatsi was a marshy lake that had reeds growing in it, as shown. The Sotho believed that any lake that has reeds is a habitat for water snakes. There was also a belief that children came from lakes, or reeds. Any woman who wished to have a child was expected to be courageous enough to go to the lake and catch her baby even though there was a risk of evoking the fury of the water snake. In this case, Ntsoanatsatsi was the domain of *Tlhahla-macholo*, and as a result, a place where children were made.

[46] W. M. Tšiu, "Basotho Oral Poetry at the Beginning of the 21st Century," PhD diss., (University of South Africa) 2008, p.23.
[47] F.C.L. Rakotsoane, "Traces of Snake Worship in Basotho Culture," (National University of Lesotho).
[48] F.C.L. Rakotsoane, "Religion of the Ancient Basotho with Special Reference to "Water Snake", Masters Thesis, (University of Cape Town, 1996), p.47.
[49] Ibid., p. 47.

The role of water snakes in environmental conservation serves multiple purposes. First it was to caution people when crossing rivers, swimming, or cleansing in deep pools, as well as to deter them from drawing water at night. According to Sotho customs, people could not enter a homestead carrying water from a spring, or a well, after sunset. The belief was that such water could weaken the effectiveness of any traditional medicines in the house. Anyone one who disrespected the water snakes would get an allergy reaction caused by *Tlhahla-metsi (Soloane)*[50] or run the risk of being eaten by Fito which was less forgiving in comparison with the peaceful *Tlhahla-metsi*.[51]

Uses of nature in healing

The Southern Sotho were aware of the benefits of plants, animals and minerals in their environment. They knew the powers and qualities of such natural resources and how they could be used to prevent or heal illnesses, improve luck, protect people and sometimes to destroy the health and wealth of others.[52]

They believed that traditional healers had better understanding of the healing properties of these resources because of the training they received. As already indicated, ancestors were central in every aspect of the Sotho speaking groups. For one to be a healer, she or he, had to be chosen by

[50] Soloane is another name for Tlhaha-macholo. It is derived from the Sesotho word *sola* which means, to cause an allergy reaction.
[51] F.C.L. Rakotsoane, "Religion of the Ancient Basotho with Special Reference to "Water Snake", Masters Thesis, (University of Cape Town, 1996), p. 48-49.
[52] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.53.

the ancestors who would then impart to them the ability to heal. Traditional doctors, *lingaka* or diviners (*Linooe*), were very influential in pre-colonial Southern Sotho societies. Because of their special connection with the spirit world, people believed traditional healers could help them with situations which they themselves could not control. For example, traditional healers or diviners were entrusted with the duties of: prescribing remedies for different illnesses, reducing and preventing misfortunes, protecting people and their properties against witchcraft of evil spirits, enhancing people's fortunes and predicting future events.

Traditional healers incorporated different methods such as medicines, amulets, sacrifices and purification to heal their patients, or to protect people and their property from witchcraft (*Boloi*) and evil spirits such as *Lithotsela*, *Thokolosi*, *Tsubalala* and others.[53] Natural properties picked from plants, animals and mineral substances were used in these healing methods. For those who used divination for healing, a set of diving bones (*Litaola*) was given to them by their ancestors through dreams. A healer had to collect all the items, which would become part of their divining bones as shown by the ancestors. A set of divining bones consisted of a mixture of bones picked from different animals. Each piece was named after the animal it came from.[54]

Animals like cattle, duiker, sheep, porcupine, and baboon were mostly used in alignment with the natural traits they portrayed. While divining bones maybe tangible objects, there was a lot of spirituality attached to them. Upon consultation, divining bones were thrown on the floor by a

[53] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.248.
[54] J. Mapetla, *Liphoofolo, Linonyana, Litaola le Lithoko tsa tsona* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1969), pp. 22-23.

healer, who would then read the bones to say if a patient has been bewitched and show the sacrifice required to exorcise evil spirits.[55]

Furthermore, traditional healers took fats from certain animals for specific medicines. Animal constituents and derivatives were more valuable in curing non-medical ailments such as protection against bad luck and witches.[56] Since it was believed that animal traits could be transferred from animals to people, the selection of species to use in medicine was made under specific considerations. Given their strength and dominant characters, top predators such as leopards, lions and crocodiles were vastly sought after. Those considered to be easily frightened, or weak, like antelopes and hares, were avoided for specific purposes.[57] Other animals were simply preferred based on their morphology. For example porcupine quills were used for preparing and administering medicine because of their natural shape.[58]

Herbs were also an important component of healing. They were mainly used for treatment of physical body ailments, although this does not dispute their use in purification and protection. These plants were prescribed, or administered in a number of ways, which included decoctions, lotions, powders, or whole plants, which could either be burnt inside the house, or outside. Apart from that, others were processed into ash, potions, or brewed in water, while others were used as raw products.[59]

[55] D.F. Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1912), p.249.
[56] W. A. Nieman et al, "Traditional Medicinal Animal Use by Xhosa and Sotho Communities in the Western Cape Province, South Africa," *Journal of Ethnobiology* and Ethnomedicine 15, no.34, (2019), p.2.
[57] Ibid., p.10.
[58] Ibid., p.10.
[59] R. Possa and P. Khotso, "Naming of Basotho Medicinal Plants: Semantic Connection to their Remedies," *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 25, no.1 (2015): p.34.

Medicinal plants used by traditional healers were usually collected from mountains, or plains. These plants could either be used as charms to improve one's luck, or cast misfortune on others. Most of them were given names according to the function the plant was meant to perform. For example, the medicinal plant, *Moferefere* (literally, 'trouble') was used to inflict 'trouble' among people. Others such as *Lemanamana* (basically, 'sticky') were used for love relationships, especially for those who wanted their lovers to stick to them.

The use of medicinal plants, or animals in healing, were deeply rooted in spiritual beliefs. While there were those who used them appropriately, they could also be used to harm or kill other people. Among the Sotho speaking groups, both men and women, could use medicinal plants to cure, or protect themselves. However, it was usually men who were expected to use herbs, or medicinal plants to protect themselves. A woman who used medicinal plants for the same benefit was, however, regarded as a witch, and could pose danger to children if she used medicine around them.[60]

Conclusion

This chapter revealed how the Sotho speaking groups of the Southern Highveld were in constant contact with the natural environment. Recognition and adoption of animals within *liboko* and folklore are some of the key ways through which the Southern Sotho speaking communities showed appreciation and respect of the natural environment. The selection and believe in sacred animals, or places, were effective nature conservation mechanisms, which not only served their

[60] Ibid, p.36.

spirituality, but their environment as well. The sacredness with which they approached nature was assurance for continuity, which evidently worked in their favour.

The chapter has also shown how the natural resources greatly influenced their belief systems and ideologies. Their spirituality helped them to come up with explanations for the non-physical aspects of their environment, especially the origins of humanity, God and ancestors. They understood that as much as they relied heavily on nature, they had to allow it to recuperate. In addition, the pre-colonial Southern Sotho speaking communities appreciated the healing power of the environment by incorporating it in their physical and spiritual healing rituals. Overall, their lives were truly anchored in their environment.

CHAPTER 7

Environmental Disasters and Political Conflicts in the Collapse of the Old Order in the Southern Highveld: The *Mfecane*/*Lifaqane* Wars

Introduction

Before the nineteenth century, common political disturbances in the Southern Highveld were occasional cattle raids and minor disputes over chieftainship among clans. However, in the early nineteenth century, southern Africa experienced a period of horrid political changes. These changes included the formation of new states and the dismantling of many kingdoms in the region, some of which were permanently exterminated. This period of upheavals, wars and migrations is known to the Sotho speakers as *Lifaqane* (*Mfecane* in Nguni language). These wars marked an end of the old order and emergence of a new one in the region. This chapter is an attempt to show a history of events that led to the collapse of the old order in the Southern Highveld. It will also reflect on factors that led to the emergence and the fall previous polities that were once powerful in southern Africa before the settlement of the Southern Highveld. The chapter will also discuss how the causes of *Lifaqane* wars instigated the formation of a single polity of the Basotho under Moshoeshoe.

The Rise and the Fall of Pre-Nineteenth Century Polities in Southern Africa

The agro-pastoralist Iron Age societies in Southern Africa depended on various ways of subsistence, which included hunting, gathering and fishing to substitute their diet. The extensive

rearing of livestock not only contributed to people's diets but to their social and economic relations too.[1] Apart from cultivation, rearing of livestock and hunting, the economic relations of these societies also emanated in mining and extensive trade in metals across the region hence the emergence of other great ancient polities such as Toutswemogala, Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe.[2] However, it is important to note that these economic activities were fragile; they were threatened by other environmental conditions or disasters like drought, sickness and social practices such as cattle raiding and political instability among others.[3] Climate and the natural features of any settlement had a significant role in the growth of Later Iron Age societies.[4]

In the period between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries, the Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists who were also referred to as Later Iron Age communities developed into populous societies, crowded together in order to protect their livestock from predators.[5] Some of these societies also moved to higher laying areas, which were ideal for defense purposes and provided better security for their herds. Since these were agriculture-oriented communities, they chose settlements based on the availability of arable soil for cultivation and suitable pastures for their livestock.[6] As these societies expanded, they also developed into stratified communities, which were dispersed all over southern Africa.

