

**The Early Internal Politics of the Barolong in the District of Mafikeng: A study
of Intra-Batswana Ethnicity and Political Culture from 1852 to 1920.**

by

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HISTORY

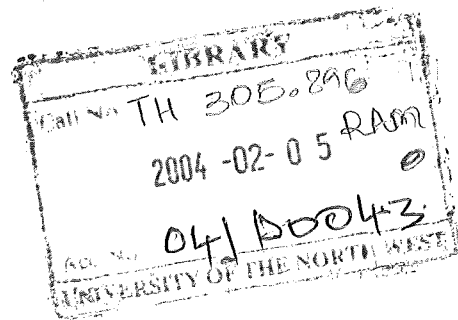
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GLOSSARY

- difaqane - period (1820s to 1830s) of massive upheaval and dislocation in southern and central Africa
- kgotla - public meeting, central meeting place or a court
- landdros - South African Republic (SAR) official, equivalent to a magistrate
- phasha - an old tradition of cultivating a particular piece of land for the chief practised by the Ratshidi-Barolong for many generations
- laager - a defensive Boer encampment

ABBREVIATIONS

ANC - African National Congress

SNC - Secretary for Native Affairs

BNC - Barolong National Council

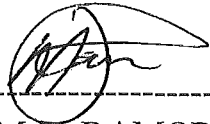
LMS - London Missionary Society

AMEC - African Methodist Episcopal Church

DECLARATION

I MALOSE DANIEL declare that, **The Early Internal**

Politics of the Barolong in the District of Mafikeng: A Study of Intra-Batswana Ethnicity and Political Culture from 1852 to 1920, is my work and I have acknowledged all the sources I have used.



M.D. RAMOROKA

INTRODUCTION

This study focuses on, among other issues, the early ‘nationalist’ organisation among the Barolong, that is, the Barolong National Council (BNC), formed by traditional leaders and clerics in the central Transvaal and northern and central Orange Free State in the early 1900s.¹ Its geographic axes were centred in Kimberley, Mafikeng, Kroonstad and Johannesburg. Its role was both to combat divisive political practices among the Barolong (which alienated already established nationalist-minded leaders like Solomon Plaatje and Chief Montshiwa of the Ratshidi of Mafikeng) and to create a distinctive cultural and economic epi-centre for what they loosely defined as ‘Barolong interest’. This study unravels these neglected ethnic dimensions of early Barolong politics.²

The study also seeks to explore the source and the nature of the conflict between two Barolong groups, the Ratshidi and the Rapulana. Firstly it highlights the break-up of the Barolong kingdom after the death of the Barolong king Tau in about 1670 and polarisation of the Barolong into different

¹ National Archives of South Africa (NASA), Vol. 12, File No. 718, “Barolong National Council”, Caledonian House, Johannesburg, 1 December 1917.

² NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, “Barolong National Council”, 1 December 1917.

sections which developed ultimately into independent chiefdoms such as the Ratlou, Ratshidi, Seleka and Rapulana.³ Their relationship during the *difaqane* and their encounter with the Boers and British which marked the beginning of the conflict between the Ratshidi, Rapulana and Ratlou are examined. The contribution of the Boers and the British to the contestation over the land of the Barolong is outlined. The consequences of the engagement of the Rapulana and the Ratshidi in the now famous siege of Mafikeng is also explored, in the context of Rapulana-Ratshidi relations.

The main focus of this research is the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries because it was a period of intensified disputes that were ultimately fought in court between the Ratshidi and Rapulana. This study also deals with the rise of missionary activities among the Barolong which led to the development of the elites who contributed to the ethnic conflict. However, the research reveals the activities of the elites in bolstering both the Ratshidi and the Ratlou chieftainships instead of undermining them.

SCOPE OF WORK

The study begins in 1852 with the signing of the Sand River Convention agreed

³ S.M. Molema, *Chief Moroka: His Life, His Times* (1950), p.3.

upon by the British government and the South African Republic.⁴ This period was crucial because the Boers occupied the Barolong land in 1837, much against the will of the British government which intended to stop the Boer encroachment into the interior. However, this time in 1852 the British allowed the Boers to stay in the land of the Barolong and to make it theirs without British intervention. This was the first time in the history of South Africa that the British government failed to intervene in a land dispute that involved the Boers and Africans and allowed the Boers to use the Africans as labourers.⁵ It was also the period when the British government promised the Boers that they would not make any alliance with the African people. The Boers saw this as an opportunity for them to dispossess all the land of the Barolong and informed the chiefs that they lived in the Molopo region at the mercy of the Boers and therefore had to pay tax and provide labour. This era demonstrated the fact that both the British and the Boers widened existing ethnic parochialism.

The study ends in the 1920s because this was the period of a court decision on the Lotlhakane land crisis between the Ratshidi and the Rapulana which had ensued earlier from 1880. This era was characterised by an uneasy peace

⁴ S.M. Molema, *Montshiwa, 1815-1896* (1966), p.38.

⁵ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.38.

brought by the court and litigation which were paid for by both the Rapulana and Ratshidi. It was also an era that encompassed the activities of the BNC, one of the organisations most neglected by historians of early twentieth century Batswana history.

APPROACH TO THIS STUDY

EARLY HISTORIOGRAPHY ON AFRICAN PEOPLE, INCLUDING THE BAROLONG

The historiography of South Africa has been adequately elaborated upon by several prominent historians in the last decade or more.⁶ What has been revealed is the highly polemical and political nature of South Africa's historiography which has been used to underpin different political intentions and points of view. These include the Afrikaner "school" of historians seeking to legitimise Afrikaner control and settlement in South Africa;⁷ the liberal (mostly English-speaking) view which, although paternalistic, recognised the injustices perpetrated against people of different races;⁸ the Africanist

⁶ See for example C. Saunders, *The Making of The South African Past: Major historians on race and class* (1988), p.9; H.M. Wright, *The Burden of the Present* (1977), pp.77-78; J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (1982); E.P. Dutton, *Ideas of History* (1969).

⁷ See for example G. Preller, cited in K. Smith, *The Changing Past* (1983), pp.69-89; F.A. Van Jaarsveld, *From Van Riebeeck to Vorster, 1652-1974* (1975); D. Scoltz, *Die Politike Denke van die Afrikaner, 1652 - 1939* (1967); D.W. Kruger, *The Age of the Generals* (1958).

⁸ See for example C. W. De Kiewiet, *The Imperial Factor in South Africa*

perspective emanating in the early 1960s with the decolonisation of Africa;⁹ the radical or Marxist paradigm which focussed on the paramountcy of economic factors and relations in shaping political hegemony¹⁰ and finally the advent of the school of social historians who sought to rescue the role of the under classes in the contest between “forces” of history which dominated Marxist historiography.¹¹ In many cases historians employed several or different approaches because these categories were not mutually exclusive. All of these approaches have been fully critiqued and it would not be appropriate to “go

(1937); M. Wilson and L.M. Thomson, *Oxford History of South Africa*, Vol. I and II (1971); J.S. Marais, *The Cape Coloured People, 1562 - 1937* (1939); W.M. Macmillan, *The Cape Coloured Question: A Historical Survey* (1927).

⁹ See for example P. Bonner, “The Dynamics of Late Nguni Society: Some Hypothesis” cited in J. Peires, *Before and After Shaka: Papers in Nguni History* (1981); P. Delius, *The Land Belong to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Transvaal* (1983); Peires, *Before and After Shaka: Papers in Nguni History*; J.J. Guy, *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom: The civil war in Zululand, 1879 - 1884* (1979).

¹⁰ See for example M. Legassick, *Class and Nationalism in South African Protest: South African Communist Party and the “Native Republic”, 1924 - 1934* (1973); C. Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of South African Peasantry* (1979); J and R. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850 - 1950* (1969).

¹¹ W. Beinart, and C. Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in South Africa: Politics and Popular politics in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890-1930* (1987); N. Cope, *To Bind the Nations: Solomon KaDinuzulu and Zulu Nationalism 1913-1933*, (1993); T. Keegan, *Rural Transformations in Industrializing South Africa: The Southern Highveld to 1914* (1986).

over old ground”. In more recent years the divisions between these different views have become less intense with the need for “reconciliation” in changed political circumstances and as history as an academic subject has struggled to survive as a distinct discipline within academia. History in South Africa has also been forced to become more “relevant” leading to specialist research in areas such as environmental history, heritage history and so on.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The writings of Brown, Wookey, Molema, Matthews, Breutz, Sillery, Stow and Gray trace the origins of the Barolong and contributed to this research by laying the ground work and background of the Barolong.¹² This study is not necessarily divorced from the works of these historians, but includes issues which they have left out and also brings new ideas, perspectives and interpretations. Brown, for example, outlines the original history of the Barolong kingdom and successive kings. He describes the cruel nature of the leadership of Tau and the disintegration of the Barolong kingdoms into four

¹² Brown, *Among Bantu Nomads* (1926), p.217; A..J. Wookey, *Dingwao Leha e le Dipolelo Kaga Dico Tsa Batswana* (1929); Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.5; Z.K. Matthews, *A Short History of the Barolong* (1945), p.9; P.L. Breutz, *The Tribes of The Mafikeng District* (1957), p.30; A. Sillery, *The Bechuanaland Protectorate* (1996); G.W. Stow, *The Native Races of South Africa* (1905), p.491; R. Gray, *Cambridge History of Africa*, Vol.15, No. 7, p.415.

chiefdoms. He even alludes to a significant fact that the paramountcy of the Barolong belonged to the Ratlou family but that it was given to Montshiwa by the British government. However, Brown's work falls short of discussing the contribution of the Boers to the intra-Barolong conflict for ethnic paramountcy. In addition, his work does not go beyond the *difaqane* era.

Wookey charts the origins, successive leaders of the Barolong and in particular dwells in detail on the complexity of the subdivision of the Ratlou.¹³ Breutz's work outlines the subdivision of the Ratlou in a complicated manner leading to confusion about the location of the Ratlou in Morokweng, Ganyesa, Setlagole, Kopela, Khunwana and Phitshane.¹⁴ On the other hand, however, Wookey succinctly and in a scholarly manner outlines the polarisation and the destination of each and every Barolong subsection and was useful for this study. But his work has similar flaws to that of Brown. Another historian's work, that of Sillery,¹⁵ delineates some of the aspects already mentioned by Brown and dwells in a rigid manner on the economic life of the Barolong. However, his work is scanty and does not explain the destinations of the four sections of the Barolong following the break-up of their kingdom. It has very little on the Rapulana.

¹³ Wookey, *Dimwao*, pp.24-33.

¹⁴ Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.102.

¹⁵ A. Sillery, *The Bechuanaland Protectorate*, pp.489-515.

Z.K. Matthews outlines the origins and migrations of the Barolong. This study is similar to those of Brown and Wookey, but Matthews adds valuable information on the Barolong-Boer contacts and their wars. He also explicates the conflict for Lotlhakane land as well as the court decision of 1920 already referred to.¹⁶ However, his work falls short of the activities of the Ratshidi in Lotlhakane that precipitated the ethnic dispute and the impact of the court case which took place between the Rapulana and Ratshidi. Moreover, his work like all others already mentioned, fails to record the rural dynamics which manifested themselves in the form of the BNC.

One of the works that needs critical scrutiny is the ethnological publication, *The Tribes of Mafikeng District* by P. L. Breutz. He outlines genealogies and origins of all sections of the Barolong as do Brown, Wookey and Matthews. However, he attempts to explain the subdivision within the Ratlou by breaking them into small units each time the chief had several sons. It is therefore difficult for the reader to understand whether they joined other sub-sections or formed independent chiefdoms. In addition, it is difficult to draw a distinction between the Mariba-Ratlou and Seitshiro-Ratlou.¹⁷ His work is, however, crucial because it dwells, though in a sketchy manner, on the

¹⁶ Matthews, *A Short History*.

¹⁷ Breutz, *The Tribes*, pp.104-176.

Barolong-Boer conflict over land which will be discussed in this thesis.

The historiography of the Barolong's contact with the whites, presented by Shillington and Molema, reveals bias in favour of the British intentions in Bechuanaland.¹⁸ Shillington deals with the Barolong-Boer war from 1881 to 1884. He projects a picture which hails Montshiwa as the most important Barolong chief and reveals the Ratlou and Rapulana as if they did not have the right to the land. One of Shillington's critical weaknesses is that he regards Lotlhakane as Montshiwa's old town but does not provide sufficient evidence. He does not acknowledge the contributions of writers like Brown, who state that it was the British who gave the paramountcy of the Barolong to Montshiwa. This study reveals the original owners of Lotlhakane and discloses in detail how this land was given to Montshiwa by the British authorities. The historians Theal and Manson, explore the role played by British and Boer freebooters who wanted land as a reward for either defending the Ratshidi against the Boers or the Rapulana against the Ratshidi.¹⁹ This study outlines the

¹⁸ K. Shillington, *The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana 1870-1900* (1985), p.128; J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton, *The Road to the North: South Africa, 1852-1886* (1937), p.67; Molema, *Montshiwa*.

¹⁹ A. Manson, "Christopher Bethell and the Securing of the Bechuanaland Frontier, 1878-1884," *Journal of Southern Africa Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (1998), p.497.

contributions of both the Boers and the British to the Barolong conflict and clears the misunderstanding created by those historians already mentioned.

Molema wrote more about the Barolong than any other historian and in *Bantu, Past and Present* he asserts that “the Bantu remained an indolent, lethargic and dreamy race of men, and their dreary, featureless scene of barbarism and incompetence”.²⁰ He projects the Zulu revolution as a war of extermination and Shaka as a tyrant and Mzilikazi a drinker of blood.²¹ In 1951, he published a somewhat more scholarly biography of *Chief Moroka*, but the book still undermined the Africans. In this book he stressed that “the minds of the Barolong were blank and utterly void, a howling vacuum ... they were rude in their manners and totally illiterate, ignorant of the art of peace”.²²

Molema lambasts certain areas of African culture as backward. He maintains that “polygamy was sunken in superstition, without the light of any true religion, so degraded in morals as to be almost unmoral, intellectually under developed.”²³ According to E.H Carr, if one needs to understand the historian’s view one needs to know the historian himself and study his historical and social

²⁰ Quoted in Saunders, *The Making*, p.108.

²¹ Quoted in Saunders, *The Making*, p.108.

²² Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.190.

²³ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.190.

environment.²⁴ Molema's father, was one of the first councillors among the Batswana to convert to Christianity and Molema as his descendant saw non-Christians as heathen and evil. This to a large extent coupled with his status as an amateur historian led him to promote the perception of the superiority of the whites.

In 1966, Molema published a biography of Chief Montshiwa of the Ratshidi, *Montshiwa 1815-1896* in which he outlines the origins and the background of all sections of the Barolong. He highlights the formation of chiefdoms and their later relationships with the whites. Writing as a member of the Barolong, he is not detached and impartial but biased in favour of the Ratshidi. He projects Montshiwa as though he was the paramount chief who claimed the land of Tau, the former king of the Barolong on behalf of all the Barolong. He promotes the image of Montshiwa as the chief who fought for the land of Tau while Matlaba the chief of the Rapulana and Moshete were selling the same land to the Boers. This study seeks to clarify these issues of land and to show that not only did Moshete and Matlaba hand over the land to the whites but also that Montshiwa gave the land to the British government.

²⁴ E.H. Carr, *What is History?* (1964), p.44.

Molema's scanty knowledge of the Rapulana and Ratlou was caused by the reluctance of the Rapulana and Ratlou to give him information. According to Mothibi, an old member of the Rapulana, Molema interviewed them before he wrote his book and Mothibi claimed that Montshiwa had failed to subjugate them under his rule, an issue which Molema did not acknowledge. The above-mentioned book by Molema is a biography which revolves around issues involving Chief Montshiwa. In this book the history of the Rapulana and Ratlou is not explored in detail and there is, in fact, no book which deals exclusively with either the Rapulana or the Ratlou. The Ratlou and Rapulana communities were as important as other ethnic groups in South Africa with their own history. They should be recognised because they, like the Ratshidi, were independent chiefdoms with their own chiefs. This could be interpreted as a bias of omission by historians, because both the Ratlou and Rapulana form part of the history of the Barolong. Molema's strength, however, lies in the fact that he consulted all available published sources at the time he wrote and that he was Morolong who wrote Barolong history from their point of view and used oral tradition, one of the most important sources of African history. The aim of this thesis is to bring the Ratlou and the Rapulana into the picture and present an explanation for their actions, particularly as Molema is biased towards the Ratshidi, a bias which was reinforced by his reliance on British

correspondence which time and again praises Montshiwa for his loyalty to the British cause. The Ratlou, by contrast, have been damned by their association with the Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) state.

Another historian, Manson, dwells on the Barolong-Boer wars of 1881 to 1884. Manson outlines the role played by Bethell and examines in detail matters that affected him. He outlines the part played by external forces, namely the Boers and the British in the battle between the Ratshidi and the Rapulana and the death of Bethell, showing that this was one of the factors that led to the establishment of British Bechuanaland. Unlike Shillington, who refers to Lotlhakane as Montshiwa's old town, Manson regards this land simply as the Rapulana's main town. However, Manson's work does not address the causes of the Ratshidi-Rapulana conflict and the logistics surrounding Lotlhakane. In addition, his work does not go beyond 1885.²⁵

All of the above-named historians have enriched the historiography of the nineteenth century Southern Tswana. These studies take as their focus specific regions and distinctive political economies. These historians, just like the others already mentioned, concentrate only on the Ratshidi and project Montshiwa as

²⁵ Manson, "Christopher Bethell".

if he was a paramount chief of the all Barolong.²⁶ This research has joined the efforts by historians such as Mbenga²⁷ and Beinart²⁸ in tracing the hidden struggles in the rural areas by identifying the rural political dynamics of the Ratlou and the Rapulana.

Odendaal asserts that “in Bechuanaland no European-style political organisations sprung up after the Anglo-Boer War as they did in other parts of British South Africa”.²⁹ This is an over-generalisation because evidence reveals the existence of the BNC, already mentioned above, with its European-style constitution.³⁰ Odendaal has little to say on the Ratshidi and has nothing at all on the Rapulana and Ratlou. He writes only about the Ratshidi and in particular, about Plaatje and Molema, arguing that they did not form a Barolong organisation. This was part of the stereo-typing that preoccupied certain historians. They centred their work around Plaatje and left out other developments in British Bechuanaland that did not include him. These historians assert that the Barolong were represented in the SANNC simply

²⁶ Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu*, p.42.

²⁷ B.K. Mbenga, “The Bakgatla-baga-Kgafela in the Pilanesberg District of the Western ZAR from 1899 to 1931”, *D Litt et Phil, Unisa (1997)*; Beinart and Bundy, *Hidden Struggles*.