By the tenth century, a densely populated settlement of an estimated one thousand residents named Toutswemogala (Toutswe) had emerged in the region around present-day east-central Botswana

[1] P. Mitchell, *The Archaeology of Southern Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 248.
[2] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 21-27.
[3] P. Mitchell, *The Archaeology of Southern Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 248.
[4] R. O. Collins and J.M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.165.
[5] R. O. Collins and J.M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.165.
[6] D. Mookodi, "Settlement and Land Use Between the 11th and 17th Centuries in Eastern Botswana," *Pula: Botswana Journal of Africa Studies* 15, no;1 (2001): 92.

and towards the Kalahari Desert.[7] Toutswe was a settlement characterized by numerous smalls hill overlooking the Southern Highveld, therefore its location was favourable for safeguarding human and livestock. This was not an entirely isolated settlement; in its heydays, it had three large towns: Toutswemogala, Bosutswe and Shoshong, which exchanged goods with another settlement of its kind known as Mapungubwe in modern northern South Africa.[8] The people of Toutswe also engaged in long distance trade where they acquired beads and porcelain through its trade with Mapungubwe. Mapungubwe was the gateway through which the inhabitants of Toutswe could import glass beads which reached the interior of southern Africa through the Indian Ocean trading network.[9]

Mosothwane and Steyn argue that the settlement of Toutswe marked the introduction of new social and economic ways of life. The Toutswe people brought with them iron working technologies, domesticated animals and crops, and ceramics which were unknown to the hunter-gatherers who had been living in the area for centuries.[10] The absence of gold sources and lack of ivory remains and glass beads, which were found in abundance in Mapungubwe settlement, suggest that competitive accumulation and rearing of cattle were the main source of economy at Toutswe as compared to imported goods.[11] The Toutswe settlement prospered until the thirteenth century because of overgrazing and drought. These arid climatic conditions were unsuitable for grazing livestock, and also resulted in reduced cattle number as well as low yields of millet and sorghum

[7] R.O. Collins and J.M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.165.
[8] M.N. Mosothwane and M.Steyn, "Paleodemography of Early Iron Age Toutswe Communities in Botswana," *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 59, no.180 (2004): 45.
[9] J.C.A. Boeyens, "Towards Refining the Classification of Glass Beads imported into Southern Africa from the 8th to the 16th Century AD," *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 19 (2016): 437.
[10] M.N. Mosothwane and M. Steyn, "Paleodemography of Early Iron Age Toutswe Communities in Botswana," *South African Archaeological Bulletin* 59, no.180 (2004): 45.
[11] P.Mitchell, *The Archaeology of Southern Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 308.

which were the main crops cultivated by the Toutswe people.[12] It is believed that the decline of Toutswe coincided with the rise of Mapungubwe which succeeded it as a great economic hub in the region.[13] Since the living conditions at Toutswe were no longer conducive for the sustenance of people and their livestock, some inhabitants were propelled to move to Mabungubwe, while those who still had livestock to hang to remained.[14] Hence, the abandonment of Toutswe was prompted by environmental conditions which were no longer conducive for its occupants and could therefore be spelled as disastrous.

Mapungubwe hill is an ancient African kingdom which was established between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries. The hill was situated within the Limpopo valley near the confluence of the Limpopo and Shashe Rivers[15]. Here, the soil was rich and well watered and this made it suitable for both large scale cultivation and livestock rearing.[16] These environmental conditions were viable for population growth for both cattle and humans. Implying that rulers might have gained more power as more people joined their polities because of the cattle loan system (*mafisa*) which was probably used to entice followership.[17] During its prime years, Mapungubwe was home to progressive people who were actively involved in extensive trade, especially with Eastern cultures along the Indian ocean. Mapungubwe was best known for gold. There was a thriving economy of gold mining from the Shashe River which also attracted and trained people in working

[12] R. O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.164; D. Mookodi, "Settlement and Land Use Between the 11th and 17th Centuries in Eastern Botswana," *Pula: Botswana Journal of Africa Studies* 15, no;1 (2001): 93.
[13] J.C.A. Boeyens, "Towards Refining the Classification of Glass Beads imported into Southern Africa from the 8th to the 16th Century AD," *Journal of Cultural Heritage* 19 (2016): 437.
[14] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.27.
[15] R.O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.165.
[16] R.O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.165; P. Mitchell, *The Archaeology of Southern Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.275.
[17] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.27.

gold, copper, iron and ivory.[18] Gold in the form of dust, ivory, specialized crafts (pottery and bone carvings), glass beads, porcelain, cloth and shells were important commodities during this trade.[19]

Trade networks in Mapungubwe resulted in the spread of wealth and accelerated the rise in production of commodities. This enhanced population growth and led towards the development of marked social classes.[20] The political rulers and the elites of Mapungubwe benefited from controlling the trade of luxury goods such as beads and porcelain. This as a result heightened disproportion of wealth. Through ownership and control of these rare and foreign resources, they easily established dominance over other inhabitants, consequently, the monopolization of power led to a centralized state.[21] The surge in economic activity at Mapungubwe accelerated the rise of the first territorial state in southern Africa and development of the 'Zimbabwe culture.'[22] According to Hannaford, 'Zimbabwe Culture' is an archaeological term that describes the emergence of second millennium polities which were characterized by class distinction and monumental stone architecture.[23] Despite the economic growth and flourishing trade at Mapungubwe, rearing of livestock and cultivation of crops still remained the basic resources of the community which even the common man had access to and could still make surplus out of them.[24]

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[18] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.27.
[19] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.26; R.O. Collins and J. M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.165.
[20] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.20.
[21] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.20; R.O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.165.
[22] M.J. Hannaford, "The Consequences of Past Climate Change for State Formation and Security in Southern Africa," PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2015, p.2.
[23] Ibid., p.2.
[24] R.O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.165.

At about the 1300s climatic changes in the interior of southern Africa became colder and drier, this drastic period was known as 'Little Ice Age.'[25] The impact of Little Ice Age was severe on the inhabitants of Mapungubwe and the entire Shashe-Limpopo Valley, it induced stress on food security and livestock.[26] The dry and cold living conditions were no longer served the needs of this agro-pastoralist society, resultantly, Mapungubwe was abandoned.[27] Its people migrated further north towards present day Zimbabwe to join the polity of Great Zimbabwe. Although Mapungubwe was abandoned because of climate change, Pikirayi and Huffman suggest that transformations associated with the shift in gold trade might have been another factor that led to its abandonment.[28] Huffman further stresses that Mapungubwe was probably phased out by Great Zimbabwe since it was closer to the coast, therefore, the Swahili traders could have moved their business further north for convenience.[29] Apart from that, the abundance of gold at Great Zimbabwe made it even harder for Mapungubwe to compete with it at international markets within the Indian Ocean trade.[30]

Great Zimbabwe was a hill top settlement of a large number of elaborate clay and stone wall buildings situated within the Zambezi-Limpopo basin which grew rich and powerful in the thirteenth century.[31] In similarity with other Iron Age polities of the first millennium, the basis of

[25] T. Huffman, "Archaeological Evidence for Climatic Change During the Last 2000 Years in Southern Africa," *Quaternary International* 33 (1996): 57; P.D. Tyson et.al, "The Little Ice Age and Medieval Warming in South Africa," *South Africa Journal of Science* 96 (2000): 121.
[26] T. Huffman, "Archaeological Evidence for Climatic Change During the Last 2000 Years in Southern Africa," *Quaternary International* 33 (1996): 57.
[27] M. J. Hannaford, "The Consequences of Past Climate Change for State Formation and Security in Southern Africa," PhD Thesis, University of Sheffield, 2015, p.v.
[28] I. Pikirayi, "Great Zimbabwe in Historical Archaeology: Reconceptualizing Decline, Abandonment, and Reoccupation of an Ancient Polity A.D 1450-1900," *Historical Archaeology* 47, no.1 (2013):26; Thomas Huffman, "Archaeological Evidence for Climatic Change During the Last 2000 Years in Southern Africa," *Quaternary International* 33 (1996): 57.
[29] T. Huffman, "Archaeological Evidence for Climatic Change During the Last 2000 Years in Southern Africa," *Quaternary International* 33 (1996): 57.
[30] R.O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.165.
[31] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.28; Webber Ndoro, "Great Zimbabwe," *Scientific American* (2005).

the economy at Great Zimbabwe was livestock rearing and crop cultivation. The advancement of Great Zimbabwe is attributed to its abundance of gold and water sources which made it the hub of trade networks because of the wealth and political influence associated with it.[32] The size of the enclosed tall stone walls for homesteads and kraals which were a symbol of prestige and power on the plateau, together with evidence of gold ornaments found at Great Zimbabwe suggest that there could have been a noticeable class division. Numerous other stone enclosures in the valley below were modest homesteads of the lower class.[33] The stratified occupation of Great Zimbabwe through class division demonstrates the settlement and organization patterns of these communities in a landscape that is characterized by hills. The rulers amassed wealth by controlling agricultural surplus and exotic commodities from the coast including Chinese porcelains and beads from India.[34] The control of these resources bestowed authority to the ruling class. The rulers could use their dominance to foster a political system that was capable of organizing skilled human and material capital for the construction of complex stone structures.[35]

By the fourteenth century, Great Zimbabwe had reached its peak. It was thriving as the largest metropolis in southern Africa and the most dominant polity south Zambezi River. Its people enjoyed a period of abundance for close to 250 years until its decline in the fifteenth century.[36] There are a number of reasons why Great Zimbabwe collapsed and was ultimately abandoned. In common with its predecessors, drastic changes in the environment led to its collapse. Parsons and Ndoro suggest that overpopulation and over-grazing which led to exhaustion of resources were the most likely reasons for its abandonment. These factors were exacerbated by a series of

[32] R.O. Collins and James M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.165.
[33] Ibid., p.166.
[34] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.28; R.O. Collins and J.M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.165.
[35] Ibid., p.166.
[36] I. Pikirayi, "Great Zimbabwe in Historical Archaeology: Reconceptualizing Decline, Abandonment, and Reoccupation of an Ancient Polity A.D 1450-1900," *Historical Archaeology* 47, no.1 (2013):2-27.

droughts, which led to famine, and shortage of water.[37] During its prime, Great Zimbabwe had an estimated population of about 10000 to 17000 inhabitants.[38] Parsons goes on to show that another reason for the state to be abandoned might have been political instability in the form of an internal revolt or external attacks.[39] Another reason for the decline was the shift of gold trade; the exhausted gold mines propelled the Arabs to move their business further north towards the Sofala coast in present day Mozambique, as a result.[40] When Great Zimbabwe ceased being the capital of trading in southern Africa, its inhabitants scattered to different areas including the north of the Lekoa/Vaal River and the northern part of the Zimbabwe plateau to Mutapa.[41]

By the eighteenth century, several groups of Iron Age communities from the north lived along the Limpopo River. These groups later broke into several other chiefdoms such as the Venda among others. Thompson affirms that the gradual introduction of iron to those areas was linked to the arrival of Iron Age Bantu speaking farmers from the north.[42] He emphasises that as early as the fourteenth century or even much earlier, Bantu speaking groups in southern Africa had created two main distinctive cultures; the Sotho culture mostly settled in the Transvaal Highveld and the Nguni culture in the Bokone/Natal area.[43] Hence, by the end of the eighteenth century, chiefdoms of the Sotho-Tswana speaking groups were spread all over the Southern Highveld, south and west of the Transvaal.[44]

[37] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.28; W. Ndoro, "Great Zimbabwe," *Scientific American* (2005), p. 2.
[38] W. Ndoro, "Great Zimbabwe," *Scientific American* (2005), p. 2.
[39] Ibid., p.28.
[40] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.28.
[41] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.42; R.O. Collins and J.M. Burns, *A History of Sub-Saharan Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.168-169.
[41] Ibid., p.166.
[42] L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), p.17.
[43] Ibid., p.17.
[44] R.M. Byrnes, *South Africa: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996); M. Legassick, "The Sotho-Tswana Peoples before 1800," in *African Societies in Southern Africa: Historical Studies* (ed), Leonard Thompson (London: Heinemann, 1969), p.101.

The Destruction of Lifaqane among Sotho Speaking Communities

In the first half of nineteenth century a combination of local factors which included population growth, exhaustion of resources, extreme drought and famine led to revolutionary transformations in the political, the economic and the social organisation of the Iron Age communities in southern Africa.[45] Rapid rise in population levels implied that available arable land could no longer sustain farmers, and ecological resources were scarce from time to time. These conditions were exacerbated by a decline in rainfall followed by a period of devastating drought. The adoption of maize from the Americas as the main grain[46], made the effects of drought even more overwhelming because unlike other indigenous grains such as sorghum which were more drought resistant, maize required much more water to produce. Low rainfall therefore meant low yields in maize, hence famine and massive disruptions.[47] This ecological catastrophe resulted in the eruption of horrendous warfare over resources that came to be known as Lifaqane (Mfecane).[48]

The core of these upheavals was the east coast of southern Africa among the Nguni chiefdoms in what is now Bokone/Zululand or Natal.[49] During this time, Nguni chiefdoms of AmaHlubi of Mpangazitha, AmaNgwane of Matiwane and AmaNdebele of Mzilikazi were under the distress

[45] E. Eldredge, "Sources of Conflict c.1800-1830,"in The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History, (ed), Carolyn Hamilton (Johannesburg: Witswatersrand University Press, 1995), pp.123-162.
[46] The Portuguese in the Delagoa Bay (Mozambique) first introduced maize to southern Africa in the seventeenth century. Since maize is higher yielding than indigenous grains, it gained dominance as the main crop because it could sustain a larger population.
[47] R.M. Byrnes, *South Africa: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1996).
[48] Lifaqane/Mfecane was a period of conflict, migration and state formation in the early nineteenth century, which caused disruption in southern Africa.
[49] T. Mothibe, "State and Society, 1924-1833," ," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.15

of a revolution whose consequences reached some parts of southern and central Africa.[50] The distress was brought by the expansion of superpowers such as Chief Dingiswayo of the Mthethwa chiefdom, and Chief Zwide, of the Ndwandwe chiefdom into resource-filled areas which were considerably arable and better watered, crowded with wildlife as well as adequate grazing land.[51] The expansion of the Mthethwa and the Zwide chiefdoms forced neighbouring chiefdoms into the interior where they triggered shock waves over almost half of the southern Africa region.[52] Although the causes of this Lifaqane are controversial and unclear, available literature demonstrates that they were caused by extensive drought in the region, which sparked aggressive competition over resources, and the emergence of the powerful Zulu kingdom under Shaka with large military forces which conquered many communities. Historical evidence also reveals that the struggle to control the Portuguese trade at Delagoa Bay was one of the main causes of the wars.[53]

Sotho communities in the Southern Highveld were not spared from the repercussions of *Lifaqane*. When the wars reached them around the early 1820s, they experienced social, economic and political disruptions. Drought and disease led to loss of large herds of cattle. Eldredge describes the nineteenth century as a period of radical changes among the Sotho speaking communities in the Southern Highveld.[54] She argues that developments involving the expansion of polities and the competition for trade areas between Africans and European traders were not caused by environmental factors. Instead, environmental factors mediated political changes as people had to

[50] P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe: Chief of the Sotho* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 27.
[51] S. M. Maliehe, "Basotho Traders'Struggle for Access to, and Control Over, Local Trade in Colonial and Immediate Post-Colonial Lesotho, 1870-1970," Master's Thesis, (National University of Lesotho, 2011), p.28.
[52] J. Wright and J. Cobbing, "The Mfecane: Beginning the Inquest," African Studies Seminar Paper, University of Witswatersrand, September 1988, p.1.
[53] Towards the end of the eighteenth century the process of nation building developed rapidly among the Zulu or Nguni groups in the Natal. This development resulted in the creation of larger political units because of the rising completion to gain control over the lucrative trade in ivory with the Portuguese and the Portuguese's interests in slave trade at Delagoa Bay in present day Maputo in Mozambique.
[54] E. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.58.

compete over little resources to survive and cope the social distress which was caused by environmental difficulties.[55] However, natural disasters worsened the tension and the competition for limited resources which overtime were scarce or almost depleted. Famine and war in the Bokone/Natal forced large numbers of AmaZizi and AmaHlubi refugees to flee from the Upper Tugela River basin. They crossed the Drakensberg mountain range seeking security far from the turmoil.[56]

On the western side of the Drakensberg, the first Sotho speaking groups to encounter refugees from Bokone/Natal were the Batlokoa of Chieftainess Manthatisi[57] because of their proximity to the Nguni. For many years Batlokoa traded in metal and other goods with the neighbouring Nguni chiefdoms.[58] The AmaHlubi of Chief Mpangezitha, were the first, and probably the largest of the Nguni groups, to flee from the fury of Shaka, ambushed and dislodged the unsuspecting Batlokoa chiefdom, and devoured their cattle and crops. In no time, the food supplies were depleted because of the large followership that Mpangazitha had.[59]

Following the attack, Manthatisi led her people westward. The AmaHlubi later trekked in the same direction. Lye, Murray and Sanders agree that the AmaHlubi were the first group to launch an attack on Batlokoa. However, Sanders differs with Lye and Murray on who occupied Batlokoa's village longer after the attack. He suggests that after the AmaHlubi attacked the Batlokoa, they