²⁸ Beinart, and C. Bundy, *Hidden Struggles*.

²⁹ Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu*, p.42.

³⁰ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, “Barolong National Council”, Caledonian House, Johannesburg, 1 December 1917.

because Plaatje, Molema and Montshiwa belonged to it. Yet the reality is that the Rapulana and Ratlou representatives were not invited to the first meeting of the SANNC and it was Plaatje's responsibility, as a prominent and educated leader of the community, to woo them into this organisation because it was the prerogative of executive members of the SANNC to unite their people in the spirit of solidarity and to end ethnic conflict. This exclusion of the Ratlou and Rapulana as if the "dialectics of modernity on the South African frontier" had not affected them, needs to be corrected.

Sol Plaatje was a journalist and writer of books about Ratshidi and other Africans. In his book, *Mhudi*, he tackles the destruction of the Barolong kingdom by the Amandebele and the Boers on the highveld. As it is primarily a novel, his book deals with the Barolong-Boer contact in an insular manner and does not go beyond the *difaqane*. This book is very general and it is not clear which sections of the Barolong Plaatje refers to. This confusion is caused by the fact that the four sections of the Barolong were temporarily united during the *difaqane* when they fled from the Basotho and Amandebele.³¹

The early twentieth century Ratshidi-Rapulana dispute over Lotlhakane has not been recorded by historians. The anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff have

³¹ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.33.

written about Wesleyan missionary activities among the Ratshidi only, and this is their focus. They mention the BNC in a general manner and do not associate it with its founders, namely, the Rapulana and the Ratlou traditional authorities.³² However, the works of the Comaroffs have contributed to this study by dealing with the christianisation of the Ratshidi.

Historians have also been preoccupied with the emergence of Independent Churches among African societies in South Africa. Roux locates the emergence of Independent Churches among the Thembu and records it exclusively within the Xhosa.³³ Parsons dwells on the development of independent churches among the Basotho.³⁴ Odendaal examines the establishment of the Native Independent Congregational Church in British Bechuanaland in 1885.³⁵ He also mentions the development of Ethiopianism in British Bechuanaland but does not confine it to any population group.³⁶ The Comaroffs, who worked among the Ratshidi, examine Ethiopianism among the southern Tswana (Batlhaping, Barolong and Batlharong) but they focus their study on the Batlhaping. What is

³² J. and J. Comaroff, *Revelation and Revolution: The dialectics of modernity on the South African frontier* (1994), p.91.

³³ E. Roux, *Time Longer than Rope, The History of a Black man's struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (1966), p.79.

³⁴ N. Parsons, *A New History of Southern Africa, Second Edition* (1984), p.211.

³⁵ Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu*, p.35.

³⁶ Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu*, p.35.

common in the work of all these writers is that they did not record the development of Ethiopianism among the Barolong.

Campbell is the only historian who has recorded the development of Ethiopianism among the Ratlou. It should be mentioned that the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) which broke away from the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, was also known as the Ethiopian Church and Campbell outlines its support for Chief Moshete and how it replaced the London Missionary Society among the Ratlou.³⁷ He, however, confines his research to the ZAR and does not explore its activities in the Setlagole Reserve which was in the British Bechuanaland. This present study has benefited from Campbell's work and examines the AME activities in Setlagole with the help of oral sources.

Secondary sources have been extensively analysed and in particular the works of the Ratshidi historian, Molema, have been crucial in laying the ground work for the origins of conflict within the Barolong from their point of view. Moreover, Molema was close to the royal family and his father was a chief.

³⁷ J. Campbell, "Chiefly authority and the AME Church, 1896-1910" *Collected Seminar Papers: The Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries*, Vol. 15, No. 38 (1990), p.40.

However, these secondary sources deal with the Barolong during the nineteenth century. This dissertation will therefore make a major contribution to the history of rural communities and be a source of reference for the history of the Barolong in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Primary sources have been critically scrutinised because there were attempts by each of the parties involved in the Barolong conflict to justify their actions.

Most of the archival sources dealing with the twentieth century Ratshidi-Rapulana dispute from the sources collected from the archives were testimonies by both the Ratshidi and Rapulana and these were interpreted in conjunction with the historical data from oral sources. There are documents such as War Office³⁸ and the *Report by Commissioner for Native Affairs*³⁹ collected from the archives which deal with the origin and genealogies of the Barolong and are based on oral tradition. These documents were produced in 1905 and they collaborate with the oral tradition of the Barolong. Relations between the Barolong and the British are contained mainly in the *British Parliamentary Papers* or Blue Books.⁴⁰ Other sources such as the papers of Sol. Plaatje and

³⁸ War Office (n.n.), "A Short History of Native Tribes of The ZAR" (1905).

³⁹ ZAR Native Affairs Department (TNAD), "Report by the Commissioner for Naive Affairs relative to Acquisition and Tenure of Land by Native in the ZAR" (1905).

⁴⁰ British Parliamentary Papers(BPP), Blue Books, (henceforth BPP), C-3486,

Silas Thelesho Molema were consulted in Witwatersrand University Library.⁴¹

Oral sources were collected from the Ratshidi, Rapulana and Ratlou communities. The oral traditions which deal with their origins are similar but differ with regard to the conflict and the legitimate ownership of land. A healthy scepticism was applied in dealing with this oral data to produce as accurate a picture as possible of Barolong ethnicity and political culture.

Pretoria, 1970 to 1900.

⁴¹ A979, Ad6.1, Silas Thelesho Molema and Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje Papers cover the period 1874 to 1934. They are located in Witwatersrand University Library.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PRE-COLONIAL AND “COLONIAL” PERIOD UP TO 1902

INTRODUCTION

This chapter seeks to outline the origins and geographical location of the Barolong. It highlights the disintegration of the Barolong kingdom into small branches and their subsequent formation into independent chiefdoms. The chapter singles out two Barolong branches, the Ratshidi and Rapulana, because they were situated close to each other and were involved in a prolonged struggle for land. It traces the sources of the conflict between the Ratshidi and Rapulana which was caused initially by the break-up of the kingdom, leading to migration, settlement and resettlement of different sections of the Barolong. It outlines the roles played by the Boers and the British in exploiting these polarisations which led to the Barolong War. The chapter addresses the effects of the siege of Mafikeng and its consequences for the Ratshidi-Rapulana relations. It is intended to provide an essential background to events in the twentieth century. Finally, The chapter adds some insight into the course of events, but relies to some extent on existing studies which provide a solid outline of the nineteenth century history of the Barolong.

THE ORIGINS AND SETTLEMENT OF THE BAROLONG IN THE MOLOPO RIVER REGION c. 1400 A.D.

The Barolong consisted of a number of clans, all of which shared the same origins, language and similar history. The Ratlou clan of the present-day Barolong is to be found at Khunwana, Ganyesa, Madibogo, Setlagole, Morokweng, Phitshane and Tshidilamolomo in the greater Mafikeng region. Its present rulers are Moshete at Khunwana, Moamogwa at Ganyesa, Motseokhumo at Phitshane and Phoi at Madibogo. The Ratshidi live in the Mafikeng area in the village generally known as the “Stad” under the chieftainship of Montshiwa. The Seleka live in Thaba-Nchu under Moroka’s rule. The last group consists of the Rapulana who live at Bodibe and Lotlhakane (about 15 kilometres to the south of Mafikeng) under Matlaba.¹

In the early nineteenth century the Barolong occupied what is today the northern Cape province of South Africa, which is bordered on the south-east

¹ A.D. Dachs, *Papers of Mackenzie* (1975), p.13; Sillery, *The Bechuanaland Protectorate*, p.170; Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.2; Stow, *The Native Races*, p.491; Parsons, *New History*, p.47; Matthews, *A Short History*, pp.1-2; Breutz, *The Tribes*, pp.97-99; Brown, *Among the Bantu*, p.217; Wookey, *Dinwao*, pp.26-31.

by the west-flowing Vaal and Orange Rivers and on the north-west by the southern reaches of the Kalahari Desert.² They were generally scattered over wide areas of the northern Cape, the western ZAR, the Orange Free State, and parts of Botswana.³

The Barolong were Setswana-speaking and traced their origins from king Morolong who was the founder of the Barolong kingdom in approximately 1400 A.D. According to Brown, the Barolong were an offshoot of the Bahurutshe who are “the primary branch” of all the Batswana⁴. Morolong was succeeded by Noto. Then came Morara, Mabe, Mabua, Manoto and Mabeo. King Mabeo was succeeded by Modiboa, who liked hunting and had no time to attend the *Kgotla*, which made him unpopular. According to tradition the Barolong deposed him and his brother Tshesebe was installed. About the time of king Mokgopha who succeeded Tshesebe, the Bakaa people who were subjugated by the Barolong, branched off from the Barolong and went to live under the chief of

² Shillington, *Colonisation*, p.4.0

³ B. Willan, *Sol. Plaatje : A Biography of Solomon Thekisho Plaatje 1876-1932* (1984), p.2.

⁴ Brown, *Among the Bantu*, pp.260-261; Mbenga, “The Bakgatla”, p.24.

the Bamangwato.⁵

The Barolong lived in the western Witwatersrand in about the early sixteenth century, probably in close contact with the Bakgalagadi of the desert areas.

The Barolong were forced south-westward from Mosega area across the Molopo by the Bahurutshe in the late sixteen century.⁶ The Barolong then moved to the area around Mafikeng and kept their capital in the area until the following century.

The movement was prompted by conflict with the Bakwena, who were in alliance with the Bahurutshe. Another reason was that the Bakwena wanted land for hunting and herding livestock and sought iron ore in order to trade with the Kora and the Khoisan.⁷ According to Legassick the Barolong were at one time assumed to be iron workers because of their totems iron and hammer.⁸

According to Parsons, the most powerful and famous rulers of the Barolong were Thibela and his son Tau, who reigned in the seventeenth and eighteenth

⁵ Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.28.

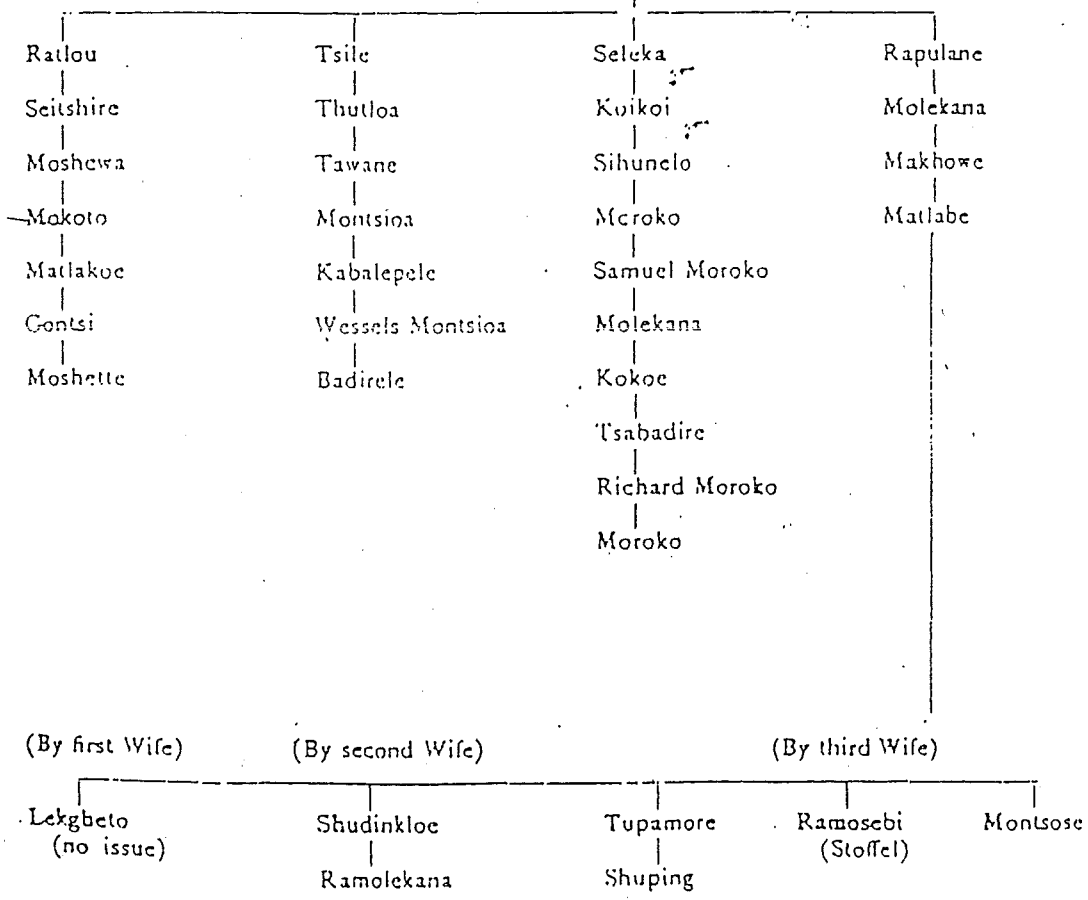
⁶ M. Legassick, "The Griquas, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries, 1780 - 1840 : the politics of the frontier zone" (1969), p.115.

⁷ Brown, *Among the Bantu*, p.216.

⁸ Legassick, "Origins of the Sotho-Tswana", p.116.

GENEALOGICAL TREE OF THE BAROLONG CHIEFS.

- No. 1. Morolong
- " 2. Noto
- " 3. Morara
- " 4. Mabi
- " 5. Mabiyo
- " 6. ?
- " 7. Modiboa
- " 8. Morakile
- " 9. ?
- " 10. Tsesebe
- " 11. Masipa
- " 12. Mokgopa
- " 13. Tibela
- " 14. Tau



Barolong Chiefs' Genealogy.⁹

⁹ Source: War Office, "The Native Tribes", p.10.

centuries. In the time of these leaders the Barolong country stretched from Phitshane (within today's Molopo Reserve) to Molemane (Ottoshoop, Marico district) in the north, then to Klerksdorp in the south-west and the south and Morokweng (Vryburg district) in the west. The Barolong rulers then may justifiably be said to have been kings and their state a kingdom because of the large size of the area they ruled. The kingdom covered much of what later became the northern Cape and the south-western ZAR. Its subjects included groups of the Kora, Kgalagadi and Bahurutshe.¹⁰

According to oral tradition, king Tau was a ruthless military leader, much like Shaka of the Zulu, who conquered and subjugated the neighbouring groups like the Kora, Bakgalagadi and the Bahurutshe. He treated his own people like slaves, killed the Kora and the San and also members of his own community. Those Barolong that he alienated, because of lack of food, were forced to eat fish from the Vaal River, and they were therefore called the Batlhaping.¹¹ Tau's attempts to control the Batlhaping brought him into conflict with the Kora who had joined the Batlhaping in an alliance after Tau had killed a Kora chief. The

¹⁰ Brown, *Among the Bantu*, p.216.

¹¹ Parsons, *New History*, p.47.

Kora chief's brother, Matsaledi (Tarbosch), then ambushed Tau and killed him in about 1760 in Taung.¹²

According to Molema, Nthufa, Tau's brother, succeeded Tau and ruled for a while as a regent for Ratlou who was still a minor, but he died in 1775. He was replaced by Seleka, one of the sons of Tau, who relinquished the regency in favour of the rightful heir, Ratlou.¹³ Ratlou who was 21 years old was installed as king of the Barolong at Mosita north of Taung in 1775.¹⁴ Gray asserts that the Barolong kingdom reached its peak under the reign of king Ratlou.¹⁵ Ratlou's reign was short lived; he died of small pox and was buried at Mosita in about 1775.¹⁶ He had several sons by his wives namely, Seitshiro, Mariba, Modirwagale, Mokalaka and Lephontho and when he died they fought for the kingship, which led to the disintegration of the Barolong kingdom.¹⁷ However, the question of a legitimate heir and successor led to rivalries and divisions that resulted in a number of splits of distinct and independent Barolong clans. The conflict for the kingship was

¹² War Office, "The Native Tribes", p.8.

¹³ Matthews, *A Short History*, p.8.

¹⁴ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Ratlou History", p.39.

¹⁵ Gray, *Cambridge History of Africa*, p.415.

¹⁶ Parsons, *New History*, p.46.

¹⁷ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Ratlou History", p.2.

between Seitshiro and Mariba and the Barolong were divided into two groups. The Barolong claimed that Sietshiro's mother was betrothed first, while Mariba's mother's bride wealth was paid first. Modirwagale, one of Seitshiro's brother, who also supported him for the kingship was appointed a regent for Seitshiro.¹⁸

Mokalaka, another brother of Seitshiro, who supported Mariba for the kingship resented Modirwagale's appointment and advocated dissension. He took away the young Mariba to establish an independent chiefdom.¹⁹ Subsequently, five branches, that is, Ratlou, Ratshidi, Makgetla Seleka and Rapulana emerged each named after Tau's sons. However, the Makgetla branch was absorbed by the Ratshidi and only four branches remained. These are the four Barolong groups dealt with in this study. All four sections of the Barolong left Mosita and went to Setlagole near Madibogo because of internal conflict caused by the Ratlou who could not easily accept the disintegration of the kingdom.²⁰

MIGRATION, POLARIZATION AND CHIEFDOM FORMATION

According to Schapera, the composite name "Batswana" comes from the term

¹⁸ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Ratlou History", p.3.

¹⁹ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Ratlou History", p.3.

²⁰ Parsons, *New History*, p.46.

“-tswana” which means “to come or to go out from one another, to separate,” a derivation which suggests the very high incidence of secession and fission in Batswana history.²¹ The process of fission was influenced by population growth, scarcity of land and water resources, which tended to exacerbate political differences and succession disputes within a chiefdom. Thus disgruntled individuals and their followers would break away to form their own separate chiefdoms elsewhere.²² This process affected the Barolong who were divided into branches and later those branches were further subdivided into small, independent chiefdoms.

While the Barolong were polarized into four sections, the Ratlou were further subdivided into the Seitshiro-Ratlou and Mariba-Ratlou.²³ The two branches ultimately established themselves as independent chiefdoms. The senior branch of the Ratlou, led by one of Ratlou’s sons, Seitshiro, moved from Setlagole to Disaneng, away from the Mariba section of the Ratlou in order to evade conflict. The Mariba section occupied Phitshane. However, little is preserved on Seitshiro’s

²¹ Quoted in Mbenga, “The Bakgatla”, p.23.

²² R. Cornwell, “ ‘Origins’ of the Sotho-Tswana peoples and the history of the Batswana,” *African Insight*, Vol.18, No.2 (1988), p.98.