[55] Ibid., p.58.
[56] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.66.
[57] Batlokoa are Sotho speakers who lived in the valleys of Namahadi/Elands River in present day north eastern Free State when the Lifaqane broke out. They existed in two main chiefdoms, namely the Mokhalong who were the senior family under Nkhahle and the Mokotleng who were under 'Manthatisi's husband, Mokotjo. Mokotjo died while his heir Sekonyela was still young, therefore 'Manthatisi, Sekonyela's mother became regent.
[58] W.F. Lye and C. Murray, *Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and Southern Sotho* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980), p.31.
[59] W.F. Lye and C. Murray, *Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and Southern Sotho* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980), p.31.

soon followed them in the westerly direction. This was after the AmaHlubi were also ambushed by the AmaNgwane of Matooane, who remained at the Batlokoa's villages until they had gathered their harvest and evacuated thereafter.[60] Later on, the Ndebele of Mzilikazi also crossed the Drakensberg to escape the rage of Shaka. They, too, caused havoc on the Sotho and continued to invade the Pedi, and later the Tswana.[61]

The displacement of these three groups had an impact on other Sotho groups almost immediately. Within a year or two, the inhabitants of the Southern Highveld were caught up in a different kind of warfare. The Lifaqane upheavals were in the form of invasions by starving multitudes that violently attacked their villages, killing and destroying everything in their way. In response to this political instability and starvation, many Sotho groups were dispersed. In the same manner, these Sotho groups looted and conquered villages they came across. Most of them evacuated to seek refuge in the north across the Lekoa/Vaal River, west among the Tswana, east under Shaka and south in the Cape Colony.[62]

Some survived the ordeal of war and famine by hunting and gathering, while others resorted to cannibalism. Thousands were killed by hunger and violent attacks.[63] During this time, the Sotho speakers still lived in small independent chiefdoms scattered within the Mohokare/Caledon Valley, therefore they were easily outnumbered. Their inability to join forces and defend themselves from the Nguni invasion made them easy targets. At this point, they had to either adapt or die. As a result, some were incorporated into the invading groups of AmaHlubi, AmaNgwane

[60] P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe : Chief of the Sotho* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p. 27.
[61] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.66.
[62] W.F. Lye and C. Murray, *Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and Southern Sotho* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980), p.31; S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.66.
[63] P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe : Chief of the Sotho* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p.27.

and AmaNdebele. The aftermath of this was the collapse and dispersal of chiefdoms, except for a few who sought refuge in the mountains or turned hills into fortresses.

The Formation of the Basotho Chiefdom

Before *Lifaqane,* Sotho groups lived relatively in peace with one another, apart from occasional disturbances caused by cattle raids and power struggles within clans. This peaceful period was unexpectedly disrupted by the violent invasion by groups from across the Drakensberg early in the nineteenth century.[64] When the *Lifaqane* upheavals broke out, there was still no paramountcy among the Sotho speaking chiefdoms and this made them vulnerable to attacks. Apart from that, it put them at the risk of being defeated easily. Therefore, it was necessary to consolidate these chiefdoms in order to enhance their capacity to survive the challenges caused by their enemies. In the course of these widespread upheavals, the Bakoteli of Moshoeshoe, who were comparatively a small and weak group were also at risk. In spite of this, Moshoeshoe started the process of nation building by facilitating alliances with other chiefs. He did this through his ability to negotiate and manipulate followership by extending his generosity through the cattle loan system of *mafisa,* which came as a relief to starving people who sought refuge under his leadership. He also incorporated other chiefdoms into his own after he had attacked and defeated them.[65]

Around 1820, Moshoeshoe still under the control of his father moved from his birthplace, Menkhoaneng, to Botha Bothe to establish his rule as a chief. His initial followers included his age-mates and other chiefdoms such as Bafokeng of Ntsukunyane, Bafokeng of Ramohau and

[64] H. Ashton, *The Basuto* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 2.
[65] T. Mothibe, "State and Society, 1824-1833," ," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.16.

other influential people such as his maternal uncle, Ratšiu.[66] Roughly, around 1822 when the wars broke out, he made desperate attempts of uniting other chiefs in his precinct into a larger polity because he foresaw the dangers which were drawing near from reports he received from the Drakensberg. However, those chiefs the lacked vision for his dream, therefore they rejected his proposal. Moshoeshoe's neighbours saw this proposal as a threat to their independence and authority. The only chiefdoms to join forces with him at the time were the Bahlakoana of Tsoanyane and the Makhoakhoa of Lethole.[67] Consequently, many of the people who were in the way of the AmaHlubi and the Batlokoa lost most of their livestock and grains stores. Their frantic efforts to survive were in vain because they could no longer cultivate their fields to produce food. Villages were abandoned or burnt to ashes, chiefdoms dismantled by their enemies and people were subjected to extreme suffering. All that remained were ruins and human bones which could be seen scattered in many places.[68]

Amidst all this chaos, Moshoeshoe managed to keep his people free from the attacks for some time. He was lucky that the Batlokoa had at first passed him by, he was also able to buy off the AmaHlubi by sending a peace offering or tribute in the form of cattle. However his main challenge was the AmaNgwane of Matooane who took the cattle he had sent as tribute even though they refused to recognize that as an act of peace offering. When the men Moshoeshoe had sent to take the cattle to the AmaNgwane returned, the latter had made it clear that he should expect war.[69] When the AmaNgwane eventually advanced, Moshoeshoe ordered his men to gather his cattle and take them to his father's home at Mekhoaneng, which was also his. The AmaNgwane's attempt to launch an attack on the Bakoteli was a stalemate because the Sotho realized that they were

[66] Ibid., p.17.
[67] P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe: Chief of the Sotho* (London: Heinemann, 1975), p.24.
[68] L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), p.35.
[69] P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe: Chief of the Sot*ho (London: Heinemann, 1975), p.29.

outnumbered and so they fled. This however, did not deter Moshoeshoe from forging peace with Matooane who was at the time the strongest leader in the Southern Highveld. Once more, he convinced his followers to pay cattle to Matooane as tribute and the second attempt was a success.[70]

By 1824 the Batlokoa had made Moshoeshoe's stay at Botha Bothe unbearable. They attacked him and seized his fields and cattle in an attempt to capture his mountain fortress.[71] This was after the Batlokoa under the leadership of Manthatisi and her son Sekonyela returned from their plundering expedition which had lead them far west towards Kuruman to establish themselves in the Mohokare/Caledon Valley.[72] Batlokoa's migration further in the north-west is however disputed by Parsons who argues that 'Manthatisi never led her people very far to the north-west, instead, she was infamous for terror which ironically earned her respect across the entire Southern Highveld. He highlights that Europeans living or traveling in that precinct could not make a clear distinction between Batlokoa and other Sotho-Tswana marauders therefore they simply referred to all raiders within that area as the people of Manthatisi.[73] Nonetheless, when Moshoeshoe realized that his warriors had limited chances of defeating the Batlokoa he abandoned his villages and fields and gathered his people and livestock to take cover on the summit of Botha Bothe mountain. Meanwhile, the Batlokoa besieged Moshoeshoe's fortress for almost three months. Their aim was to starve out the Bakoteli by destroying their crops and preventing their herdsmen

[70] P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe: Chief of the Sot*ho (London: Heinemann, 1975), pp.29-30; S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija:Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.68.
[71] D.F Ellenberger, *History of the Basuto: Ancient and Modern* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1997), p.143.
[72] L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), pp.40-41.
[73] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p.68.

from coming down to graze their livestock. As a result, cattle started to die and this had a direct impact on the food supply.[74]

Relocation to Thaba-Bosiu

Moshoeshoe's position was critical. He needed an effective defense strategy for the survival of his chiefdom. Consequently, in 1824 Moshoeshoe sent out his brother Mohale and some men to look for a stronger and safer fortress away from the Batlokoa. They found a suitable fortress that surpassed the one they occupied at the time about 80 kilometres south-west of the Mohokare/Caledon Valley.[75] During the winter of the same year, Moshoeshoe moved his people to their newly found stronghold, Thaba Bosiu, which was an even more impenetrable fortress. The new fortress had a much more spacious summit with good pastures and water springs, it also offered much needed formidable defence against enemies.[76] Here, Moshoeshoe's people were somehow secure, although their security was not guaranteed because of their proximity to Matooane's headquarters at Senyotong to the north of Thaba Bosiu. Likewise, Moshoeshoe had to renew good relations with his mighty neighbour by sending him a peace offering of cattle. However, in 1828 Matooane launched an attack on Moshoeshoe in an attempt to replenish their cattle after AmaNgwane lost their own to the Zulu the previous year. Their attack was unsuccessful and Moshoeshoe took a significant piece of land, which was previously under

[74] L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho 1786-1870* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), pp.40-41.
[75] G. Tylden, *The Rise of the Basuto* (Cape Town: Juta & CO., Limited, 1950, p.5.
[76] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa : From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London : Croom Helm, 1995), p.57.

Matooane's control, in the end, the AmaNgwane were consolidated into Moshoeshoe's chiefdom.[77]

Once settled in Thaba Bosiu, Moshoeshoe's people were able to grow their livestock and successfully reap food from their fields. On the other hand, Moshoeshoe's reputation and success as a defence strategist continued to spread extensively; he continued to expand his chiefdom and numerous refugees and former enemies that had been dispersed by Lifaqane upheavals sought protection under his leadership at Thaba Bosiu.[78]Apart from defeating gaining lordship over the AmaNgwane, according to Mothibe, Moshoeshoe continued to broaden his territory with the help of his brothers; Mohale and Mopeli whom he placed strategically as subordinate chiefs in the south and north of his territory respectively. His other major defeats include the incorporation of Baphuthi of Chief Moorosi into his chiefdom in 1825 when Mohale pressed them to submit to Moshoshoe's rule after losing a great amount of their herds to the AbaThembu. Moshoeshoe also gained the followership of Bataung of Chief Moletsane when he placed Mopeli over them in the 1820s.[79] Contrary to Mothibe, Gill suggests that Chief Moletsane of Bataung became an ally of Moshoeshoe in 1837 following years of roaming after he was originally displaced from the Kroonstad area during the destruction of Lifaqane.[80] Moreover, after years of hostility and contest over sovereignty in the Mohokare/Caledon Valley between Batlokoa and Bakoteli, in 1853 Moshoeshoe attacked, defeated and conquered Sekonyela's chiefdom and placed it under his own.

[77] P. Maylam, *A History of African People of South Africa : From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London : Croom Helm, 1995), p. 58.
[78] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.70; Paul Maylam, *A History of African People of South Africa : From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London : Croom Helm, 1995), p. 58.
[79] T. Mothibe, "State and Society, 1824-1833," ," in Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.19.
[80] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.85.

Meanwhile many refugees including remnants of Nguni origin such as the AmaHlubi of Chief Mpangazitha also sought Moshoeshoe's protection and leadership.[81]

During this time, Moshoeshoe had also been growing his herds by raiding cattle, which he loaned together with fields to starving refugees who joined his chiefdom. Moshoeshoe's approach of state formation was not rigid; he allowed some of the chiefs who joined his chiefdom a certain level of authority as minor chiefs under his leadership. He expected loyalty from these chiefs in exchange for the protection they were receiving from him.[82] Ultimately, Moshoeshoe was able to build his wealth and consolidate diverse groups into a single polity during a chaotic period. Because of his remarkable achievements and rapid influence, by the end of the Lifaqane turmoil in 1830 Moshoeshoe emerged as a dominant figure in the Mohokare/Caledon Valley. For the first time Sotho groups were under a single paramountcy, now Moshoeshoe was no longer merely the chief of his small chiefdom of the Bakoteli but the chief of Basotho as he called his people.[83]

Conclusion

Before the nineteenth century there were several Late Iron Age Bantu speaking polities in southern Africa which rose to power because of conducive environmental factors such as good rainfall, availability of arable land, pastures and minerals like gold. The availability of natural resources guaranteed the longevity and survival of these societies. However changes in the environment because of climatic conditions beyond their control threatened the stability and prosperity of many

[81] T. Mothibe, "State and Society, 1824-1833," ," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.19.
[82] T. Mothibe, "State and Society, 1824-1833," ," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (eds.), Neville W.Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2002), p.19.
[83] S.J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 1993), p.71.

of the pre-nineteenth century communities. Owing to natural incidents such as drought and unusually cold conditions which had a direct impact on water, yield, pastures and game, some of these communities were permanently dismantled when their inhabitants fled to seek suitable living conditions for themselves and their livestock. In some instances shortage or lack of natural resources triggered conflicts since people had to compete for little resources which they could scavenge from their environment. Hence towards the end of the eighteenth century spilling into the early nineteenth, Sotho speaking communities were faced with the same dilemma as their predecessors. Once again restricted resources because of drought, conflicts over trading rights, expansion of other polities incited instability in the region hence the emergence of Lifaqane/Mfecane. Lifaqane wars, state formation and the rise of Moshoeshoe to power marked the end one era and the beginning of another. After centuries of living independently, the Sotho speaking groups and other Nguni groups were brought together by Moshoeshoe under calamities of Lifaqane to found the Basotho nation. These groups came together to form a larger social, economic, cultural and political polity that could fight off enemies and withstand the turmoil of the Lifaqane. The massacres and migrations which were caused by Lifaqane had long term consequences on the people of the Southern Highveld and significantly impacted the social, geo-political and demographic layout in the region. While other chiefdoms expanded into nations, some were permanently eradicated.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

This study investigated the Environmental History of the Sotho speaking communities in the Southern Highveld in relation to their origins, migration, settlement patterns, trade, political organisation and belief systems.

The origins of the Sotho speaking communities of the Southern Highveld show that before they fragmented into numerous sub-groups (clans) around the sixteenth century, they stemmed from a common ancestry as the Tswana. Because of power struggles, competition over resources and population growth, the split of the Sotho-Tswana led to the formation of new polities which were a mixture and absorption of new cultures. The Sotho speakers tied their origins to nature, they held the believe that their ancestors came from Ntsoanatsatsi, which exists both as a physical and mythological place.

The migration history of the Sotho speaking communities in the Southern Highveld reveals that they were particular on how they selected landscapes to accommodate and sustain their livelihoods and livestock. These communities settled in places where the climate was well-suited to their agricultural practices. The Sotho specifically looked for landscapes that provided water, pastures for their animals and security. Given the changing climate in the region, they were able to devised ways of surviving in their surroundings by designing architectural structures in response while also using local material. This points out that they were well aware of their environment; hence they developed ways of surviving in it. Furthermore, as they moved from one place to another,

they gave names and held memories of their settlements. Some of the names they gave to such settlement exist even to-date. The land tenure system and zoning of places also suggest that these communities were well organised. They planned and zoned their landscapes in other to have separate spaces for grazing cattle, burial, food production and residence.

When the Sotho speaking communities spread into the Southern Highveld, in order to sustain their livelihood they introduced new crops and farming techniques which altered the natural landscape. The economy of the Sotho speaking communities was based on animal and crop farming. This was sometimes supplemented by hunting, gathering and trading with others within their precinct in other to procure commodities which did not exist or were scarce in their environment. Their interaction with the San hunter gatherers opened opportunities for trade in items such as pottery, iron, agricultural produce in exchange for game meat, wild fruits and the medical knowledge. These exchanges also extended to cultural exchange and inter-marriage.

The study further looked into the political organisation, power distribution and governance tools of the Sotho speaking communities. It established that a communitity or polity was ruled by a chief and his council of advisers. Power was not solely invested in the chief as the only decision maker. He had his men of the court/l*ekhotla* who advised him on arbitrations or public matters of any nature and allocation of resources. It is therefore rational for this study to conclude that Sotho chiefs to some extent practised democracy through the notion of public gatherings known as *pitsos. Pitsos,* were public gatherings which the chief convened for all initiated men under his jurisdiction. At this gatherings, subjects were allowed the freedom to voice their opinions or even raise their concerns without the fear of being judged.

Apart from that, the study revealed that environment was intertwined with spirituality and belief systems of the Sotho. Sotho speaking communities deliberately selected certain natural elements or objects which they associated with their spirituality from their environment. They believed that there was a god whom they could worship through their ancestors. Not only that, but they also held the belief that their god was the creator and therefore responsible for everything in their environment. Lastly, the study findings show that natural disasters such as drought and scarcity of resources are some of the factors that propelled the Sotho speaking communities in the Southern Highveld to ultimately unite under a polity as a result of the Lifaqane upheavals which were exacerbated by drought among other things.

In essence the Sotho speaking communities of the Southern Highveld had very strong ties with their environment. Not only did environment influence their choices, it also influenced their identity and culture, hence making them distinctively unique.