²³ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.3.

reign. According to oral traditions, when he died, he left behind a beautiful woman called Sereni whom he had married in a polygamous marriage but who did not have a child.²⁴ The sons of Seitshiro, namely, Kgosi, Mosweu and Mokoto quarrelled about this beautiful woman. A great battle over Sereni, known as the “war of the woman”, took place and divided the Ratlou further, blood being shed on a large scale between the rivals.²⁵ Some of the Barolong fled their country and others followed Sefunelo (the Seleka chief) and joined him in Khunwana. Most of the Ratlou left Disaneng and stayed in Khunwana under the leadership of Kgosi to move further away from the Mariba-Ratlou and other sections of the Barolong. Kgosi established Khunwana as the headquarters of the Ratlou. Khunwana was swelled by the Ratshidi who were fleeing from a war with the Batlokwa. Some messengers in Khunwana who were entrusted with the responsibility of alerting the Barolong about impending attacks told the Barolong that the Batlokwa were heading towards Phitshane and the Ratshidi decided to occupy Khunwana. However, the Batlokwa led by Mantatise attacked Khunwana instead.²⁶ The Ratlou and the Ratshidi were defeated by the Batlokwa. The Ratlou under Gontse (the son

²⁴ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.3.

²⁵ Gray, *Cambridge History of Africa*, p.415.

²⁶ Gray, *Cambridge History of Africa*, p.415.

of Mokoto), and the Ratshidi under Tawana fled from Khunwana and resettled at Phitshane. In Phitshane they were joined by Sefunelo who had fled from the Basotho (Baphuting). The Bataung's attacks forced the Ratlou, Seleka and Ratshidi to return to Khunwana, which was safer.²⁷ Since Tau's death, there was no strong leader to centralise authority among the Barolong and build them into a strong nation because they had been disunited and only made piecemeal responses to outside attacks. These groups of Ratlou and Ratshidi fled to Platberg, but because the place was too small they later moved to Thaba-Nchu.²⁸

The second group of the Ratlou were the Mariba-Ratlou. When the Barolong were polarized in 1777, the Mariba-Ratlou went to Morokweng in the present-day Vryburg district.²⁹ They settled for a short period in Tshidilamolomo. The Mariba-Ratlou were subdivided among the sons of Moamogwe, namely Motswari and Maiketso, because of conflict over chieftainship. Maiketso was acting for Letlhogile (another son of Moamogwe). Letlhogile left Maiketso with one section of his people in Morokweng, Setlagole and Ganyesa and took the rest of his

²⁷ Stow, *Native Races*, p.92; Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.102.

²⁸ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Barolong History" p.8.

²⁹ Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.102; Stow, *Native Races*, p.492; Wookey, *Dinwao*, p.28; Z.K. Matthews, *A Short History*, p.12.

followers and settled at Phitshane in the Molopo Reserve.³⁰ Maiketso was succeeded by his elder son who took another section to Morokweng and went to Dikgatlou with a small Ratlou group. He left his younger brother called Montsusi, in Morokweng, and he became a chief for the section that remained behind.³¹ Motshwari took his section to Phitshane and was succeeded by Makgobi who established the area as the stronghold of the Mariba-Ratlou and incorporated some of Maiketso's people. In short, Maiketso's people ended up in Phitshane, Ganyesa, Setlagole, Morokweng and Madibogo. The descendants of Motshwari settled in Phitshane, Leporung and Tshidilamolomo.³²

This sub-division of the Ratlou was formed because of a struggle for chieftainship. The Ratlou were never united and were later scattered all over Bechuanaland. They were the most divided of all the sections of the Barolong. Their disunity stemmed from the conflicts for the kingship of the Barolong and when other sections realised that there was a leadership crisis they broke away and formed

³⁰ Stow, *Native Races*, p.492.

³¹ S. Broadbent, *A Narrative of the First Introduction of Christianity amongst the Barolong Tribe of Bechuanas* (1865), p.96.

³² Wookey, *Dinwao*, pp.28-29.

their independent chiefdoms, thus marking the end of the original Barolong kingdom. This situation gave the Ratshidi, Rapulana and Seleka groups the opportunity to establish their independent chiefdoms ruled by independent chiefs, all of them being sons of the first Morolong king, Tau. The Ratlou did not have a strong leader who could centralise authority and unite them and it would have been very difficult for their rulers to unite all sections of the Barolong because they were unable to bring together the scattered Ratlou section of the Barolong.

The second section was the Ratshidi who traced their lineage back to Tau's son Tshidi from the Second House. This branch broke away from the stem of the Ratlou. They left Setlagole in about 1777 under the leadership of Magetla (one of Tau's sons) who acted on behalf of Tshidi who was still a minor time. Tshidi took over when he had come of age. The Ratshidi went to Phitshane to avoid conflict with the Ratlou.³³ Thutlwa, an heir to the Ratshidi throne, died in 1805. After the Ratlou had attacked the Ratshidi because of the frustration caused by the collapse of the kingdom, they left for Setlopo, adjacent to the Seleka and Rapulana clans of Lotlhakane. Ratshidi's son Thutlwa was survived by his sons and one of them,

³³ M. Kinsman, "Hungry Wolves: The Impact of Violence on Rolong Life, 1823 - 1836" in Hamilton, *The Mfecane Aftermath*, p.377.

Tawana, became the heir to the throne,³⁴ because he was still a minor, Leshomo, his uncle acted as regent. In about 1800 Leshomo moved from Setlopo to Disaneng.³⁵ When Tawana grew up he demanded his rightful position but Leshomo did not want to relinquish authority, and in 1814 a civil war erupted.³⁶ Tawana fled to Leporung and then to Tshoaneng and it was during this flight that Montshiwa was born. Montshiwa was destined to play an important role in the history of his people, as will be seen later in Chapter Two. Tawana managed to defeat Leshomo, drive him away and assume his chieftainship. When Leshomo died, his followers were received back into the Ratshidi chiefdom.³⁷ The Ratshidi managed to stabilise the situation again after the civil war and that clearly showed the ability of the Ratshidi rulers to unite their people. Tawana then went to Phitshane and made his capital there. In June 1823 when rumours of the Batlokwa attacks loomed, he moved to Khunwana. After being defeated he returned to Phitshane because the area was at the edge of what later became the Mafikeng district along the border of modern Botswana and because he considered that if the

³⁴ Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.160.

³⁵ Molema. *Montshiwa*, p.8.

³⁶ Molema. *Montshiwa*, p.8.

³⁷ Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.160.

other sections were attacked, Phitshane would be the last to be in danger and the Ratshidi would have time to prepare themselves to flee.³⁸ He reoccupied Khunwana but because of the Amandebele threat, he went to Platberg and then to Thaba-Nchu.³⁹

The third branch was the Seleka under Chief Seleka. They left Setlagole and went to Thabeng in about 1777 to avoid conflict with other sections of the Barolong. Because of the attacks of the Koranas they left Thabeng and went to Lotlhakane to join the Ratshidi and Rapulana and thereafter established themselves at Dithakong.⁴⁰ After being dislodged from their homes at Thabeng by the Phuthing, the Seleka migrated to Makwassie. The attacks of the Taung forced Sefunelo to move to Phitshane where he found the Ratlou and the Ratshidi. Sefunelo went with them to Khunwana but left for Platberg because the Seleka wanted to build themselves up as an independent chiefdom. It was there that the Ratlou, Ratshidi and the Rapulana who had fled away from Mzilikazi joined the Seleka.⁴¹ Platberg

³⁸ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.8.

³⁹ War Office, "The Native Tribes", p.8.

⁴⁰ War Office, "The Native Tribes", p.8.

⁴¹ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.33.

was also vulnerable to the attacks by the Bataung and therefore sections of the Barolong migrated to Thaba-Nchu which was relatively safe because it was under the jurisdiction of the Basotho king, Moshoeshe.⁴²

The last section of the Barolong was the Rapulana led by their founder chief, Rapulana. After the polarization of the Barolong kingdom discussed earlier, the Rapulana left Setlagole and settled at Lotlhakane in about 1777. It was here in Lotlhakane where their chief, Rapulana, died and was buried. However, the Rapulana did not settle there because they desired to live close to other Barolong communities for the sake of security. The Rapulana were either being subjugated or on the run. They went to Thabeng near Platberg and settled at Matlwang with the Seleka.⁴³ Their movement was encouraged by their fear of Basotho attacks, and this made it convenient to join other sections of the Barolong. In addition, Matlaba became a vassal of Mzilikazi and seemed to work well with him.⁴⁴ This information debunks the generalization about the cruelty of the Amandebele king. He had killed many of the Barolong but he also incorporated some of them into the

⁴² Molema, *Chief Moroka*, pp.35-36.

⁴³ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.9.

⁴⁴ War Office, "The Native Tribes", p.8.

Amandebele community because he acknowledged them as human beings. Moreover, he worked with Matlaba and did not kill him. Despite this, historians such as Molema and Stow⁴⁵ criticise him as barbaric and cruel but without acknowledging his ability to relate with and accept members of other ethnic groups. Because of the attacks of the Bataung people against the Rapulana, they fled to Platberg and together with other sections of the Barolong went to Thaba-Nchu in December 1833.⁴⁶ The Barolong were thus forced into hiding because of the period violence called the *difaqane*.

The *difaqane* was a period between the 1820s and 1830s, characterised by massive violence, inter-ethnic rivalry, destruction and chiefdom formation in southern and central Africa. Historians differ as to what caused the upheaval of 1820s and 1830s. In 1980 Julian Cobbing, challenged the generally held view by historians such as Omer-Cooper, that the upheavals associated with the emergence of the Zulu kingdom, set in motion a whole series of migrations which extended their influence over a vast area of southern, central and east Africa.⁴⁷ According to

⁴⁵ Stow, *Native Races*.

⁴⁶ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, pp.35-36.

⁴⁷ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.9.

Cobbing the troubled times of the nineteenth century happened as a result of the labour raiding and slaving expeditions mounted to feed the demand for labour generated in the Cape Colony and Portuguese Mozambique.⁴⁸ Cobbing's view was castigated by historians such as Peires, Saunders, Omer-Cooper, Eldredge, Parsons, Manson and others.⁴⁹

As already noted, the Barolong in the northern Cape were scattered all over the region by groups of the Basotho who had fled from Mzilikazi, the king of the Amandebele. The Barolong were divided and disunited and could only flee in search of a safer place. They could not contain both the Basotho and the Amandebele attacks and in their flight men, women and children lost their lives. This section seeks to outline the impact of the *difaqane* raids on the Barolong communities generally and the Rapulana, Ratlou and Ratshidi in particular, especially those in the highveld area between the Drakensberg mountains, the Kalahari Desert and the Limpopo River. The Nguni fugitives such as the Ngwane and Hlubi from the Zulu king Shaka prompted the emergence of the Basotho

⁴⁸ N. Etherington, "Putting the Mfecane Controversy into Historiographical Context" in C. Hamilton, *The Mfecane Aftermath*, p.13.

⁴⁹ For information on the debates about *difaqane* see, C.Hamilton, *The Mfecane Aftermath*, pp.21-435.

forces such as the Batlokwa, Bahlakwana, Bafokeng, Baphuting and Bataung, who devastated sections of the Barolong.⁵⁰ After the Basotho attacks the Amandebele regiments wreaked further havoc on the Barolong.⁵¹ The Bafokeng conquered the Barolong under Gontse and Tawana at Khunwana and settled in their ripe fields to feast and recover.⁵² The Barolong fled and reoccupied Phitshane.

The Ratshidi, Seleka and Ratlou were also attacked by the Bataung where ever they went. They did not know which direction to take as the Bataung followed them. Other sections of the Barolong, such as the Rapulana, Ratlou and Ratshidi joined the Seleka at Platberg. They took refuge in Thaba-Nchu because of the devastation by the Amandebele who attacked Khunwana, killing some members of the Ratshidi and Ratlou. The people who visited the spot two days later saw starving children sucking, but in vain, the breast of their lifeless mothers.⁵³ The Barolong refugees increased the population at Platberg and because of a shortage of water, the Barolong went to Thaba-Nchu.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Kinsman, "Hungry Wolves: The Impact", pp.363-393.

⁵¹ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.9.

⁵² Kinsman, "Hungry Wolves: The Impact", p.367.

⁵³ Cited in Kinsman, "Hungry Wolves: The Impact", p.386.

⁵⁴ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.35.

THE CAUSES OF THE RATSHIDI-RAPULANA CONFLICT, 1852 - 1895

The dispute between the Ratshidi and Rapulana arose because Montshiwa regarded Lotlhakane, the land occupied by the Rapulana, as the Ratshidi's land. He based his claim on the fact that it belonged to his father, Chief Tawana, who had died there in about 1849. The Rapulana justified their occupation of the land on the basis that it was occupied by their Chief, Rapulana, in about 1787, before the Ratshidi led by Tawana occupied it. Therefore, the bone of contention behind the Ratshidi-Rapulana conflict was Lotlhakane. In addition to the land issue there was also the chiefly paramountcy of the Barolong. The Rapulana did not want to be ruled by Montshiwa.⁵⁵ They recognised Moshete as their paramount chief because the paramountcy over the Barolong as a whole had earlier belonged to the Ratlou.

The disintegration of the Barolong kingdom into four independent chiefdoms already discussed in Chapter One, caused competition for land in the long run. This happened after the death of the Barolong king Ratlou at Mosita in 1775. As

⁵⁵ S. Mothibi, interview, Rapulana *Kgotla*, Bodibe, 28 February 2001.

stated in Chapter One, the Barolong were scattered all over the present-day northern Cape in the four sections already mentioned. During the *difaqane* all sections of the Barolong were unsettled and were on the run from the Batlokwa, Basotho and Amandebele and thus, the competition for land did not surface at the time. The issue of protecting the land of the Barolong came to the fore when the Boers came to the highveld during the 1830s and claimed to be the owners of land by virtue of their conquest of the Amandebele in 1837.

The Boers, led by Hendrik Potgieter, came to the highveld in 1837 and were welcomed by Chief Moroka (who succeeded Sefunelo) of the Seleka. Moroka wanted the Boers to settle in Thaba-Nchu in order to protect him and the Barolong from Mzilikazi but the Boers were not interested and left shortly for the Molopo region. The Boers saw this as an opportunity to remove the Amandebele “obstacle” and to offer the Barolong protection in their own land. In 1837, shortly after their departure for the Molopo region, the Boers came to ask Chief Moroka for food because the Amandebele had taken their cattle. The Boers duly defeated Mzilikazi, took his cattle and established a *laager*, but the Amandebele came during the night and took back all the cattle. The Boers wanted the Barolong to assist them in preparing the expedition against the Amandebele, but of the

Barolong chiefs only Matlaba took the leadership of the contingent against the Amandebele because “he was a vassal of Mzilikazi; had often been to Mosega and therefore knew the country and the road well”.⁵⁶ The Barolong-Boer commando attacked the military headquarters of Mzilikazi at Mosega, killed about 400 of the Amandebele and put the rest to flight.⁵⁷

The Boers thought that other Barolong chiefs were reluctant to help them against Mzilikazi. They began to put their trust in Matlaba and even turned him against his brothers. They offered to protect Matlaba and his interests and promised him his favourite land Lotlhakane (that belonged to his forefather Rapulana) if he remained loyal to them. Matlaba’s interest in Lotlhakane clashed with that of Montshiwa at a later stage when he occupied Lotlhakane. Lotlhakane was a fertile area occupied by the Ratshidi, which meant that to keep their promise and their friendship with Matlaba the Boers had to push the Ratshidi out of that

⁵⁶ J. Mackenzie, *Austral Africa* (1887), p.57; This oral tradition is recorded in ZAR Native Affairs Department (TNAD), “Report by the Commissioner for Native Affairs Relative to the Acquisition and Tenure of Land in the ZAR” (1905), p.16.

⁵⁷ TNAD, “Report by the Commissioner for Native Affairs”, p.17.

area.⁵⁸ This was the beginning of the rift within the Barolong caused by the Boers. The issue of Chief Matlaba needs some explanation. He was hated by most of the Barolong because he had often joined alliances with the enemies of the Barolong such as the Bataung, Amandebele and the Boers to escape being a victim of the most powerful forces in the region before the British occupation. When Moletsane of the Bataung attacked the Barolong, Matlaba entered into an alliance with him against the Barolong in the 1820s. In the 1830s when Mzilikazi came to the highveld, Matlaba switched his loyalty to the Amandebele and helped them to track down Moletsane whose military skills could not match those of the new white arrivals.⁵⁹ Moletsane fled to the Basotho. Then too, the Boers came to the highveld in 1837, Matlaba was the first to align himself with them against other sections of the Barolong. As a result, he was hated by the other Barolong who regarded him as a traitor and Montshiwa wanted to curtail Matlaba's activities once and for all by subjugating his people the Rapulana.⁶⁰

In 1838 after the expulsion of the Amandebele, the four sections of the Barolong

⁵⁸ Shillington, *The Colonisation*, pp.128-129.

⁵⁹ Mackenzie, *Austral Africa*, p.57; TNAD, "Report by the Commissioner for Native Affairs", p.16; Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.20.

⁶⁰ TNAD, "Report by the Commissioner for Native Affairs", p.16.

also captured cattle from the Boers and drove them away until they reached the Vaal River. Here their cattle-driver mistakenly brought them within sight of the Boers.⁶¹ Potgieter immediately said that the livestock captured by the Boers would replace those stolen by the Amandebele and that they would share those captured by the Barolong. The Barolong agreed because they were disunited and too poorly organized to resist the Boers.⁶² The relations between the Boers and the Barolong (except the Rapulana) began to deteriorate because the Boers thought that the Barolong had helped them in order to steal their cattle.

In 1839 the Boers went to Pochefstroom and took possession of the land of the Barolong by virtue of their conquest of the Amandebele. The Boers realised that the Barolong were disunited, disorganised and were weary of outside attacks. They capitalized on this weakness. They offered to protect the Barolong but in reality they planned to secure the land for themselves. Meanwhile, in 1845 the Barolong under Gontse, Ratshidi under Tawana and Rapulana under Matlaba left Thaba-Nchu and came to the west of Potchesfstrom because the Boers and

⁶¹ Mackenzie, *Austral Africa*, p.58.