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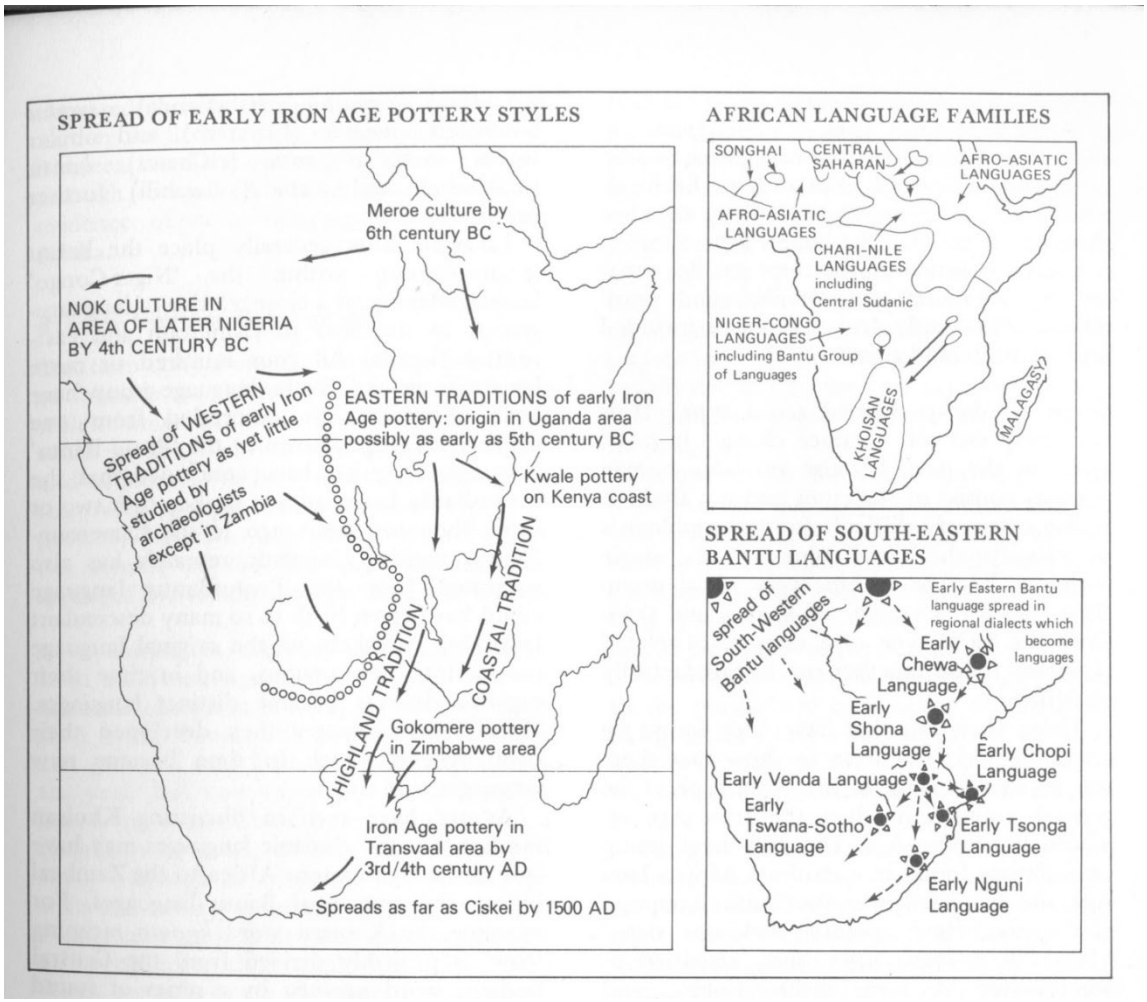
Appendices

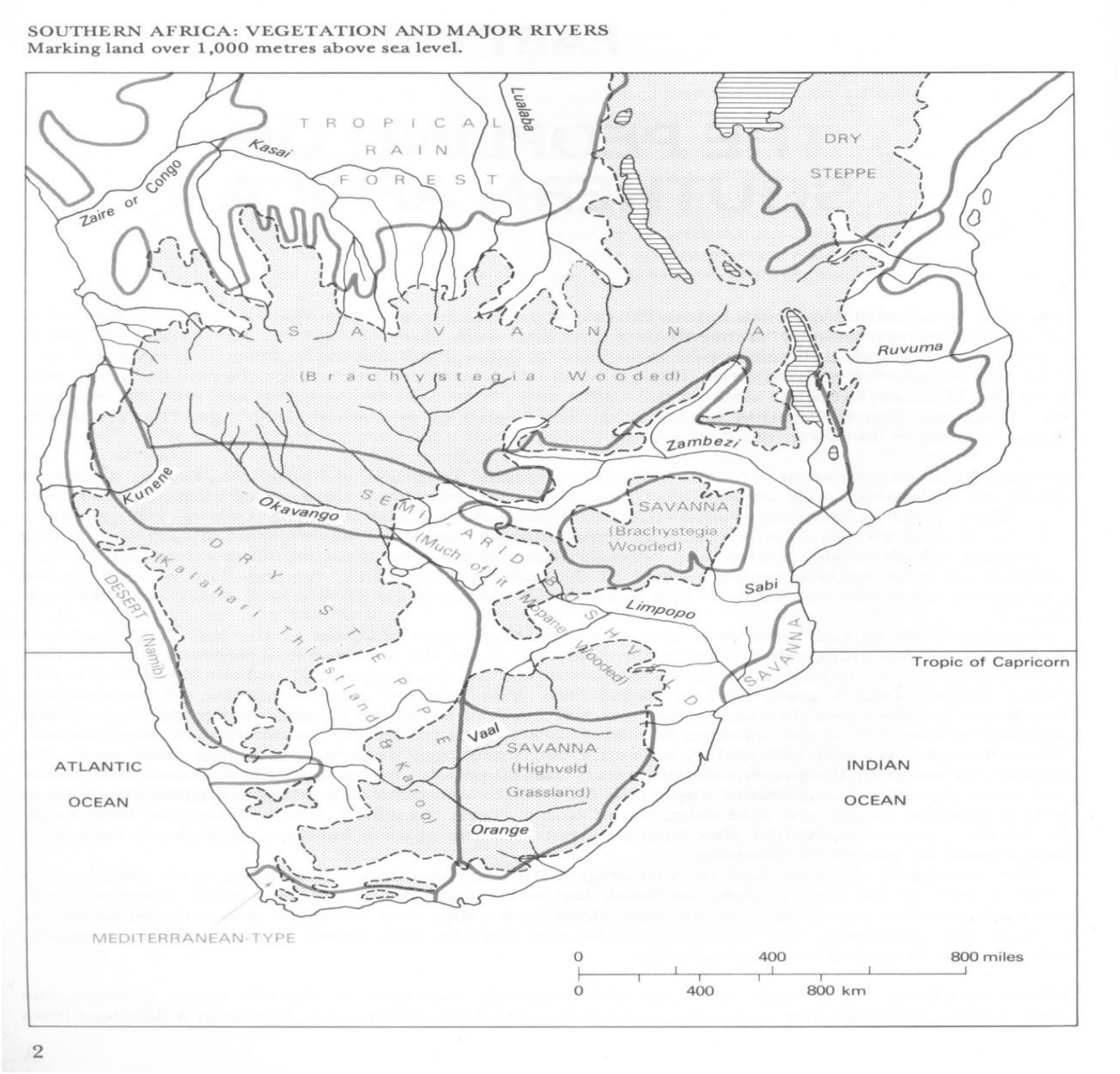
Appendix 1



Three Maps illustrating the migration routes and settlement patterns of Bantu speaking communities.[1]

[1] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p 15.

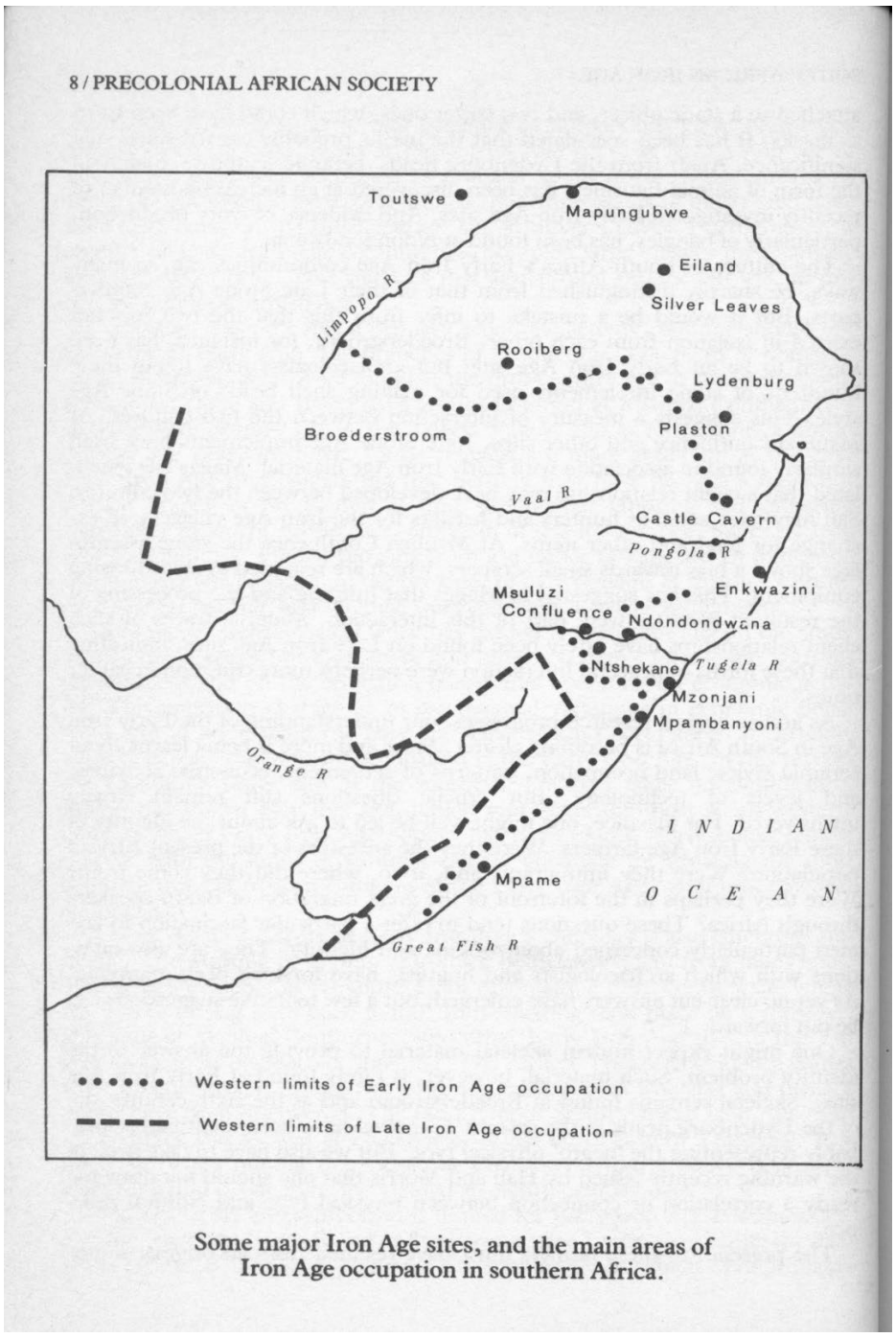
Appendix 2



Southern Africa vegetation landscape [2]

[2] N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p 2.

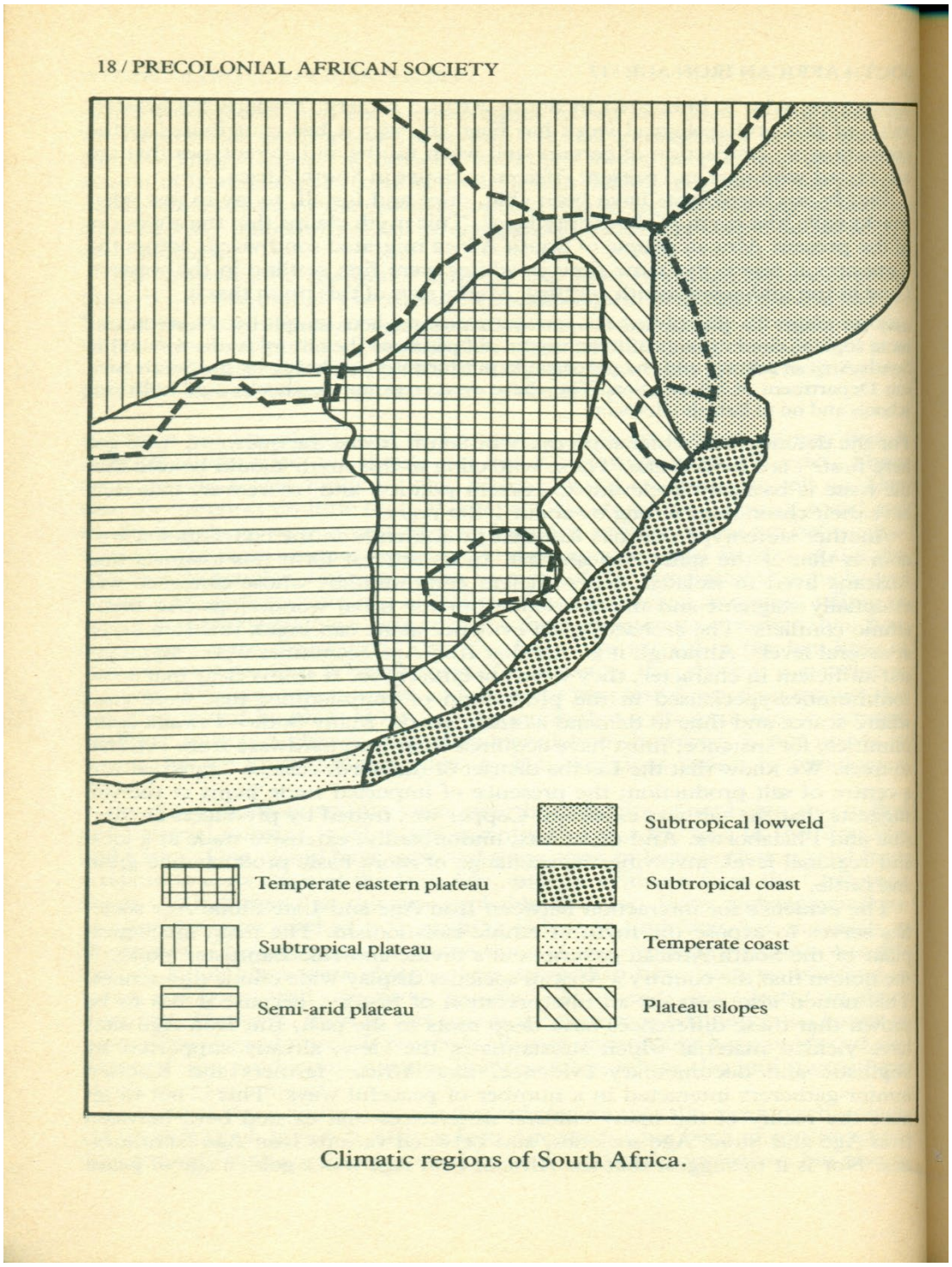
Appendix 3



An outline of some major Iron Age sites, and the main areas of Iron Age occupation in southern Africa.[3]

[3] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London:Croom Helm, 1995), p. 8.

Appendix 4



The outspread of climatic regions of South Africa.[4]

[4] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London:Croom Helm, 1995), p. 18.