⁶² Mackenzie, *Austral Africa*, p.58.

the Barolong had defeated Mzilikazi.⁶³ The Boers had already occupied the surrounding farms. The Ratlou moved to Platberg and were on their way to Khunwana, while Tawana and Matlaba remained in Potchefstroom until the Boers gave the Rapulana the area called Bodibe about 35 kilometres from Lotlhakane as a reward for their having assisted them against the Amandebele.⁶⁴ But because Tawana was too old, he ordered the Ratshidi to return to Lotlhakane and Dithakong because these areas were fertile.⁶⁵ The Ratshidi came to Lotlhakane in 1847 and in 1849 Tawana died and was succeeded by Montshiwa.⁶⁶

In 1851 some Boers came to settle to the west of Lichtenburg upon land claimed by Montshiwa at the “eye” of the Molopo River.⁶⁷ Montshiwa made a formal protest to Andries J. Pretorius, the newly appointed Commandant-General of the Potchefstroom and Rustenburg districts, about the occupation of his land by the

⁶³ These were testimonies by the Rapulana to the Secretary of Native Affairs about events from Thaba-Nchu to the occupation of Lotlhakane in 1874. See NASA, Vol. 12, File. 718, “Complaint of George Matuba and others at Lotlhakane”, 23 July 1913.

⁶⁴ NASA, Vol. 12, File. 718, “Complaint of George Matuba and others at Lotlhakane”, 23 July 1913. War Office, “The Native Tribes”, p.9.

⁶⁵ War Office, “The Native Tribes”, p.9.

⁶⁶ War Office, “The Native Tribes”, p.9.

⁶⁷ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.30.

Boers. Montshiwa's complaint was not heeded but he was invited to meet the Boers to resolve the land problem. The Boers organized a commission of farmers consisting of Pieter Scholtz and Andries Stander and two field cornets. These men met with Montshiwa and his brother Motshegare with twenty Barolong councillors and Ludorf (the missionary teacher from the Wesleyan Mission Society) on 30 December 1851 at the "eye" of the Molopo River. The Ratshidi and the Boers agreed not to encroach upon each other's land and drew a boundary. It stretched from Mosega to Ottoshoop, to Buurmansdrif, through the source of the Harts River, and down along that river to a point opposite Makwassie.⁶⁸

When Montshiwa thought that the problem of the Boer encroachment was over, the British gave the Boers the right to occupy the land of the Africans, including that of the Barolong in terms of the Sand River Convention of 1852. This convention which was signed by Assistant Commissioners W. Hogge and C.M. Owen on behalf of the British government, gave complete independence to the "emigrant Boer farmers beyond the Vaal River".⁶⁹ The Boers were scattered all

⁶⁸ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.30.

⁶⁹ A. Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland: A Study in Humanitarian Imperialism 1835-1899* (1971), p.10; E.C. Danziger, *Perspectives in History* (1978), p.11.

over the interior and it would have been too costly for the British to protect every African community whose land was being encroached upon by the Boers.⁷⁰ The British decided instead to grant the Boers concessions in accordance with the Sand River Convention.⁷¹ It gave the Boers the legal right to land they occupied or claimed.⁷² Shortly after the conclusion of the Sand River Convention, Commandant Scholtz, the highest Boer authority in the Lichtenburg district, convened a meeting of all the African chiefs living in the Molopo region. He told them that the land they occupied belonged to the Boers by right of conquest. Therefore they were liable to pay labour tax to the South African Republic.⁷³ The chiefs resisted this move and refused to submit to the Boer authorities. The Boers attacked chiefs such as Sechele, Montshiwa and Motshegare who resisted their authority.

In 1852 when the Boers resolved to attack Sechele in Rustenburg district because he was resisting their infringement upon his land and independence, Montshiwa

⁷⁰ C.F.J. Muller, *500 Years: A History of South Africa* (1981), p.178.

⁷¹ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.30.

⁷² Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland*, p.10.

⁷³ Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland*, p.10.

was instructed to assist them.⁷⁴ Because the Bakwena and the Barolong were on friendly terms Montshiwa declined to join the Boers. In response to Montshiwa's refusal, the Boers maintained that after their expedition against Sechele they would attack him because he had refused to render the military assistance they demanded. The Ratlou and Rapulana from Setlagole and Lotlhakane went to Rustenburg district and repossessed their cattle from the Boers who were unaware and preoccupied with the battle against Sechele.⁷⁵ However, after returning from the war, they traced their cattle from the Barolong. Montshiwa refused to deliver either the cattle or culprits because he knew that the cattle belonged to the Barolong.⁷⁶

In September 1852 Montshiwa and his people were aware of the imminent danger, and decided to leave Lotlhakane and Dithakong and settle at Setlagole in an attempt to evade the impending Boer attack.⁷⁷ Because the Boers followed them up, Montshiwa and his people went to Mosite and ultimately reached

⁷⁴ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Barolong History", p.10.

⁷⁵ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Barolong History", p.10.

⁷⁶ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Barolong History", p.10.

⁷⁷ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Barolong History", p.16.

Dikhukhung.⁷⁸ The obstacle preventing Matlaba's occupation of the land was virtually removed by the Boers, but Montshiwa did not leave with all his people. He had left headmen behind to safeguard his home area.

When diamonds were discovered on the Vaal River in 1868, the Barolong, the Boers and the Griqua began to compete for the ownership of the diamondiferous land. The ZAR used a "proclamation" including within its western boundary the entire Bechuanaland, from Lake Ngami on the north to Langberg and southwest of Kuruman.⁷⁹ In August 1870, a meeting organised by Pretorius and Commandant Paul Kruger took place between the Boers and the Barolong on the border of the ZAR near Mafikeng at a place called Buurmansdrift.

Montshiwa, Moroka, Maiketso, Gaseitsiwe and Mosweu represented the Ratshidi, Seleka Barolong, Batlhaping, Bangwaketse and the Koranna respectively.⁸⁰ The purpose of this meeting was to persuade the Ratshidi to give the Boers the land on which diamonds had been discovered. The Boers knew fully well that the Keate Award had given this land to the Barolong, Bangwaketse and the Batlhaping

⁷⁸ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.60.

⁷⁹ Mackenzie, *Austral Africa*, p.60.

⁸⁰ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.61.

communities.⁸¹ The Boer leaders urged the Barolong to safeguard their land by placing it under the control of the South African Republic. If they failed to do so the British would surely annex it. The Boers were concerned that the British, through their arbitrator Keate, might annex the diamond fields. Montshiwa refused to give up his own land and his stand was backed by the Barolong, Batlhaping and Korana chiefs. Montshiwa claimed the land from the north of the Molopo River to the Harts River, from the Schoon spruit in the south at the Vaal River down to its confluence with the Harts River. Montshiwa claimed to be the legitimate owner of the land, basing his claim on his inheritance from his forefathers.⁸²

The arbitrator Keate awarded the diamondiferous land to the Griqua and the Barolong. The ZAR and Orange Free State governments which were disillusioned by the Keate Award, forced Marthinus Pretorius and his state attorney Klein to resign and Thomas Francois Burgers became the new president of the ZAR in 1872.⁸³ His presidency marked the beginning of serious conflict within the Barolong from 1873 to 1884. Burgers wanted to make claim to the land

⁸¹ Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland*, p.41.

⁸² Mackenzie, *Austral Africa*, p.60.

⁸³ Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland*, p.41.

of the Barolong chiefs to counteract British imperialism on the highveld.⁸⁴ He made an oral survey into the history of the Barolong and found out that Ratlou had been the king of all the Barolong after the death of his father Tau and that he was the eldest legitimate son to ascend to the Barolong kingship. According to Molema, President Burgers discovered that there were several clans, namely, the Ratlou, Ratshidi, Makgetla, Seleka and Rapulana in their order of seniority and that the principal chief of the clan was Moshete the chief of the Ratlou.⁸⁵

Brown asserts that:

Although, as we have seen, the right to the paramountcy of all the Barolong tribes belongs to the family of Ratlou, the British government when it took over the country in 1884, gave the position to Montshiwa of the Ratshidi branch and his successors were recognised by the government as chiefs of the whole tribe, though members of the tribe acknowledge the priority of the living descendant of the Ratlou as their paramount chief.⁸⁶

Urged by these findings, the Boers approached Moshete, who was the elder son of Kgosi⁸⁷ and an heir to the throne of the Ratlou chieftainship, who was working on

⁸⁴ Shillington, *Colonisation*, p.128.

⁸⁵ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.62.

⁸⁶ Brown, *Among the Bantu*, p.221.

⁸⁷ Kgosi was the chief of the Ratlou Barolong. He took them to Khunwana. Moshete was his son. When Boers found out that he was going to be a chief of the Ratlou, they elevated him to the status of the chief and called him the "paramount" chief of all the Barolong. For more information see NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Statements taken by

Boer farms in Khunwana. The Boers found out that he was the future chief, set him free from the indentured labour and influenced him with the notion of being a “paramount chief” over the entire Barolong because they wanted him officially to hand over the Barolong land to them, thus paralysing Montshiwa’s resistance to the Boers.⁸⁸ They installed him as the chief of “all the Barolong” in 1872 and gave him a staff as a symbol of kingship. They also gave him a carved stick, a kind of sceptre and emblematic of his office and paramouncy.⁸⁹ This stick is still treasured even today by Moshete’s family as a symbol of supremacy.⁹⁰ President Burgers urged Moshete to cede all the territorial rights of the Barolong to the South African Republic as a reward for being granted the chieftainship.⁹¹ Burgers gave Montshiwa a letter stating that the country of the Barolong had been given to Boers by Moshete the “paramount chief” of all the Barolong.⁹² Montshiwa was enraged and asserted that he had never been under

R.C. LLOYD”, Magistrate of Mafikeng at Lotlhakane on 29 May 1913.

⁸⁸ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, “The Ratlou History”, p.13.

⁸⁹ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, “The Ratlou History”, p.13.

⁹⁰ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, “The Ratlou History”, p.13.

⁹¹ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, “The Ratlou History”, p.13.

⁹² BPP C-3486, Montshiwa to High Commissioner, Pretoria, 26 December 1882.

Moshete's rule and he maintained that according to the Barolong law the country was not divisible by individual chiefs.⁹³ He further stated that the whole country belonged to the general ethnic group of the "Barolong".⁹⁴

When Moshete realized that politically he could rise over Montshiwa, he favoured the idea and agreed to be under the protection of the ZAR and to assist the Boers militarily against Montshiwa. Historians like Agar-Hamilton, Mackenzie and Shillington have all criticized Moshete's legitimacy as a paramount chief of the Barolong.⁹⁵ Moshete was the eldest son of Kgosi who was the chief of the Ratlou, and therefore his legitimate successor. Moshete was not the paramount chief but if matters of paramountcy were raised by the outsiders, namely, the Boers and British, he could claim authority by virtue of being a descendant of king Ratlou who died at Mosita. However, Moshete's aspirations to the paramountcy were thwarted because the Barolong chiefs were independent and would not relinquish

⁹³ BPP, C-3486, Montshiwa to High Commissioner, Pretoria, 26 December 1882.

⁹⁴ BPP, C-3486, Montshiwa to High Commissioner, 26 December 1882.

⁹⁵ Shillington, *The Colonisation*, p.128; Agar-Hamilton, *The Road*, p.67.

their authorities.⁹⁶ In the struggle for land and tribal supremacy between Montshiwa and Moshete, historians have relegated Moshete's action to same level as the land grabbing desire of the freebooters.⁹⁷ They project Montshiwa as the paramount chief and do not criticize the British freebooters who also desired the land and cattle of the Barolong. Evidence presented by these historians which correlates with the oral tradition of the Barolong proves that Montshiwa could not claim paramountcy over all the Barolong. Theal, for example, states that Moshete was descended from the principal son of Tau, and was therefore higher in hereditary rank, but on the other hand, Montshiwa had a larger following and was favoured by the British authorities in South Africa.⁹⁸ Moreover, Montshiwa managed to secure a large area which included the Molopo and Setlagole Reserves. The ascendancy of Moshete to the Ratlou chieftainship intensified conflict between Ratshidi and Ratlou on the one hand, and Rapulana on the other. Boers had already united Matlaba and Moshete. Moshete was recognised for the

⁹⁶ Montshiwa had previously acknowledged the paramountcy of Moshete but after his collaboration with the Boers he protested. See NASA, Vol. 12, File No.718, "Complaint of George and others at Lotlhakane", 23 July 1913.

⁹⁷ Mackenzie, *Austral Africa*, p.66.

⁹⁸ G.M. Theal, *History of South Africa from 1873-1884*, Vol. II (1919), p.148.

first time as “paramount” chief of the Barolong by the Rapulana, another section of the Barolong. In 1873 President Burgers asked Montshiwa for an alteration of the boundary set by the Keate Award because the Boers wanted the diamond area to be on their side, but Montshiwa refused.⁹⁹ As a result, in 1875 Montshiwa’s people were dislodged by the Boers from Bodibe where they had long resided, and Matlaba and his people were brought from Potchefstroom district to occupy Bodibe¹⁰⁰ because most of the Barolong areas were already claimed and occupied by the Rathidi. In 1874 some members of the Rapulana in the ZAR asked Montshiwa to settle at Lotlhakane and he agreed.¹⁰¹ Montshiwa gave the Rapulana permission to stay because the land belong to all the Barolong but they must recognise him as the chief.

In 1874 a small section of the Rapulana who had come from Matlwang arrived in Lotlhakane under the leadership of Mokgosi a Makgora, Chief Matlaba’s cousin.¹⁰² In 1875 they were joined in Lotlhakane by Mothupi Mosikare with a

⁹⁹ BPP, C-3419, Montshiwa to Burgers, 26 December 21 August 1873.

¹⁰⁰ War Office, “The Native Tribes”, p.9.

¹⁰¹ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, Blue Book, Land Commission, C.4890 1886; War Office, “The Native Tribes”, p.9.

¹⁰² A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, “The Barolong History”, p.8.

small party of the Rapulana from Bodibe. Mokgora and Mosikare negotiated with Montshiwa and Molema (Montshiwa's brother) and agreed that they would settle peacefully with the Ratshidi and acknowledged Montshiwa as their chief.

Mosikare acted as a petty chief until the arrival of Goutlwecwe Abram Motuba in January 1881.¹⁰³ He was installed by Matlaba in the same year and obliterated the agreement between Montshiwa and Mosikare by claiming that Lotlhakane belonged to the Rapulana and they did not need any permission from Montshiwa.¹⁰⁴ He informed the Rapulana that Matlaba was their chief and Moshete their paramount chief. Subsequently, the majority of the Rapulana defied Montshiwa and honoured Moshete as their "paramount" chief because they believed that the paramountcy of the Barolong belonged to the Ratlou family and, consequently, Montshiwa became furious. However, a small section of the Rapulana under Mosikare remained loyal to Montshiwa.

The acknowledgement of Moshete as a paramount chief was legitimate because the paramountcy belonged to the Ratlou and not the Ratshidi. Moreover,

¹⁰³ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Barolong History", p.8.

¹⁰⁴ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Barolong History", p.8.

Lotlhakane belonged to the Rapulana because it was the home of the original chief, Rapulana, who had died and was buried there. The Rapulana believed that because Chief Rapulana had brought them there under his rule, they had to respect him by honouring Matlaba, his Rapulana descendant chief. They did not want to be separated from those in Bodibe. Molema asserts that:

In 1874 Burgers approached Chief Matlaba of the junior branch (Rapulana) of the Barolong, and succeeded in obtaining from him a cession. Armed with Mosweu's, Moshete's and Matlaba's deeds of cession, Burgers now issued a proclamation on 11 March 1874 that all the territorial rights of the Barolong were by cession from the 'paramount' Chief Moshete the territorial right of the South African Republic.¹⁰⁵

The Boers secured an agreement with Moshete in which he ceded all the Barolong land to the ZAR.¹⁰⁶ However, the land of the Barolong could not be taken that easily from them because Montshiwa was prepared to resist the Boers. If war erupted between the Boers and the Ratshidi, the Rapulana would obviously join the Boers who were busy trying to get Moshete on their side. The Boers wanted to use the question of chiefly paramountcy to justify taking over all the Barolong land.

¹⁰⁵ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.78.

¹⁰⁶ Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.19; TNAD, "Report by the Commissioner for Native Affairs", p.17.

The advent of the British and Boers within the ranks of the Ratshidi and the Rapulana developed and consolidated the conflict for the paramountcy of the Barolong, and was used as a lever by both the British and the Boers to take Barolong land. In 1881 the Boers encouraged Moshete to help them fight Montshiwa. In 1885 the British reacted by establishing its authority and installed Montshiwa as “paramount chief” in the Mafikeng district after they had collaborated with him to take the diamondiferous land. At the time, the British used the word “principal chief” to suggest that Montshiwa was higher in the traditional hierarchy than all the other Barolong chiefs in the Molopo Reserve. Some historians such as Molema, Mackenzie and Shillington put the Boers at the centre of the causes of the conflict, asserting that the Boers came to the highveld to take the land of the Barolong but do not implicate the British government.¹⁰⁷ However, according to Theal, British volunteers acquired weapons and ammunition for Montshiwa and therefore also contributed to the Ratshidi-Rapulana conflict.¹⁰⁸ In addition, the Boers decided to use Moshete as a counter to British imperialism. The British placed the diamond fields under their authority by

¹⁰⁷ Shillington, *Colonisation*, pp.124-144.

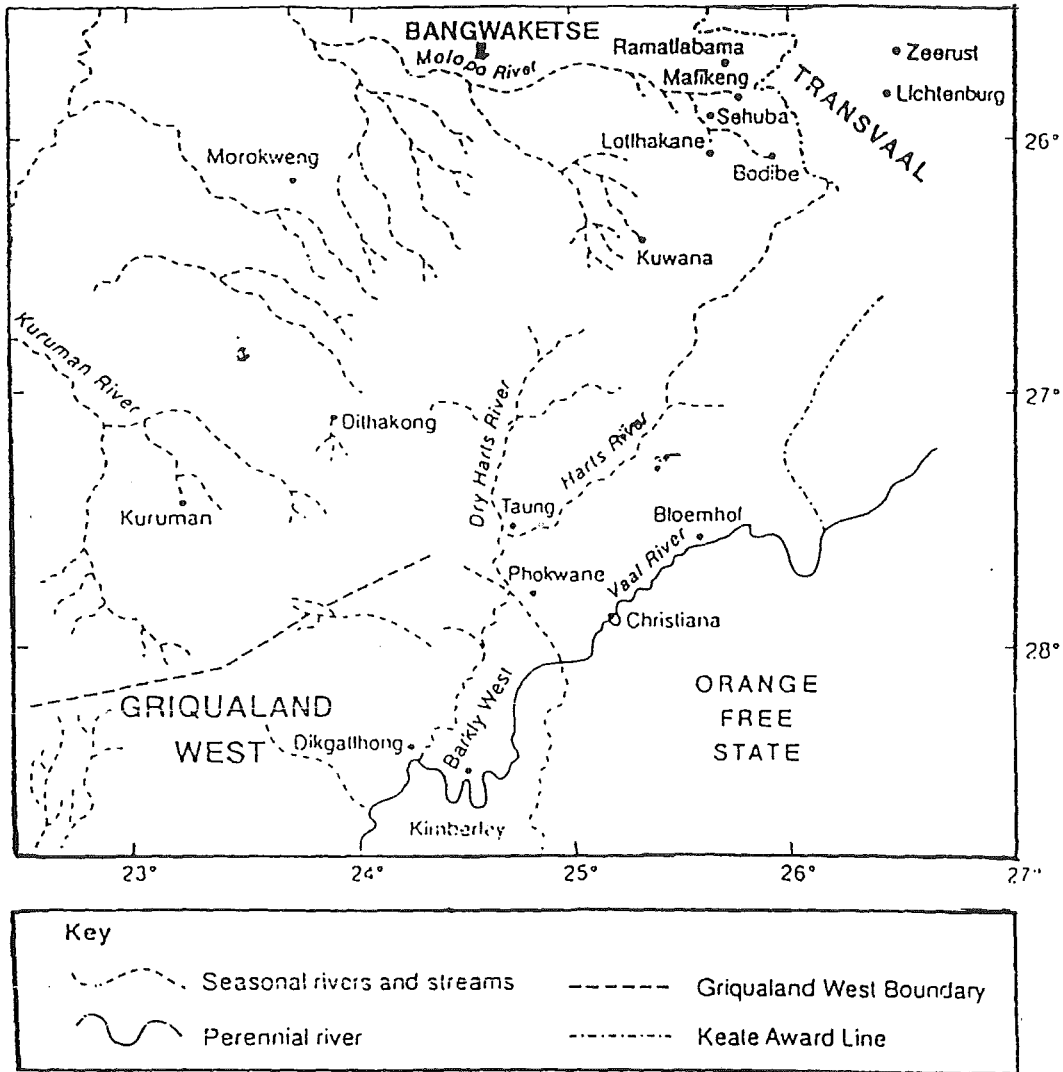
¹⁰⁸ Theal, *History of South Africa*, pp.147-148.

using Montshiwa and promoting him into a paramount chief. What is clear is that both the British and the Boers wanted the diamondiferous land and both used the Barolong chiefs to accomplish this. It was the British who succeeded. The Ratshidi, Ratlou and Rapulana became the victims of these circumstances.

Montshiwa, like Mankoroane, also enlisted the British volunteers, most of whom were willing to help him because he had promised them a share of the booty and a farm each when the war between Montshiwa and the Boers was over. This was an opportunity for the whites to acquire land and cattle. The British termed them freebooters.¹⁰⁹ The view advanced by Shillington and Mackenzie, namely that the Boers who assisted Matlaba and Moshete were freebooters or mercenaries who simply wanted land, is misleading.¹¹⁰ The reality is that Moshete's Boer volunteers as well as most of Montshiwa's British volunteers were freebooters because they were all opportunists who wanted the land and cattle of the Barolong in exchange for fomenting trouble among the different Barolong groups, and which resulted in the Barolong war of 1881-1884. According to Manson, a number of whites came to Montshiwa's aid in the war. These men were promised grants

¹⁰⁹ Theal, *History of South Africa*, p.146.

¹¹⁰ Shillington, *Colonisation*, pp.131-160.



Map 2¹¹¹, Griqualand West and Southern Bechuanaland (1870-1884).

¹¹¹ Manson, "Christopher Bethell", p.488.

of land for their efforts. Manson also states that European volunteers or freebooters who would be rewarded for their services with grants of land, assisted each of the four chiefs, namely Mankoroane and Mashau (Batlhaping), Montshiwa and Moshete (Barolong).¹¹²

In a nutshell, the source of the Barolong conflict stemmed primarily from the break-up of the kingdom. This led to the struggle for paramountcy in the long run between Montshiwa and Moshete. The Boers and the British who used the Barolong to get land at the expense of the Ratlou and the Ratshidi reinforced this ethnic cleavage.¹¹³ Therefore, it is true to say that the division of the Barolong, the British and the Boers contributed equally to the Barolong war.¹¹⁴

THE BAROLONG WAR

The Barolong War which occurred between 1881 and 1884 did not involve all

¹¹² BPP, C-3486, Montshiwa to High Commissioner, Pretoria, 26 December 1882; Manson, "Christopher Bethell", pp.496-497.

¹¹³ Montshiwa was dissatisfied with the fact that Moshete was regarded by the Boers as the paramount chief of the Barolong. See, for example, BPP, C-3486, Montshiwa to R. Southey, Griqualand West, 26 December 1882.

¹¹⁴ Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland*, p.41.

the Barolong but only three sections, namely the Ratshidi, Rapulana and Ratlou. This war was an attempt by the Boers to use Matlaba and Moshete against Montshiwa to force him to surrender the Mafikeng district to the Boers. The Ratshidi, led by Montshiwa, used the war to attract British attention. Montshiwa wanted to use the Mafikeng district and British support to ascend to power and resist Moshete, Matlaba and Boer attacks. If he controlled these large areas which housed the Ratshidi, Ratlou and Rapulana he would have power over other Barolong chiefs because this jurisdiction would prevent Matlaba and Moshete from controlling their own followers in the Mafikeng district. He was aware of the oral tradition respected by all sections of the Barolong which acknowledged the Ratlou as the only people who could claim paramountcy over other sections of the Barolong. He also knew that the Ratlou would not accept him as the paramount chief of all the Barolong. Therefore, he used his resistance against the Boers as an excuse to rule over other sections of the Barolong. He realized that the Barolong lacked a powerful chief who could counteract the Boers. If the Barolong needed a paramount chief, Moshete was the legitimate chief to claim paramountcy, but the decision had to come from the Barolong and not from the Boers. The Boers had assumed the illegitimate task of restoring the paramountcy to the Ratlou. The

Rapulana on the other hand, were blamed by Montshiwa for occupying his country and without recognising him as their ruler. Instead, they regarded Matlaba as their chief, and Moshete as their paramount chief. Montshiwa thus wanted the Rapulana out of Lotlhakane and Bodibe because they were his subjects. The Boers, who brought the Rapulana there, did so at the expense of pushing Montshiwa's people out of their land in Lotlhakane. The Seleka were neutral. These were the logistics of the Ratshidi-Rapulana war.

In the summer of 1876 Montshiwa and his community left Moshaneng, returned to their traditional home and settled at Sehuba. The Ratshidi¹¹⁵ complained to Montshiwa that Matlaba's followers had provoked the Ratshidi by stealing their horses and cattle and firing at them as they worked on the land in Lotlhakane because of the dispute.¹¹⁶ Montshiwa attacked the Rapulana in Lotlhakane, tied up Matlaba's son and others, and captured several of his cattle, horses, goats and wagons.¹¹⁷ This was the beginning of an inevitable showdown between the Ratshidi and Rapulana, and both sides were joined by Boers and British

¹¹⁵ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.83.

¹¹⁶ Agar-Hamilton, *The Road*, p.184.

¹¹⁷ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.79.

freebooters. The ZAR government warned Montshiwa that if he invaded Matlaba he would be indirectly attacking the ZAR government because Matlaba was their subject. Montshiwa responded by writing a letter to Lanyon, the Lieutenant-Governor of Griqualand West, complaining about the encroachment of the Boers on his land. He asserted that the Boers had brought Matlaba to Bodibe, which fell within his jurisdiction, and that they threatened Molema in Mafikeng demanding the payment of tax to the ZAR government.¹¹⁸

Montshiwa's principal adviser was Christopher Bethell, a leader of Montshiwa's British volunteers who procured not only recruits, but also large quantities of ammunition at the diamond field.¹¹⁹ Manson asserts that Bethell recruited a dozen Britons to assist in his defence of the Barolong and some of these men were on Montshiwa's payroll simply as mercenaries.¹²⁰ He was in correspondence with the Secretary to Sir Hercules Robinson, the British High Commissioner and took care to represent all events in which Montshiwa was implicated in the most favourable light.¹²¹ Bethell wanted to protect the Barolong

¹¹⁸ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.83.

¹¹⁹ Theal, *History of South Africa*, p.146.

¹²⁰ Manson, "Christopher Bethell", pp.496-497.

¹²¹ BPP, C-3419, Montshiwa to High Commissioner, Mafikeng, 22 June 1882.

land using a group of Britons who were given land for their role of protecting the Ratshidi and giving them arms.

Montshiwa outlined his programme of containing Boer encroachment to the British authority. He asserted that the first course was for Her Majesty's government to annex the country generally known as the Bechuana Cis- Molopo country, and including all the country south of Molopo River, and east of the borders of the Kalahari desert, and lying between those limits and boundaries of the ZAR state and the Cape colony".¹²² Secondly he would request the British to supply them with a special force that would deal with the Boer infringement.¹²³ Thirdly if the British government failed to respond positively there chiefs who were loyal to Britain including Montshiwa, Bareki and Jantje of Batlhaping, Gaseitsiwe of Bangwaketsi and Sechele of Bakwena would request weapons from the British to defend themselves from the Boers and their Batswana allies.¹²⁴ All these chiefs who were loyal to the British government agreed to Montshiwa's programme of containment. Montshiwa was startled by the fact that David

¹²² BPP, C-3419, Montshiwa to High Commissioner, Mafikeng, 28 July 1882.

¹²³ BPP, C-3419, Montshiwa to High Commissioner, 28 July 1882.

¹²⁴ BPP, C-3419, Montshiwa to High Commissioner, 28 July 1882.

Massouw of the Koranna, Matlhabani of the Batlhaping, Moshete and Matlaba of the Barolong were armed by the Boers to assist them to take the land and cattle of the Barolong.¹²⁵

In the ZAR Moshete gave the Boers land and they also had access to Matlaba's land in Bodibe, but they were not satisfied and wanted all the Barolong land. The Boers who regarded the Ratlou and Rapulana as their subjects were prepared to do anything to defend them against Montshiwa. The Boers were determined to use Moshete's claim to paramountcy as a lever to acquire land and cattle belonging to the Barolong. Their aim was to render the Keate Award superfluous.

On 5 February 1881 Montshiwa gave Motuba, the Rapulana chief at Lotlhakane, who was under Matlaba in Bodibe, and had for some years been residing there, notice to leave that place, but Motuba refused.¹²⁶ Moshete collected his men at Khunwana and Matlaba at Polfontein (Bodibe) in order to pre-empt the impending attack from Montshiwa. On 2 May 1881 Montshiwa attacked Lotlhakane and

¹²⁵ BPP, C-3419, Montshiwa to High Commissioner, 28 July 1882.

¹²⁶ Members of Rapulana, namely, Seyesho Mothibi, Isaac Lerane and Mothupi who participated in the conflict of 1881 to 1884 gave testimonies of their experience to the Secretary of Native Affairs. See NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Statements taken by R.C. Lloyd", 29 May 1913.

routed Motuba's people, killing over 600 men. The white farmers along the ZAR frontier, who held Matlaba in high regard, intended to retaliate.¹²⁷

Matlaba was too old and feeble to go to war but Moshete was ready to adopt his cause.¹²⁸ On 17 October 1881 Moshete and his partisans attacked Montshiwa at Sehuba just south of Mafikeng.¹²⁹ Montshiwa was able to contain the attack. In 1882 Moshete and Matlaba with a hundred men and openly assisted by the Boer freebooters, attacked Sehuba and burnt it to ashes. The Boers took 30 forms, a bell and pulled down the chapel.¹³⁰ Montshiwa retreated to Mafikeng, an outstation occupied by his brother Molema.¹³¹ Montshiwa complained to the British Resident about the infringement by the ZAR Boers who openly helped Moshete and Matlaba. The Boers on the other hand accused the British volunteers of assisting Montshiwa. Clearly, therefore, it would be fundamentally flawed to advance the view that only the Boers were central to fuelling the intra-Barolong

¹²⁷ Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland*, p.69; Mackenzie, *Austral Africa*, p.53.

¹²⁸ Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland*, p.69.

¹²⁹ Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland*, p.69.

¹³⁰ BPP, C-3486, "Montshiwa to High Commissioner", 26 December 1882.

¹³¹ The Rapulana oral testimonies of the Barolong Wars of 1881 to 1884, NAD, Vol 12, File No. 718, 23 May 1913.

conflict or participating in the Barolong war. In actual fact, the Boer-British relations were deteriorating not only within the Mafikeng area, but also elsewhere in South Africa after annexation of the ZAR state in 1877 and this situation tended to exacerbate the Barolong war after 1881 when the Boers regained their Independence. Under Molema's direction, the British volunteers built trenches and walls to strengthen the defence work of Mafikeng so that they should resist any force that Moshete could bring against them.¹³²

On the other hand, Moshete and Matlaba forces, under Seleka, Letsapa and Motuba, assisted by the Boer freebooters from Rooigrond, Vleifontein and Lichtenburg, built a fort about 3 kilometres to the east of Mafikeng.¹³³ In these skirmishes Weber and Coetzee, leaders of Moshete and Matlaba's volunteers, were killed. On Montshiwa's side, James MacGillivray, a British volunteer, was captured¹³⁴ and murdered by the Boer farmers. His disappearance caused much correspondence between the British Resident in Pretoria, the High Commissioner in Cape Town and MacGillivray's relatives, and tended to intensify the bitter feeling between the

¹³² Theal, *History of South Africa*, p.150.

¹³³ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.118.

¹³⁴ Manson, "Christopher Bethell", p.496.

British and Dutch-speaking people in the area.¹³⁵ Moshete's volunteers appointed Nicolas Claudius Gey van Pittius to lead the Boer contingency against Montshiwa. The Boers made some surprise attacks and sometimes they were repelled and there was loss of cattle on both sides.

Gey van Pittius urged Moshete to fulfil his part of the so-called "treaty" of 1882 and grant the volunteers their farms, while on the other hand he sent a notice to Montshiwa on 1 May 1883 to remove his people within four days from certain lands they had cultivated for centuries.¹³⁶ Montshiwa refused and the volunteers destroyed his corn by letting their cattle feed on it. Montshiwa and the Barolong were furious and decided to mobilize Gaseitsiwe of the Bangwaketse and Sechele of the Bakwena. They attacked the Boers and burnt three of their houses in retaliation.¹³⁷

Montshiwa told the British Resident, George Hudson, that he had no intention of interfering with either Moshete or the ZAR. However, he made a coalition with

¹³⁵ Theal, *History of South Africa*, p.150.

¹³⁶ Cited in A979, Ba8, Molema-Plaatje Papers, May 1883, p.14.

¹³⁷ A979, Ba8, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "Montshiwa to George Hudson", Pretoria, June 1883, p.14.

Sechele and Gaseitsiwe to drive the freebooters out of Bechuana country.¹³⁸

Montshiwa complained that when some members of the Barolong visited his country they were stopped, taken to prison and their property confiscated, fined and released after spending six weeks in the laager.¹³⁹ Montshiwa seemed sceptical about the British assistance because it was too slow to end the Boer encroachment to his land. The intention to form a coalition was prompted by a relatively lethargic reaction from the British authorities.

On 31 July 1884 the 300 Goshenites raided a Barolong cattle post north west of Mafikeng and drove off over 300 cattle.¹⁴⁰ In the same month the Goshenites had an engagement with Montshiwa's force, killed about a hundred of his men and wounded many more. Among those killed was Christopher Bethell.¹⁴¹ The British were bitterly disappointed by the death of Christopher Bethell who was in the service of Her Majesty's government and they decided to send British volunteers to evict the Goshenites. Four thousand troops under Charles Warren arrived in

¹³⁸ BPP, C-3841, "British Resident, Transvaal State to High Commissioner", 9, June 1883.

¹³⁹ BPP, C-3841, "Montshiwa to British Resident, Transvaal State", 2, June 1883.

¹⁴⁰ Mafikeng Museum, *The Place of Stones*, p.4.

¹⁴¹ Manson, "Christopher Bethell", p.492.

Bechuanaland in January 1885, and the Boer freebooters suddenly melted away to become peaceful farmers or crossed into the ZAR rather than fight.¹⁴² The British freebooters remained with Montshiwa and helped defend him and his people against the Boers. In March 1885 the British announced the extension of the protectorate over Bechuanaland from beyond the Molopo river to the longitude that marked the boundary of the German protectorate.¹⁴³ The British divided the protectorate by the proclamation of 1885. The area south of the Molopo River became known as British Bechuanaland and separate under Shippard and north of the Molopo river was called the Bechuanaland Protectorate and was also under Shippard as the Commissioner.¹⁴⁴

After the establishment of British Bechuanaland in 1885, Montshiwa and the Ratshidi were given jurisdiction over the Molopo and Setlagole Reserves that included Lotlhakane, Disaneng, Phitshane and Madibogo where the Ratlou

¹⁴² NASA, Vol. 12, File No.718, "Annexation of Bechuanaland", 1884; Sillery, *John Mackenzie of Bechuanaland*, pp.127; Parsons, *New History*, p.164; Mafikeng Museum, *The Place of Stones*, p.5.

¹⁴³ NASA, Vol. 12, File No.718, "Annexation of Bechuanaland", 1884; Parsons, *New History*, p.164; Mafikeng Museum, *The Place of Stones*, p.7.

¹⁴⁴ Parsons, *New History*, p.164.

and Rapulana resided. Matlaba and Moshete on the other hand, had their headquarters outside Bechuanaland, in the ZAR. They were prohibited by the Bechuanaland Act No.2 of 1885 in respect of Barolong residing in British Bechuanaland, from exercising authority over their people who lived there.¹⁴⁵ According to this Act, the chiefs who resided in the ZAR had no jurisdiction over their people in Bechuanaland. For example, Matlaba resided in Polfontein (Bodibe) in the ZAR under the Boer authorities, while some of his people were in Lotlhakane, which was in the Molopo Reserve, under British rule. Moshete resided at Khunwana, which was in the ZAR, while some of the Ratlou resided in Phitshane and Setlagole Reserves within the Molopo Reserve in the Cape Colony, which meant that he had no jurisdiction over them. To complicate matters, the Rapulana in Lotlhakane did not recognize Montshiwa as their ruler. Matlaba was their chief and Moshete was their paramount chief, and this widened the gap between the Ratshidi and the Rapulana even further. In effect this meant that animosity reached new heights in Lotlhakane after the British intervention. The attitudes of “disobedience” of the Rapulana against Montshiwa

¹⁴⁵ A979, Cc1-4, Molema-Plaatje Papers “Proclamation of British Bechuanaland”, 22 May 1884, p.15.

are dealt with in Chapter Five.