Appendix 5

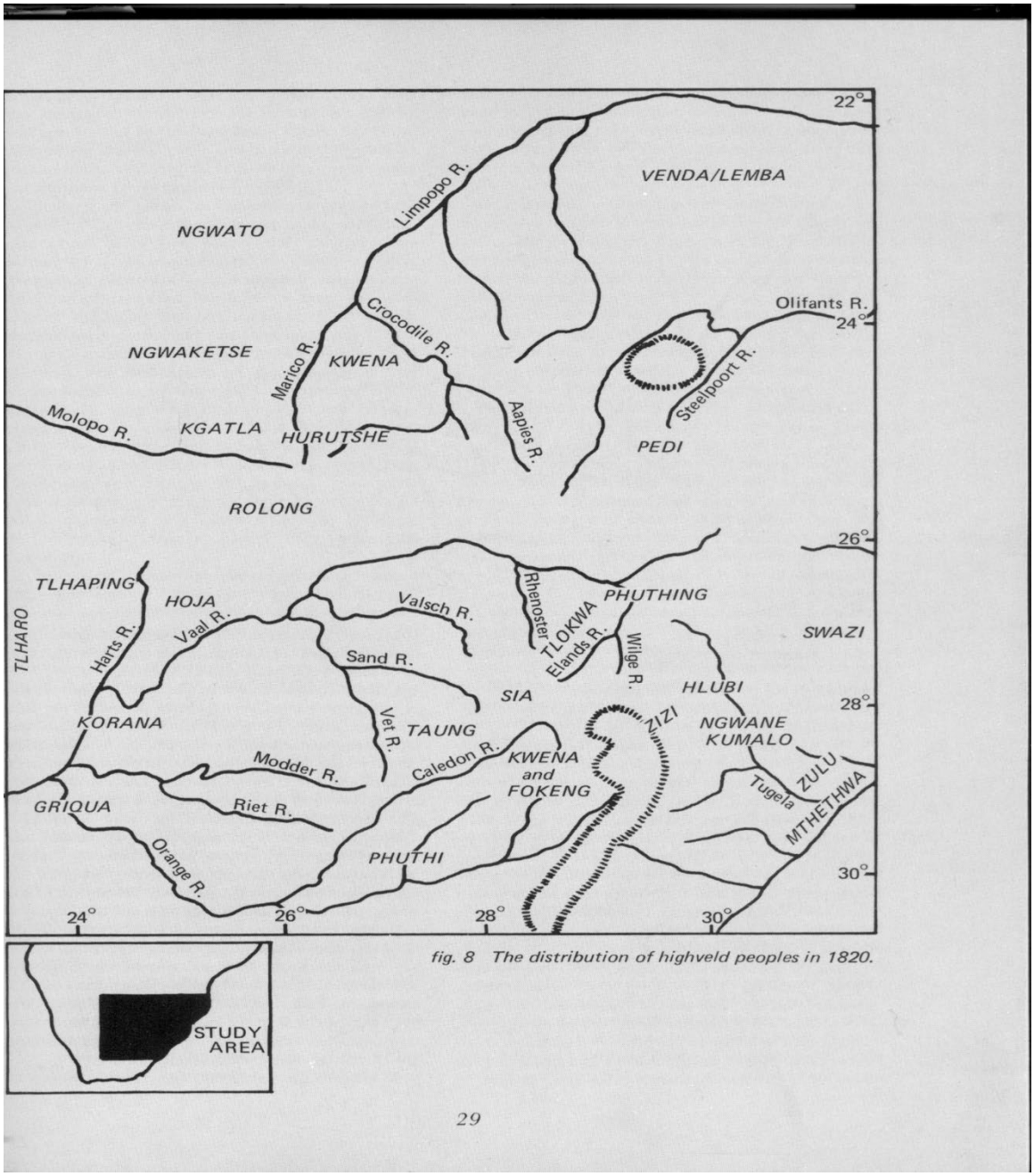


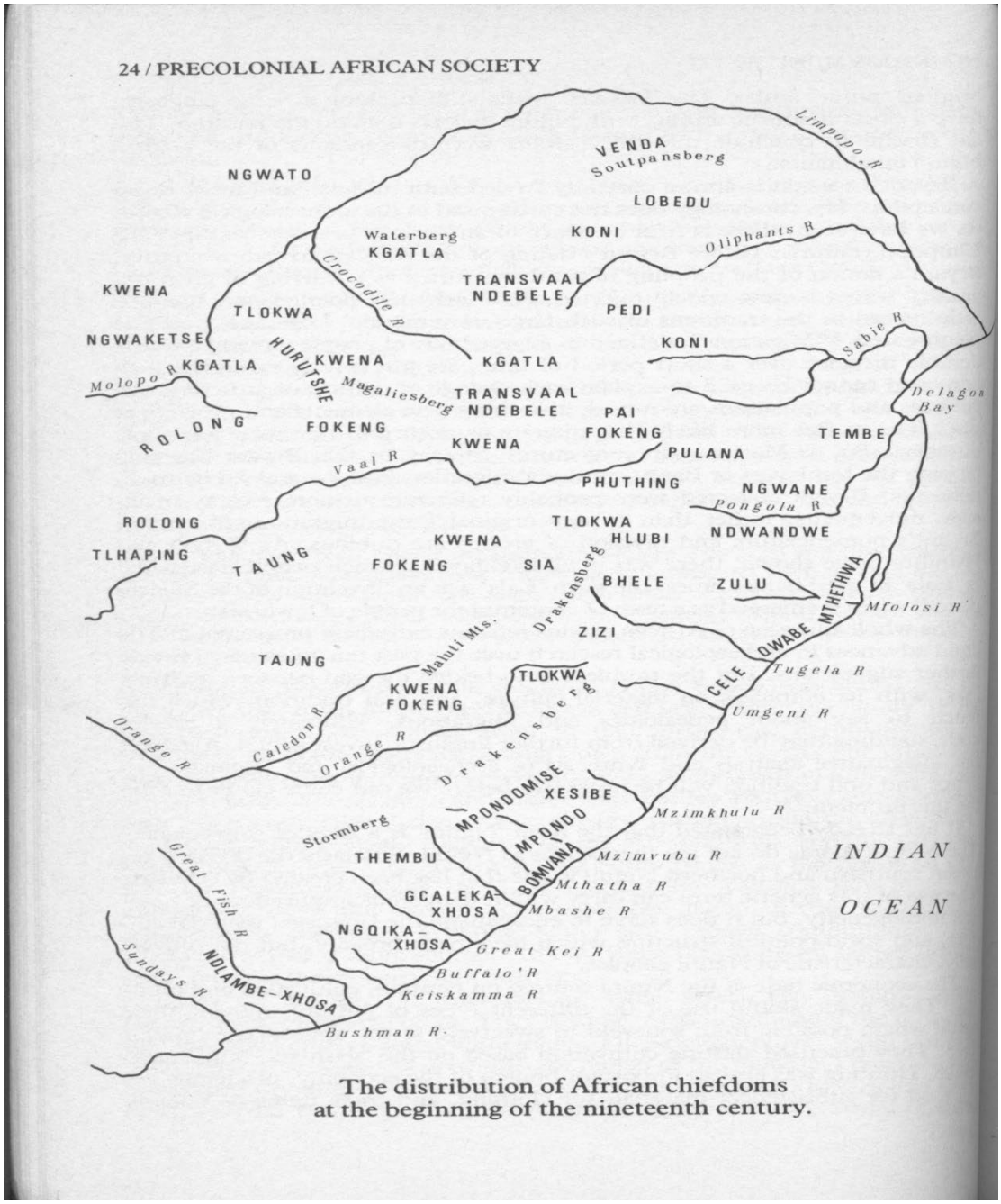
fig. 8 The distribution of highveld peoples in 1820.

29

The distribution of Highveld peoples in 1820.[5]

[5] W.F. Lye and C. Murray, *Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and Southern Sotho* (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1980), p. 29.

Appendix 6

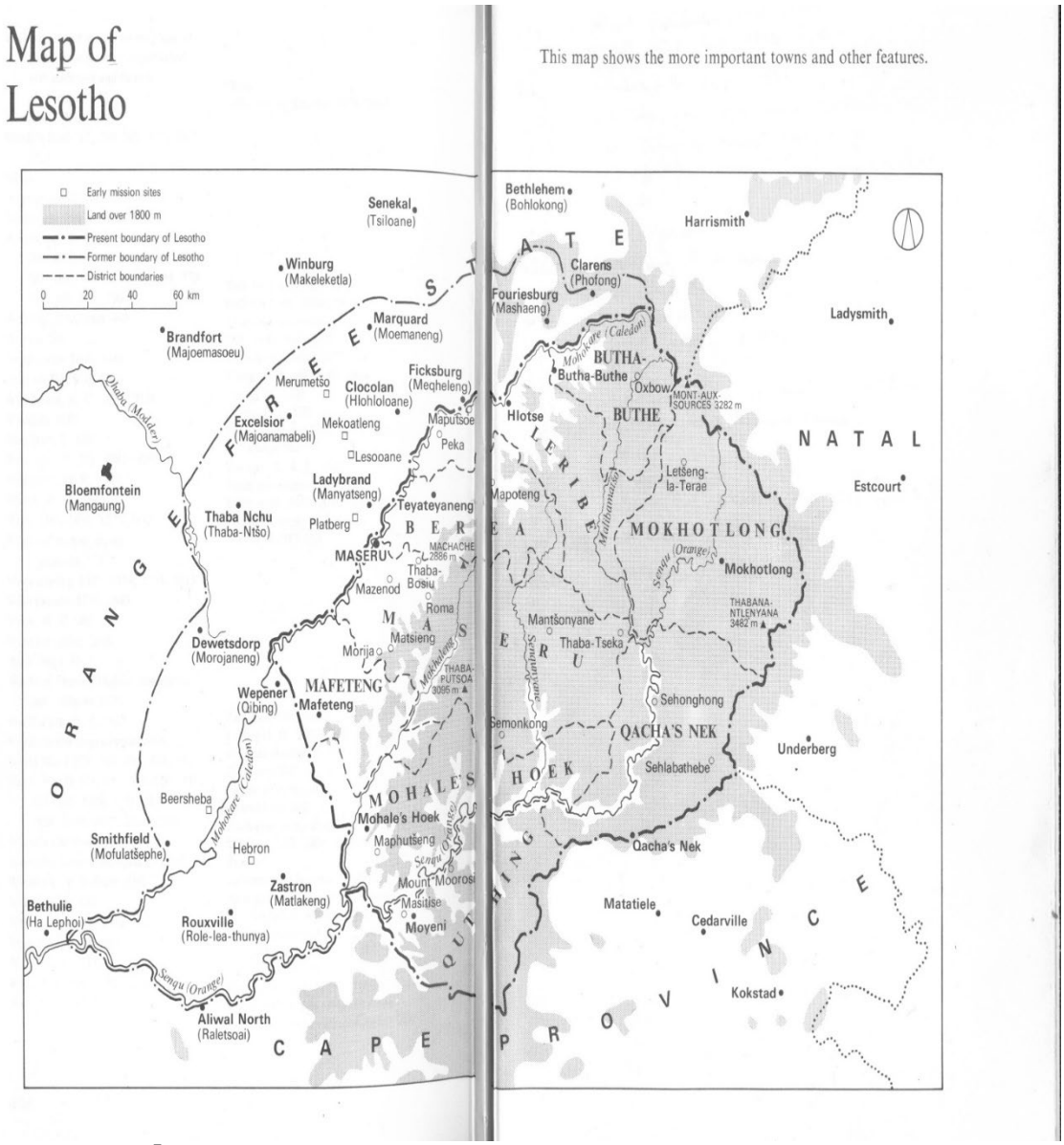


The distribution of African chiefdoms at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The distribution of Southern African chiefdoms at the beginning of the nineteenth century.[6]

[6] P. Maylam, *A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970's* (London:Croom Helm, 1995), p. 24.

Appendix 7



Map of Lesotho[7]

[7] S.M. Willet, Lesotho: A Comprehensive Bibliography (Oxford: Clio Press, 1980).