While the protectorate defused direct and open warfare between the Rapulana and the Ratshidi, it reinforced the old disputes and squabbles among the Barolong through the demarcation and rules of the boundaries. The authorization by the British government of Montshiwa's jurisdiction over Matlaba and Moshete's people was a serious source of hostility within the Rapulana and the Ratshidi communities. Montshiwa and Moshete competed for paramountcy and when Moshete's people were brought under Montshiwa's jurisdiction by the British, Moshete was appalled and vowed to incite his people to resist Montshiwa's authority. Even in Lotlhakane the Rapulana did not recognize Montshiwa but instead acknowledged Matlaba who resided in the ZAR as their chief and they were determined to fight to protect their threatened interests.¹⁴⁶

THE SIEGE OF MAFIKENG AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE RATSHIDI-RAPULANA RELATIONS FROM 1899 TO 1900

Historians such as, Warwick, Willan, Pakenham, Jeal, Plaatje and others

¹⁴⁶ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Israel Matlaba and others", 27 November 1917.

have written extensively about the siege and their works have been beneficial to this study in that they touch upon pertinent issues which affected the Barolong. Their works centre on the reasons for war and the roles played by various combatants. Latterly the role of the Barolong has been revealed, principally through the writings of Sol Plaatje. The following summary of Barolong participation is drawn from the works of these writers.¹⁴⁷ This section, however, deals with the consequences of the siege for Ratshidi-Rapulana relations, which have not been discussed by other historians.

The siege of Mafikeng was an important historical event which took place from 1899 to 1900. In 1899 the Stad was swelled by refugees from the ZAR, who included the Fingo and Shangaan who came to the Stad to escape the South African War. The Fingo were driven into the Stad when their villages were burned down by the Boers and the Shangaan "mine boys" were expelled from the Rand gold mines and fled from the ZAR to the Stad to

¹⁴⁷ P. Warwick, *Black People and the South Africa War 1899-1902* (1983), pp.29-38 and chapters in this work, B. Willan, "Blacks in the Siege"; T. Pakenham, "The Besieged"; T. Jeal, "Baden-Powell at Mafikeng" in I.R. Smith (ed), *Siege of Mafikeng* (2001); J. Comaroff, *The Boer War Diary of Sol. Plaatje* (1989).

seek British protection.¹⁴⁸

When the siege began in 1899 the Stad was placed within the defence of Mafikeng and the Ratshidi were willing to cooperate to protect it.¹⁴⁹ This was a good opportunity for Montshiwa to defend the Stad under the British flag against people he had always considered to be his enemies. The Barolong thought the British would arm them with guns to take their revenge against the Boers, but they were told that the war was a “white man’s war” and that they would be defended by the British government.¹⁵⁰ The Barolong possessed guns which they had acquired much earlier from Bethell and other Britons for defence purposes against the Boers, but what they wanted was ammunition.

A few years before the outbreak of the South African War, Montshiwa called a meeting of the Barolong chiefs, at Mabeela in the Mafikeng district. The chiefs who met were Moshete of the Ratlou, Matlaba of the Rapulana and Makgobi from Phitshane.¹⁵¹ Montshiwa requested them to join the war on the side of the

¹⁴⁸ Warwick, *Black People*, p.31.

¹⁴⁹ J. Comaroff, *The Boer War Diary of Sol. Plaatje* (1989), prologue.

¹⁵⁰ Comaroff, *The Boer War Diary*, prologue.

¹⁵¹ Matlaba, interview, Rapulana *Kgotla*, Bodibe 28 February 2001.

British government to protect their land from being taken by the Boers. This was an attempt by Montshiwa to end the Barolong conflict by suggesting intra-Barolong cooperation under the British government. Moshete and Matlaba refused to join Montshiwa and asserted that they were the “children of the ZAR” because they were promised land by the Boers after they had helped them to defeat Montshiwa.¹⁵² Moreover, the Boers did not want to be dictated terms by Montshiwa whom they regarded as an opportunist and a minor chief with no respect for Moshete. Montshiwa was shaken by the negative comments made by Chief Matlaba’s nephew, Mogotsi who accused Montshiwa “of ambition and greed for power and leadership and excessive love for everything British”.¹⁵³ There was a crisis and Montshiwa appealed to the chiefs to reprimand Mokgotsi but instead he was applauded by Matlaba’s brothers and the other men of the Rapulana for undermining Montshiwa. Montshiwa felt humiliated in the presence of other Barolong chiefs and decided to punish the Rapulana. In the light of the fact that the Rapulana had decided to fight the war on the Boers side it was a good opportunity for Montshiwa

¹⁵² A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, “The Barolong History”, p.107.

¹⁵³ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, “The Barolong History”, p.107.

to settle old scores during and after the war.¹⁵⁴

The siege impacted negatively on the Barolong and other Africans. Charles Bell asserts that on 9 February 1899 it was discovered that the supply of foodstuff for Africans would last only thirty one more days.¹⁵⁵ The British authorities had to kill horses on certain days to make the supply last at least sixty days. The British military authorities decided that a couple of thousand refugees had to leave for Kanye to enable the British to feed the “legitimate” Africans, meaning the Barolong.¹⁵⁶ As the siege progressed food became more scarce among the Africans and several deaths from starvation were reported.¹⁵⁷ According to Charles Bell, if he fed one African, the following day his yard would be full of thousands of Africans outside his door waiting for food, most of whom were women.¹⁵⁸

The dreadful situation caused by the Boer shells caused many deaths and

¹⁵⁴ S.R. Molema, interview, *Ratshidi Kgotla*, Stad, 29 September 2002.

¹⁵⁵ Comaroff, *The Boer War Diary*, p.86.

¹⁵⁶ Bell, “Mafikeng Siege Diary”, p.92.

¹⁵⁷ Comaroff, *The Boer War Diary*, p.104.

¹⁵⁸ Bell, “Mafikeng Siege”, p.94.

horrible injuries. To name but a few incidents, for example, on 25 November 1889 three Africans who were working at Ellis corner in the Stad were wounded by a shell. One of them had his leg amputated and later died.¹⁵⁹ In another incident in the same month one African was wounded in the foot and another was shot through the stomach while crossing from the location to the town.¹⁶⁰ All these and other atrocious incidents were committed as a consequence of a “white man’s war” which the Barolong had not initiated in any way.

Both the Rapulana and the Ratshidi were negatively affected by the siege of Mafikeng. In their effort to work for the Boers and British respectively, they sustained irreparable harm including paraplegia, malnutrition, diseases and death.¹⁶¹ But for the Ratshidi, the loss of life and injuries were not new and they were determined to remove the Boers once and for all from the land belonging to the Barolong.

In one incident during the siege which demonstrated the injustice against Africans, one girl was raped by a white soldier and the matter was not taken

¹⁵⁹ Bell, “Mafikeng Siege”, p.40.

¹⁶⁰ Bell, “Mafikeng Siege”, p.42.

¹⁶¹ Comaroff, *The Boer War Diary*, p.104; Bell, “Mafikeng Siege”, p.104.

seriously by the British authorities.¹⁶² Plaatje was furious about this matter. The Military Court according to Plaatje did not care about cases of this nature.¹⁶³ This issue had also been ignored by white diarists because they wanted to protect the so-called sacrosanct of the white man.

Before the end of the siege the Rapulana were disarmed by the Boers for using the siege to settle old scores originating from the Barolong War of 1884 and were in disarray, not knowing what to do.¹⁶⁴ The Rapulana lost the cattle which they had raided earlier from the Ratshidi through looting. The Rapulana also suffered because they were not rewarded by the Boers for their contribution. Consequently, they had to face the Ratshidi who waited for the siege to end in order to “punish” the Rapulana for helping the Boers.

On 15 May 1900 after the Boer column led by Eloff, the Boer commander, was defeated near Lotlhakane and had retreated into the ZAR, the siege came to an end. Then the Ratshidi realised that it was appropriate to get the Rapulana to pay for their participation on the Boer side. On 19 May 1900 about three

¹⁶² Comaroff, *The Boer War Diary*, p.28.

¹⁶³ Comaroff, *The Boer War Diary*, p.28.

¹⁶⁴ Bell, “Mafikeng Siege”, p.97.

hundred Ratshidi went out to Lotlhakane to punish Abram Motuba because he had collaborated with the Boers on behalf of the Rapulana in Lotlhakane. They planned to rescue Seane who was still being held hostage by the Rapulana.¹⁶⁵

The Rapulana were accused of killing the Ratshidi, assisting the Boers with intelligence information and occupying some of the British trenches during the siege. They took Abram Motuba, the headman of the Rapulana in Lotlhakane and fifteen leading men with all their livestock to Mafikeng. They were sent to prison by the British authorities to await trial in Cape Town where they were eventually charged for assisting the Boers and defying Montshiwa's authority.¹⁶⁶

However, Motuba was released and died shortly afterwards.

In conclusion the disintegration of the Barolong Kingdom was the long term cause of the Ratshidi-Rapulana conflict because it polarised the Barolong into four sections already mentioned. The short term causes were the activities of the external forces such as the Boers and the British who exploited and reinforced the existing divisions. Moreover, the Boers and the British brought the two Barolong

¹⁶⁵ Bell, "Mafikeng Siege", p.177.

¹⁶⁶ Bell, "Mafikeng Siege", p.117.

groups at loggerhead with each other on the issue of the paramountcy. The situation escalated the Ratshidi-Rapulana conflict to a level which never existed before. It has to be noted that the Ratshidi and the Rapulana were divided but did not fight against each other and their conflict must be blamed squarely on the roles played by Boer and British freebooters who wanted the land and cattle of the Barolong. In the course of the conflict the Barolong people were killed and their cattle confiscated. Also some of the Boers and British freebooters were killed. Even when the siege of Mafikeng ended, the struggle between the Ratshidi and the Rapulana continued. The war seemed to have escalated the existing animosity among the Barolong. The Ratshidi thought that they had the upper hand over the Rapulana because they had fought on the winning side, that of the British empire and therefore should impose their hegemony upon the Rapulana. The siege and the South African War in general was a turning point in the history of South Africa and the British withdrew from the affairs of the Barolong and left them without compensation or funds for the reconstruction of the Stad. The problem of the legitimate ownership of Lotlhakane remained unresolved as the British government was preoccupied with reconciliation with the Boers. The British parliament passed the South Africa Act in 1910 to establish the

Union of South Africa, a new self-governing state. It was now clear that the Boers had lost the military battle in a campaign in which many black people including the Barolong had participated but they gained political independence. The Africans had fought a lost cause without any reward for their efforts.¹⁶⁷ The next chapter deals with the educational empowerment through missionary education, which led to new protagonists in the dispute, the elites.

¹⁶⁷ Karis and Carter, *From Protest*, p.8.

CHAPTER TWO

MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES AMONG THE BAROLONG FROM 1822 UP TO 1920

This chapter seeks to trace the beginning of missionary activity among the Barolong, in particular the Ratshidi, the Rapulana and the Ratlou.¹ It deals with the missionary impact on these groups in the areas of western education and the gospel. Finally, it discusses the independent church movement among the Ratshidi, Ratlou and Rapulana.

EARLY BAROLONG-MISSIONARY CONTACT

The first missionary contact with the Barolong dates back to the *difaqane* in 1822 when they moved between Khunwana and Phitshane to be far from the Batlokwa of Mantatise who had attacked them at Khunwana. Robert Moffat the missionary from the London Missionary Society met the Barolong at Phitshane in about 1822. He found Sefunelo, Tawana and Gontse who ruled the Ratlou, Ratshidi and Seleka respectively. He also met the Barolong at

¹ All sections of the Barolong were exposed to Christianity at Thaba-Nchu and the missionary activities among them cannot be separated. See S.M. Molema, *Methodism Marches into the Midlands* (1956), p.5.

Chaing, where he was welcomed. Moffat did not settle among the Barolong at that time because they were always on the run. Very little has been written about Moffat's activities among the Barolong.

In 1824 the pioneer missionary to the Barolong was Rev Samuel Broadbent. He was sent from Britain to South Africa for a vague destination some where in Bechuanaland.² He left for Graff-Reinett and before he could meet the Barolong he was replaced by Rev Hodgson. Hodgson met the Seleka under Chief Sefunelo who were fleeing from the Batlokwa invaders of Mantatise.³ In the trail of refugees the missionary found a boy namely, Diratsagae, who had been left to die because people were fleeing for their life. He became the first convert to Christianity, and in due course became the first preacher and class leader.⁴

Hodgson moved about by a wagon with the Barolong, teaching them and preaching to them as opportunity arose. This evangelisation continued until the Seleka settled below the Makwassie hills where they built houses and established the first mission in the ZAR.⁵ In 1824 Hodgson was sent

² Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.5.

³ Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.5.

⁴ Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.5.

⁵ Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.6.

to Cape Town by the Wesleyan Missionary Society and replaced by James Archbell. But before Archbell could arrive, the Bataung and the Batlokwa attacked Makwassie and forced the Barolong to flee.⁶ In 1826 Hodgson returned to Makwassie. Hodgson and Archbell took the Barolong to Platberg to escape these incursions by the Bataung and the Batlokwa. Here the missionaries commenced a school, conducted regular services and set up a printing press. In 1828 they were joined by Rev John Edward and Rev Thomas Jenkins.

At the end of 1832 Platberg was swelled by the other sections of the Barolong namely, the Ratlou under Gontse and the Ratshidi under Tawana who were driven from Khunwana by the Amandebele regiments in 1833.⁷ The settlement of the Barolong at Platberg was not very happily situated from the point of view of water supply and grazing. The rainfall was also not abundant. It was known that large tracts of unoccupied land lay along the source of the Modder, Caledon and Riet Rivers towards Basutoland and the missionaries decided to explore the possibility of a settlement there.⁸ At the beginning of May 1833 an impressive expedition set out for this purpose.

⁶ Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.6.

⁷ Kinsman, "Impact of *Difaqane*" (1980), p.386.

⁸ Kinsman, "Impact of the *Difaqane*", p.386; Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.7.

It consisted of 11 wagons and several armed horsemen, Motlhwane and Jacob Ngakantsi who were Chief Moroka's counsellors, and also some Griqua of Barend Barends, Koranas of Jan Kaptein and Piet Baatjes from New Zealand, under the direction of the Wesleyan missionaries, James Archbell and John Edward.⁹ After ten days of travelling, the expedition came to the land where they wanted to settle and successful negotiations were completed with the Basotho Chief Moshoeshe about where they could establish themselves. Moshoeshe gave the land known as Thaba-Nchu to the Seleka and the missionary party, and a large piece of land lying to the west of the Caledon.¹⁰ Archbell, who had now become "Moroka's missionary", often visited Moroka and Tawana at their homes and tried to convert them to Christianity but with little success. The missionary began his evangelical work, first among chiefs and headmen. He befriended Tawana's sons, Montshiwa, Motshegare and Molema to whom he emphasised the need for salvation. Archbell urged the Barolong to offer the Boers cattle because their cattle had been dispossessed by Mzilikazi and they were practically without food. He encouraged the Barolong to extend the gesture of generosity to the stranded Boers.¹¹ Chief Moroka who succeeded Sefunelo thus handed

⁹ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.22.

¹⁰ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.36.

¹¹ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.46.

the cattle over to the Boers.

The missionaries did not only establish mission stations and change society through Christian doctrine, western education and culture, but also played the role of liaison officers and advisers to the Barolong chiefs outside the Christian paradigm. They negotiated with other chiefs, the Boers and the British authorities in matters which affected the Barolong.¹² The Ratshidi from Thaba-Nchu made their way to Lotlhakane and Montshiwa assumed his duties as chief of Ratshidi at the end of the year 1849. His people rested and settled down to normal life after being absent from their own land for eighteen years because of their flight from the Amandebele force. One of Montshiwa's first acts as chief was to send his brother Molema to Thaba-Nchu to request the Wesleyans for a teacher.

Molema had no difficulty in convincing Montshiwa to have a missionary adviser at his court. Montshiwa had witnessed the diligence and generosity of Archbell and J. Cameron in rendering services to Chief Moroka to

¹² The missionaries played the role of liaison officers for the Barolong and this role happened round about the same time with the establishment of mission stations and the spread of Christianity. In this subheading there will be a cross-reference of dates back from the *difaqane* to highlight these non-teaching roles.

facilitate his relations with other groups.¹³ He had seen for himself how the French missionaries Arbousset, Eugene Casalis and others guided and piloted Moshoeshoe through the network of European diplomacy which threatened to entangle him. It was becoming a trend for African chiefs to have missionaries at their courts.¹⁴ The missionaries were significant particularly during the Great Trek because the Boers introduced a system of treaties with the Africans and wanted to use this ploy to take their land. In the period before 1822 the Africans moved from one area to the next without rigid jurisdiction. Montshiwa was afraid he could be robbed by the Boers of his forefathers' land and therefore needed missionaries within his court to take precautionary measures.

Montshiwa and his counsellors had no experience of dealing with the whites and they did not want to risk being subservient to them. The presence of missionaries defused hostilities within African communities. Barolong-Basotho relations, for example, were ascertained and consolidated by missionaries in Thaba-Nchu when the Basotho gave land to the Seleka.

¹³ A979,Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "Wesleyan Missionaries", pp.3-8; Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.35.

¹⁴ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.35.

Moreover, the missionaries liaised with the Boers and gave them food in an attempt to make them the friends of the Barolong. Montshiwa had observed for himself the work and importance of the missionaries and was convinced that it was necessary to have them. When the Wesleyans in Thaba-Nchu gave Montshiwa the Rev Joseph D. M. Ludorf, he was welcomed in January 1850.¹⁵ In 1878 Ludorf acted as an emissary for all the Barolong against the Boers, particularly in the ongoing diamond dispute.¹⁶ He was the head of the delegation of the Barolong which met the Boers in connection with the Barolong land. He was there to ensure that the Barolong and other groups of the Batswana were not robbed of their land by the Boers. Sir Henry Barkly, the Cape Governor and British High Commissioner, sent a copy of the Keate decision to Ludorf at Klipdrift, and he at once translated its text into Setswana and sent copies of the judgement to his clients, the chiefs of the Barolong, Batlhaping and Bangwaketse. Ludorf urged these communities to unite to prevent any encroachment on their land by the Boers.¹⁷ This role that he played often united certain sections of the Batswana and resulted in good relations between them. But sometimes some sections who did not have

¹⁵ Molema, interview, Ratshidi *Kgotla*, Stad, 15 March 1998.

¹⁶ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.66.

¹⁷ Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.66.

missionaries at their *Kgotla*, like the Rapulana, felt left out and misrepresented particularly because some missionaries were agents of British colonialism. This view materialised when the same diamond fields that the Barolong had won in 1871 were taken from them by the British in 1885.

Ludorf died at Dithakong on 13 January 1872. The chiefs and people of the Barolong and Batlhaping lamented his death.¹⁸ By his death Montshiwa was left without an adviser who could read, explain and answer the letters now coming frequently from officials of the South African Republic and the British government. Montshiwa requested Cameron from Thaba-Nchu to become his adviser but he was unable to do so because there were few missionaries in Thaba-Nchu. Montshiwa relied in the meantime on the services of another Wesleyan missionary, Jonathan Webb, who had just been appointed in 1873 to work among the Ratshidi at Mafikeng and Moshaneng.¹⁹ Montshiwa wanted missionary justification for everything which was related to the Boers and the British government. He realised, after the work of Ludorf, that missionaries could represent the Barolong

¹⁸ Molema, interview, 15 March 1998.

¹⁹ Molema, interview, 15 March 1998.

appropriately. He knew that Africans had been robbed of their land by the Boers and if this happened to his people, missionaries would appeal to the British authority for help.

MISSIONARY PROGRESS AT THABA-NCHU, THE STAD, LOTLHAKANE AND BODIBE

The missionaries established a mission station in Thaba-Nchu in 1833. They gathered children and the grown-ups to attend an adult school, bible classes and church services.²⁰ The missionaries established an Archbell printing press and issued school books, scripture extracts, the catechism and hymnbooks.²¹ As a result of these missionary activities people acquired the skills of reading and writing.²² Bible classes and day school were filled so rapidly that at the end of five years of settlement at Thaba-Nchu, there were more than two hundred Christians and a thousand people who could read fluently.²³ In 1838 a church with the capacity of thousand seats was established.²⁴

Among the people who were converted was Silas Molema, Montshiwa's half

²⁰ Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.6.

²¹ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The History of the Barolong", p.8.

²² A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The History of the Barolong", p.8.

²³ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The History of the Barolong", p.8.

²⁴ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The History of the Barolong", p.8.

brother and the son of Chief Tawana. When Silas Molema converted to Christianity and became a local priest a crisis ensued because he was a member of the royal family who were ardent supporters of traditional belief. When Molema publicly accepted the doctrine of Christianity, it was regarded by the Barolong as a national catastrophe. This reaction was caused by the fact that the Barolong believed in their ancestors and Molema being one of the leading men in the royal family, his conversion threatened to cause division. This was the beginning of the revolution brought by education which enlightened a new generation of literate young men and women who wanted to worship God rather than abide by the Barolong custom. Molema was the first prince, not only among the Barolong, but among the Batswana, to take such a revolutionary step.²⁵ Montshiwa and other members of the royal family were shocked and wanted to force Molema to reconsider his decision. Emergency council meetings were called and midnight committees met to warn him and try to dissuade him. When these attempts failed, threats and ridicule were resorted to, only to meet equally dismal failure.²⁶ He took a new and inspired leadership role in education and his sons were the first members of the Barolong to attend missionary educational institutions and to

²⁵ Molema, interview, 15 March 1998.

²⁶ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.57.

attain the standard of secondary education.²⁷ His sons returned to Mafikeng and opened the first day school among their people. Molema's grandsons were the first to become ministers of the gospel of Jesus Christ and also to attend universities in America and Europe where they qualified in law and obtained degrees in arts and sciences.²⁸

Silas Molema was educated in Healdtown in the Transkei and came back to Mafikeng to establish a small school and a church in 1878. Here reading, writing, arithmetic and scripture were taught and many people including children attended, all diligent to learn. The church and the school were involved in elementary education. Molema was the only teacher among the Barolong in the Stad. He requested the Xhosa who were in Fingoland to come to Mafikeng to assist in teaching the Barolong. He even went to Ciskei to ask for a few Xhosa teachers to come and to provide education and preach the gospel to the Barolong.²⁹ There was a European Methodist missionary in Mafikeng town while Molema was an African missionary in the Stad.³⁰

According to the Comaroffs, Molema became independent of the Wesleyan

²⁷ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.57.

²⁸ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.33.

²⁹ Molema, interview, 15 March 1998.

³⁰ Molema, interview, 15 March 1998.

missionaries, and made it difficult for them to work among the Ratshidi because they, like other white missionaries, discriminated against African priests, a situation which in other parts of South Africa led to the development of Independent Churches.³¹ There were some members of the Barolong including, Goronyane, Leshomo, Mopedi, Mutla and Seatlholo who became fundamentalist Christians and were vanguards for the gospel of Christ.³² Silas Molema believed in education and had a firm conviction that the Barolong should adapt and change in response to new circumstances that developed in the latter part of the nineteenth century.³³ In these changing conditions, Molema's sons namely Israel, Joshua and Silas, liaised with the outside world on behalf of the Ratshidi.³⁴ Molema was preoccupied with a campaign to bring western education to the Barolong so that they could be on par with other ethnic groups elsewhere in South Africa who received missionary education. Molema had become convinced of the importance of extending education among his people.³⁵

During the twelve years of the Barolong migrations, Molema and his

³¹ Comaroff, *Revelation and Revolution*, p.91.

³² Comaroff, *Revelation and Revolution*, p.57.

³³ B. Willan, *Sol. Plaatje: A Biography of Solomon Tshekisho Plaatje 1876-1932* (1984), p.94.

³⁴ Willan, *A Biography*, p.94.

³⁵ Willan, *A Biography*, p.94.

followers faithfully carried on with their preaching, class meetings and their worship, and attracted many to Christianity. At Matlwang from 1840 to 1841, and at Lotlhakane from 1849 to 1852, their numbers had increased steadily. Now at Moshaneng with a more peaceful, settled state far from the Boers, these “people of the word”, as they were called, formed themselves into an organized society whose way of life stood out in sharp contrast with tribal customs.³⁶ In 1856 Molema established a simple chapel and he conducted a school, class meetings and church services and gradually a large number of people accepted the gospel message.³⁷ When the Rev John Mackenzie of the London Missionary Society visited Moshaneng in 1860 and 1862, he found relations strained between those who upheld traditional beliefs of ancestors, led by the chief and Mokgwetsi, his uncle, on the one hand, and Christian groups led by Molema and Seane (his brother) and Buku (his daughter), on the other.³⁸ Mackenzie writes: “In Montshiwa and Molema who are brothers, we have an instance of the separation which the Gospel makes in heathen lands, the one believing in paganism and the other in Christ”.³⁹ This was a great embarrassment to Chief Montshiwa, because

³⁶ Willan, *A Biography*, p.54.

³⁷ Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.8.

³⁸ J. Mackenzie, *Ten years North of the Orange River* (1871), p.103.

³⁹ Mackenzie, *Ten years North*, p.228.

members of his royal family undermined his decree by refusing to honour the cultural activities because they considered them evil. The young people lost confidence in the old customs and focused upon the word of God. A large number of young people joined the Christians and rejected traditional beliefs and this disillusioned Montshiwa.⁴⁰ Montshiwa was prepared to use his power to stamp out the gospel which Molema believed in and which divided his people and undermined his authority. The Christian groups became critical of traditional practices such as the belief in ancestors, polygamy and initiation school.

The early Barolong Christians endured persecution and were blamed for all the calamities that befell the people, such as drought, famine and sickness.⁴¹ In one incident Chief Montshiwa issued an instruction that on the following Sabbath there should be no meeting of Christians in a little chapel.⁴² However, the Christians assembled as usual and the chief entered the church carrying a sword and evicted everyone from inside.⁴³ All these

⁴⁰ Mackenzie, *Ten years North*, p.229.

⁴¹ S. Afr.32/5/A, *Molema to Moffat*, L.M.S, Dachs, *Papers of John Mackenzie*, p.101.

⁴² S. Afr.32/5/A, *Molema to Moffat*, L.M.S, Dachs, *Papers of John Mackenzie*, p.101.

⁴³ S. Afr.32/5/A, *Molema to Moffat*, L.M.S, Dachs, *Papers of John Mackenzie*, p.101.

activities against the Christians were advanced by Chief Montshiwa.

Although Molema's mother Mosele Molekane (one of Tawana's wife) was a Rapulana, Molema's campaign to educate and christianise the Barolong was only confined to the Ratshidi.⁴⁴ He did not use Christianity and education to champion the unity of all sections of the Barolong. In fact the development of Christianity among the Ratshidi alienated them and widened the gap even further between the Ratlou, Rapulana and Ratshidi. The Ratshidi were more "advanced", educated and "civilised" than other sections of the Barolong because they had a good relations with missionaries. It was crucial that the Ralou and Rapulana be given the advantages and development that the Ratshidi had acquired with the development of Christianity.⁴⁵

Montshiwa realised that more young people were converted to Christianity in spite of his battle to protect the traditional beliefs from being subdued.⁴⁶ The chief thus began to advocate a compromise between Christianity and

⁴⁴ M. Monye and S.R. Molema, interview, Ratshidi *Kgotla* , Stad, 30 September 2002.

⁴⁵ *Mothibi, Matlaba and Motshewakhumo acknowledged the fact that the Ratshidi were more advanced and educated than their people namely, Ratlou and Rapulana.*

⁴⁶ S. Afr.32/5/A, Molema to Moffat, L.M.S, Dachs, *Papers of John Mackenzie*, p.100.

traditional beliefs. The chief's intention was not to alienate the Christians and missionaries because their work was crucial in guiding the Barolong and providing understanding of the complexity of his leadership. A compromise to Molema and his followers would mean that chiefs would become nominal Christians, to which Molema was fiercely opposed. The basic western education and Christian doctrine encouraged the followers of Molema to denounce "uncivilised" local customs⁴⁷ which was a process experienced by Africans throughout sub-Saharan Africa. Montshiwa wanted the Christians to observe the usual custom of their forefathers, such as the reed dance, and then afterwards if they chose, to accept the word of God.⁴⁸ Molema and his followers were opposed to a system that virtually obliged them to serve two masters. Consequently, there were accusations, defences and criticisms, even in public.⁴⁹

Emil Holub, an Austrian traveller who visited Moshaneng in 1873 made the same observation that on the advice of the traditional doctors the Ratshidi people were ordered to take part in the rain-making ceremonies but that the followers of the new faith refused to attend so the chief forbade

⁴⁷ Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu*, p.9.

⁴⁸ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.36.

⁴⁹ S. Afr.32/5/A, Molema to Moffat, L.M.S, Dachs, *Papers of John Mackenzie*, p.100.

church gatherings and services, and dispersed any Christian people.⁵⁰ The disagreement degenerated into open hostility and it nearly divided the Ratshidi.

Montshiwa and members of the royal family generally did not embrace Christianity. They often attended church service, and they had a warm relationship with the missionaries, but they thought that Christianity contradicted traditional practices. They believed that Christianity was suitable for servants, children and commoners but not for adults. But even among servants and others it was destined to lead to a polarised society.⁵¹

According to Breutz, the majority of the Ratshidi became Christians because they came under missionary influence at an early date. A small percentage of Christians were active church members because they understood Christianity and they acquired a certain level of literacy. The majority were nominal Christians who had very little knowledge of fundamental Christian principles. This led to the struggle between traditionalism and Christianity, which was common during the early penetration of Christianity into African societies all over sub-Saharan Africa.⁵²

⁵⁰ E. Holub, *Seven Years in South Africa* (1975), p.296.

⁵¹ Holub, *Seven Years in South Africa*, p.58.

⁵² Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.78.

Another difficulty about Christianity was that it brought everybody to the same level in respect of rank, condition, character and privilege. How could a king share a cup with his servants?⁵³ To the royalists, the fact that everybody was equal before the eyes of God was unacceptable; they would eventually be undermined by their own people because commoners and women Christians would see themselves not as ordinary but important figures.⁵⁴ Moreover, it was difficult for the king to allow himself to be lectured to, from the pulpit, by his “slaves”.⁵⁵

Christianity advocated monogamy rather than polygamy because it was argued that God first created only Adam and Eve. It was difficult for the king, the husband of all the women of his people and the father of all his people to be confined to one wife.⁵⁶ But elsewhere among the Batswana, the chief of the Bakwena, Sechele, responded positively and divorced his four wives, remaining with his principal wife, after he was baptized by David Livingstone in 1848. He then delegated all chiefly functions which were considered incompatible with Christianity to his younger brother, Kgosidintsi. However, it was difficult for the Barolong chief to follow

⁵³ C. Murray, *Ritual Practice and Belief* (1985), p.124.

⁵⁴ Murray, *Ritual Practice and Belief*, p.124.

⁵⁵ Murray, *Ritual Practice and Belief*, p.124.

⁵⁶ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.38.

Sechele's example because, he would be obliged to relinquish his authority, thereby making himself merely the nominal ruler of his people.⁵⁷

In January 1882 Molema died of asthma. His enormous contribution to the well being of his people had been remarkable and would remain a legacy for future generations.⁵⁸ He had been a Christian leader of the Barolong for 46 years.⁵⁹ Some 400 boys and girls had gone to the school built by Molema since 1878 and went to larger schools such as Healdtown, Lovedale, Tigerkloof, Kilnerton, Lessey and so on.⁶⁰ After Molema's death, there was a change in Montshiwa's attitude towards Christians because he felt sorry that they had lost their first African priest. In addition, Montshiwa felt guilty for his antagonism to Molema and his followers and he wanted to assure them that he would not resist their religion again. Montshiwa befriended the preachers of the gospel after Molema's death. He announced a charter of religious liberty and ordered the Barolong Christian leaders to say prayers at the royal *Kgotla*, especially before the people were due to dwell on any particular issue. Montshiwa had succumbed to Christianity and

⁵⁷ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.59.

⁵⁸ Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.9.

⁵⁹ Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.9.

⁶⁰ Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.9.

western education and this symbolised the fact that modernism was beginning to win over traditionalism. Montshiwa even nominated Setlhakonyane Maselwanyana to be the royal chaplain, and requested Owen Watkins, a Wesleyan missionary from Thaba-Nchu, to send him a resident missionary. He also gave the Wesleyan Missionary Society five acres of land for a mission station.⁶¹ He sent all his sons, nephews and nieces to the local day school opened by one of Molema's sons.⁶² Undeniably, Montshiwa did not break away from his forefather's customs despite his admiration for missionaries and Christians, but Christian values did influence his reign because he changed some rigid traditional laws that were previously compulsory. In 1878, for example, he abolished the right of compulsion exercised by parents over the marriages of their children. He also prohibited the sale and consumption of European strong drink. In 1887 he prohibited the compulsory initiation of anyone who objected to the traditional ceremonies, or whose parents objected to the practice. He repudiated the compulsory confiscation of livestock or other property by the authorities. Finally, he declared that any member of his people might worship according to his own

⁶¹ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "Wesleyan Missionaries" pp.10-15.

⁶² A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "Wesleyan Missionaries", pp.10-15.

religious beliefs, and no restrictions should be imposed upon the holding of church services by any religious body.⁶³

Montshiwa accepted Major Warren's offer to build a chapel for the Ratshidi in Mafikeng in 1885.⁶⁴ This chapel was erected to replace the one built by Molema which was wrecked during the war of 1881-1884 against the Goshenites.⁶⁵ Three Barolong regiments made bricks and supplied unskilled labour while the Royal Engineers did the masonry and skilled work. The church was opened on 5 December 1885.⁶⁶ Montshiwa had cemented his relations with the missionaries and before he died, he requested Christians to give him a religious blessing.⁶⁷ Chief Montshiwa died in 1896 at a ripe old age and his death marked a turning point in the history of the Barolong, as many people subsequently became Christians. However, there were others who still continued to believe in ancestors, rainmaking ceremonies and traditional practices like polygamy remained in the mainstream of the uneducated communities. Chief Montshiwa was succeeded by Wessel Montshiwa, who was then followed by Letlamoreng and both of them

⁶³ Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.210.

⁶⁴ Mafikeng Museum, "The Place of Stones", p.5.

⁶⁵ Molema, *Methodism Marches*, p.9.

⁶⁶ Mafikeng Museum, "The Place of Stones", p.5.

⁶⁷ Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.210.

effected the changes he had introduced.⁶⁸ Many of the new practices came into use in the early twentieth century and moved the Barolong further away from traditional practices towards western culture. The education and Christianity of the Barolong was reinforced by the arrival of Solomon Plaatje in Mafikeng. Before him the Barolong relied on a man called Stephen Lefenya, who was a secretary responsible for keeping tribal records. Plaatje's position as the secretary became necessary because of the complex legal system which faced the Barolong in the 1890s due to the establishment of British Bechuanaland and attempts by the British to subject Montshiwa under the authority of the Cape Colony.⁶⁹

Solomon Plaatje became the editor of *Kuranta ea Bechoana*, written in Setswana and produced weekly. He wanted the Barolong to read and through his paper he introduced his readers to the outside world. It was a mechanism through which Sol Plaatje could communicate and thus influence the life of the Barolong to be more in line with western civilization.⁷⁰ In one of the issues of the *Kuranta*, he criticised initiation ceremonies and urged the Barolong to be "civilized" if they wanted to be

⁶⁸ NASA, Vol.12, File No.718, "Successor to the late Chief Montshiwa, Mafikeng", August 1896; Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.210.

⁶⁹ Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.99.

⁷⁰ Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.111.

treated as equals by the whites. Plaatje lambasted the LMS when they revised the translation of the Setswana Bible because they did not want to work with him.⁷¹ Plaatje objected to the LMS but they argued that he was an Ethiopianist and that his newspaper had the capacity to provoke Ethiopianism. Plaatje had criticised the LMS's education system in the *Kuranta* and this was the reason why the LMS was reluctant to work with him.⁷²

The Rapulana and the Ratlou⁷³ had their own different experiences with missionaries. With regard to the Rapulana, very little has been preserved about the missionary activities among their people because the Boers did not allow the missionaries to operate freely in the ZAR. Oral sources collected in Bodibe have confirmed this. A Hermansburg missionary, Hensel Jansen, with his mission field in the western ZAR, accompanied the Rapulana when they returned from Thaba-Nchu and from Platberg (Klerksdorp district) to Bodibe (Polfontein) and Lotlhakane in 1872. Hensel established a mission station in Bodibe,⁷⁴ and this missionary taught the Rapulana to read and write giving them instruction in Setswana and

⁷¹ Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.111.

⁷² Breutz, *The Tribes*, p.111.

⁷³ The Ratlou will be dealt with later in this Chapter.

⁷⁴ Breutz, *Tribes*, p.81.

German.⁷⁵

When they came to Bodibe and Lotlhakane, the Rapulana were also followed by the Wesleyan missionaries. The Rapulana aligned themselves to the Boers who distrusted the missionaries. Moreover, Matlaba did not use the missionaries to advise him because the Boers helped him instead. They wanted to dissuade the missionaries from their work among the Barolong and to propagate a pro-Boer campaign instead.

The Rev Hofmeyer, a priest, from the Cape Colony and missionary in the Zoutpansberg worked in the northern ZAR for twenty years in the early days of white settlement. He wrote that the Boers at the time of his arrival were distinctly hostile towards the missionaries. His predecessor had been visited by two Boer farmers armed with sjamboks who threatened him with physical violence because he was preaching to black people and himself had been practically boycotted on account of his vocation.⁷⁶ He had often been compelled to *outspan* in the market square of Schoemansdal in the village of Zoutpansberg, eating and sleeping alone in his wagons because no

⁷⁵ Mothibi and Matlaba, interview, Rapulana *Kgotla*, Bodibe, 28 February 2001.

⁷⁶ J.A.I. Agar-Hamilton, *The Native Policy of The Voortrekkers 1836-1858* (1926), p.122.

one would welcome him in their home.⁷⁷ This happened because the Boers did not trust the missionaries, they thought that their preaching challenged their inhuman practices such as the indenture labour system and expropriation of African land which in most cases was occupied without the permission of the Africans. The Boers saw missionaries as people who brought enlightenment and awareness to the Africans and were afraid that after their influence Africans would begin to resist suppressive Boer tactics.

The Boer farmers obviously had no particular love for missionaries, but were prepared to make the best of their interaction with Africans and try to use them to indoctrinate blacks to respect Boer authority. They were against the establishment of mission stations because they would lead to the concentration of African people who would no longer want to work for the Boers.⁷⁸ The Boers accused missionaries of inciting the Africans to armed resistance, and of “unsettling” them in their political allegiance. The Boer farmers noticed that the black people like the Ratshidi who had contact with missionaries were often supplied with arms and ammunition.⁷⁹ They also suspected the missionaries of participating in the trading of arms and

⁷⁷ Agar-Hamilton, *The Native Policy*, p.118.

⁷⁸ Agar-Hamilton, *The Native Policy*, p.118.

⁷⁹ Agar-Hamilton, *The Native Policy*, p.121.

ammunition. David Livingstone was told by the Boers that they would tolerate the missionaries provided the missionaries taught the Africans that the Boers were a superior race.⁸⁰ Under these circumstances, it was difficult for the Rapulana who were under Boer control to become exposed to Christianity because the ZAR government hated missionaries and few mission stations were established in the ZAR during the nineteenth century.⁸¹

The Rapulana did not have a missionary at the *Kgotla* to advise Chief Matlaba because he was already preoccupied with instructions from the Boers who wanted him to assist them against the Ratshidi. The missionaries who preached to the Rapulana did it on their own because the Boers were sceptical about these activities and regarded the missionaries as agents of the British empire. These may well have been the reasons why missionary activities failed to develop elites among the Rapulana in the late nineteenth century.

⁸⁰ Agar-Hamilton, *The Native Policy*, p.122.

⁸¹ Mothibi and Matlaba, interview, Rapulana *Kgotla*, Bodibe, 28 February 2001.

ETHIOPIAN CHURCHES AMONG THE BAROLONG

The historiography on Ethiopianism and Independent Churches by historians such as Karis and Carter, Roux, Parsons, Comaroffs and Odendaal has revealed the weaknesses of white missionary societies which discriminated against the Africans.⁸² The anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff have examined the development of Ethiopianism among the southern Sotho but concentrated only on its development among the Batlhaping. Another historian, Roux, centred Ethiopianism around the Xhosa (Thembu).⁸³ However, Parsons claims that the first church to break away from the European mission was in Basotholand in 1887. These historians did not record the development of Ethiopianism among the Barolong. The Barolong, like the Basotho and Xhosa, form part of the South African society and their history also deserves to be recorded. The work of Campbell deals with the development of Independent Churches among the Ratlou and his research reveals the cooperation between Moshete, the Ratlou chief and the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It shows how it replaced the LMS and supported the chief against the ZAR government. Campbell's work has

⁸² Karis and Carter, *From Protest*, p.7; Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu*, p.23; Parsons, *A New History*, p.211.

⁸³ Roux, *Time Longer than Rope*, p.79.

benefited this study more than any other work on Ethiopianism among the Ratlou.⁸⁴ He describes how the African Methodist Episcopal Church was formed in America in 1787 and known as the AME all over the world because it recognised Africa as the land of origin of the African people. However, his research does not outline the religious principles of the AME which were in conflict with the traditional beliefs of the Ratlou, and lastly it does not record the activities of the AME among the Ratlou in the Setlagole Reserve. According to Z.C Mashilela, the AME priest in the Mafikeng district, the AME and the Ethiopianists became one church in 1896 because they had common principles, were led by Africans and were against racial discrimination.⁸⁵

Ethiopianism was a religious practice in which African people broke away from European-led churches and formed their own Independent Churches that enhanced the culture and the interest of the African people. According to Odendaal, Ethiopianism was a philosophy of religious independence which manifested itself in the rise of African separatist churches that broke away from the paternalistic control of white missionaries. Thus it was a form

⁸⁴ Campbell, "Chiefly Authority", p.40.

⁸⁵ Z.C. Mashilela, interview, AME Church, Mafikeng, 22 September 2001.

of response by Africans towards the growing white domination in South Africa.⁸⁶ The people who formed and attended these churches were called Ethiopians. Among white and African Christians, friction arose early concerning the role that Africans were to play in the administration of various denominations. In 1884, Nehemiah Tile, an African clergyman broke away from the Wesleyan Methodist Church in the Eastern Cape to form his own Thembu National Church. Frustrated by the paternalism of the white ministry, a break-away group led by Mangena Mokone formed the Ethiopian Church in Pretoria in November 1892. Later, he joined the AME Church, which was formed by the black people from America and was free from white influence.⁸⁷

The AME church was first started in Khunwana in 1897 at the invitation of Moshete, chief of the Ratlou. When the first AME emissaries arrived, Moshete was pleased to welcome them, especially when they informed him that a minister would be permanently stationed in the village.⁸⁸ The church also opened a school, and the first convert of the AME was Moshete himself. The AME minister baptised many of the people of Khunwana. Moshete was

⁸⁶ Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu*, p.23.

⁸⁷ Karis and Carter, *From Protest*, p.7.

⁸⁸ Karis and Carter, *From Protest*, p.7.

dissatisfied with the LMS, which had a church in the village,⁸⁹ because it appeared that the LMS had stopped serving the local people and the resident preacher was not empowered to dispense the sacraments. The LMS did not establish a mission station in Khunwana and only sent a minister to help the community with solemnising marriages after a long period of time.

In addition, the LMS refused to ordain a local preacher Gabashane because he did not speak Latin.⁹⁰ In 1905 Khunwana residents seeking a Christian baptism, marriage or funeral rites thus had to trek over a hundred miles of sandy, rutted roads to the LMS station at Kanye. In contrast, the AME in Khunwana became a broad-based religious movement, which asserted a black religious majority and recognised their right to control the education of their children and their claim to the land.

The Ethiopians regarded the missionaries as agents of colonialism because they attempted to destroy traditional belief in ancestors, rain making ceremonies and so on. J.S Moffat (the son of Robert Moffat) conceded that missionaries enjoyed little success where political institutions were in their "aboriginal vigour".⁹¹ According to Colin Murray most Sotho-Tswana who

⁸⁹ Campbell, "Chiefly Authority", p.40.

⁹⁰ Campbell, "Chiefly Authority", p.40.

⁹¹ Murray, *Ritual Practice*, p.124.

were Christians converts continued to believe in the importance of their obligations to the dead.⁹² The advent of the AME which was flexible and accepted the African cultures, became the spiritual home of many Africans who still felt obliged to follow traditional beliefs. The nominal Christians usually found a home in Ethiopian churches or the AME. The AME tolerated local customs such as initiation and bride wealth.⁹³ The collaboration of the missionaries with the colonial authorities was not approved by the Ethiopian churches. That was why they supported Chief Moshete against the Boers. The AME was led by black people who were against colonialism and discrimination. On the other hand, the white people were against the AME because they maintained that it preached hatred against them. It needs to be noted that the Ratlou retained their customs which included the engagement in initiation ceremonies, polygamous marriages and the belief in ancestors, all activities which were strongly opposed by the LMS. But yet the AME tolerated all these customs and like other Ethiopian churches ushered in political change by asserting African independence and a rallying cry of Africa for the Africans.⁹⁴

⁹² Murray, *Ritual Practice*, p.124.

⁹³ Murray, *Ritual Practice*, p.29.

⁹⁴ Odendaal, *Vukani Bantu*, p.23.

According to Jean Comaroff the Africans proved unable to resist the military power of the whites. Therefore they developed an alternative form of resistance by rejecting white religious institutions. Many Africans opposed Christianity on the grounds that it implied rejection of their own culture, while others gradually accepted the teaching of missionaries.⁹⁵ The AME enlightened its members about racism within the LMS. Moshete, supported by the AME, encouraged the Barolong to resist white domination. The AME supported Moshete when he objected to the deployment of Zulu policemen in Khunwana, claiming that they ill-treated the Ratlou and arrested people without informing the chief.⁹⁶ Moshete demanded instead that he be given Batswana police who would be obliged to respect him. Moshete saw Ethiopianism as a weapon to resist encroachment on his authority from both internal rivals and the colonial state.⁹⁷ The number of Moshete's old enemies, namely Montshiwa and the British had increased, with the Boers turning against the Ratlou. Moshete's father had good relations with the Boers and he had given the Ratlou's land to them. Moshete was determined to get the land of his people back and had the AME on his side.

⁹⁵ NASA, Vol.12, File No.1237, "Native Police", 24 April 1913.

⁹⁶ NASA, Vol.12, File No.1237, "Native Police", 24 April 1913.

⁹⁷ NASA, Vol.12, File No.1237, "Native Police", 24 April 1913.

Another problem experienced by Moshete with the ZAR government was that it did not want people to eat the meat of diseased cattle.⁹⁸ The custom of eating the meat of diseased cattle was unacceptable and therefore it was very painful to bury them because it was great loss of meat. Moshete was worried by the fact that many cattle of the Ratlou had died of drought because the fence which divided Khunwana and the Setlagole Reserve excluded his people from the source of water in the Molopo Reserve and Moshete's complaints were not heeded by the Secretary of Native Affairs, Barrett.⁹⁹ There was disagreement about what had caused the stock to die but, according to the government, they were killed by anthrax. In compliance with the Stock Disease Act, this meant the government had to prevent the Africans from eating such meat. Moshete wanted permission to visit Pretoria to complain about the boundary issue because Chief Lekoko Montshiwa of the Ratshidi refused to allow Moshete's cattle to drink water in the Setlagole Reserve which was under the Mafikeng district.¹⁰⁰ He pleaded that the government should permit the Ratlou to follow their own custom of eating

⁹⁸ NASA, Vol.12, File No.1237, "Dead Cattle", 24 April 1913.

⁹⁹ NASA, Vol.12, File No.1237, "Request for permission to visit Pretoria for the purpose of interviewing the Secretary for native Affairs", Chief Aaron Moshete, 23 January 1914.

¹⁰⁰ NASA, Vol.12, File No.1237, "Request for permission", 23 January 1914.

the meat of cattle that had died. This further exemplifies the struggle between traditionalism and modernism. The Ethiopian churches, including the AME, were flexible and tolerated such traditional practices and were therefore supported by the chief.

Moshete wanted a school to be built in the village because the LMS had left for Kanye and did not help the Ratlou with elementary education. He also requested the government to provide a state-aided school in Khunwana, maintaining that the Ratlou children needed to be taught how to read and write and that the community could not provide the education themselves.¹⁰¹ The AME, therefore, came as a relief to the Ratlou because it provided elementary education, something which Moshete had been requesting.

Leaders of the mainstream churches were very critical of Ethiopian churches. Robert Moffat complained about Marcus Gabashane of the AME church for “illegally” solemnizing marriages in Khunwana. Gabashane preached against the whites.¹⁰² He and his son Abel were active in British Bechuanaland and the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Abel preached a millennial version of the

¹⁰¹ NASA, Vol.12, File No.1237, “School”, 24 April 1913.

¹⁰² Campbell, “Chiefly Authorities”, p. 41.

AME gospel, in which a black king, descended from Solomon and Sheba, would drive the whites from Africa and restore the land to its rightful owners.¹⁰³ In 1906, a missionary of the Church of England complained that Moshete refused to allow him to build a church or school in the Khunwana location. By 1910, the Native Commissioner at Lichtenburg was warning his superiors of the rapid spread of Ethiopianism in the area and estimating that fifty percent of the Africans in the district had already joined the AME. The “root of this evil”, he maintained, was “Khunwana location where this doctrine reigns supreme”.¹⁰⁴

The ZAR government developed a negative attitude towards Moshete because he wanted the land which his father had given to the Boers in 1880s returned to the Ratlou and the Boers did not respond positively to his request.¹⁰⁵ Moshete wanted to extend his jurisdiction over his own people, the Ratlou who were in Kraaipan, Madibogo and Setlagole under Montshiwa,¹⁰⁶ but the Boer authority refused because they were afraid that Khunwana would spread Ethiopianism to the whole of Bechuanaland.

¹⁰³ Campbell, “Chiefly Authorities”, p. 41.

¹⁰⁴ Campbell, “Chiefly Authorities”, p. 41.

¹⁰⁵ The ZAR was renamed the Transvaal after the South African War in 1902.

¹⁰⁶ NASA, Vol.12, File No.1237, “Request for removal of the fence, Chief Moshete of Khunwana”, 16 June 1913.

There were two leaders of the AME church who were responsible for spreading its gospel in the Bechuanaland region. One of them was Seole who left Khunwana and toured through Langberg in British Bechaunaland to preach the new gospel. The other was the Rev Marcus Gabashane who went north to Mafikeng and to the chiefs of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1898.¹⁰⁷ During the South African War Ethiopian churches flourished among the more settled chiefs and congregations. In 1900 some of the people of Ganyesa joined the AME, and took away its competent LMS evangelist and posted him to the Tati district of the protectorate. In 1901 the majority of the Morokweng community which resided on the western region of the Molopo River became Ethiopianists.¹⁰⁸

The AME also worked among the Ratlou in the Setlagole Reserve where they were welcomed by Chief Phoi. AME priests performed burials and wedding ceremonies but they also tolerated traditional practices and were welcomed by the people of Madibogo, Mareetsane, Kraaipan and Setlagole.¹⁰⁹ The AME built a school called Motsitlane AME Primary School in 1923 in

¹⁰⁷ Mashilela, interview, AME Church, Mafikeng, 22 September 2001.

¹⁰⁸ Mashilela, interview, AME Church, Mafikeng, 22 September 2001.

¹⁰⁹ M.A. Modukanelo, interview, Ratlou *Kgotla*, Khunwana, 26 June 2001.

Madibogo and P.R Nthoba was the priest and teacher at the school.¹¹⁰

Khunwana and Madibogo were united by the fact that they were served by the same church because the politics of chiefly paramountcy and demarcation of Molopo Reserve and the ZAR had divided them.

It was not only the Ratlou who experienced Ethiopianism but also the Rapulana. There is little information available on this aspect simply because, as already discussed above, missionary work in the ZAR was hardly tolerated by the Boer authorities . One of the members of the Rapulana, Sehemo, former secretary of Chief Matlaba, became the superintendent of the African Catholic Church in various districts. This church broke away from the Roman Catholic Church because of the same problem of discrimination by white priests and bishops. This is further evidence that some development of Ethiopianism was taking place in Lotlhakane and Bodibe.¹¹¹

For these reasons the LMS failed in Khunwana because it could not establish a mission station to help the Ratlou. As has been shown there was no mission station established among Rapulana in Lotlhakane

¹¹⁰ Modukanelo, interview, 26 June 2001.

¹¹¹ Modukanelo, interview, 26 June 2001.

either because the Boers were against it or the chief would not appreciate its presence. However, under pressure from the ZAR authority, Ethiopianism had the power to help the Barolong in their opposition to the Boers. In Lotlhakane and Bodibe the independent church led by Sehemo flourished and in Khunwana the AME led by Marcus Gabashane succeeded too, because it stood by the chiefs in times of government pressure.

The Ethiopian churches clearly had the power to unite the Barolong to resist the Boers. For example, in the case of the Rapulana, Sehemo used his African Catholic Church congregation which comprised the Barolong and other Batswana groups to form the Barolong National Council¹¹² to unite all chiefs and help the Barolong to fight for the common cause, that is, recognition by the government and accumulation of land. While Ethiopianism had the power to unite the Ratlou and the Rapulana, at the same time it tended to widen the gap between the Ratshidi, Rapulana and Ratlou.

¹¹² NASA, Vol.108, File No. 201, "Barolong National Council", 29 April 1915.

CHAPTER THREE

THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY RATSHIDI-RAPULANA DISPUTE UP TO 1920

This chapter tackles the the circumstances that led to the early twentieth century Ratshidi-Rapulana dispute. It deals with the intra-Barolong squabbles in Lotlhakane. It also explores Montshiwa's activities in Lotlhakane against those who opposed him and highlights the legal actions in court by the Rapulana against the Ratshidi in their attempts to reclaim authority over Lotlhakane from the Ratshidi. Finally, it assesses the extent to which court decisions and litigation paralysed the Ratshidi, Ratlou and Rapulana economically and caused dissent within their ranks.

The Rapulana-Ratshidi dispute was the continuation of the rivalry and skirmishes which resulted in the Barolong War of 1884 between the Ratshidi and the Rapulana. Most of the interaction between the Rapulana and the Ratshidi took place in Lotlhakane because after the South African War, Montshiwa intervened in Lotlhakane to ensure that his authority was respected. He also wanted to nominate a Ratshidi headman to lead Lotlhakane because he realised that Rapulana stability was compromised by the fact that their leader, Motuba, wanted them to

acknowledge Matlaba who was in the ZAR as their paramount chief.

This renewed conflict in the early twentieth century was caused by the advent of the British government in Bechunaland in 1884, an issue which has already been noted in Chapter Two. The British deposed legitimate chiefs who did not want to follow the British policy. During the siege of Mafikeng in 1899, for example, Wessel Montshiwa the Ratshidi chief was deposed and replaced by Lekoko. The British government reinforced the existing ethnic polarisation among the Barolong and alienated the prospective paramount chief, Moshete, because he had already been won over by the Boers. The British also left the Molopo Reserve immediately after the siege without solving the Barolong dispute to which they had contributed. As victors, they were in a better position than the Boers to settle the Ratshidi-Rapulana conflict but they chose instead to withdraw.

Chief Lekoko and his successor John Montshiwa learned from history that the Rapulana were not prepared to be subordinated to the Ratshidi because they had their own chief. In 1885 the Molopo Reserve was given to Montshiwa by the British administration in the knowledge that the area belonged to the Ratshidi, Rapulana and the Ratlou. In view of the fact that the Ratshidi and the Rapulana

were locked in a continuous struggle, the British might have allocated Lotlhakane to the ZAR under the leadership of Chief Matlaba and Phitshane under Moshete in order to defuse the conflict. But they did not. The British government promoted conflict in an attempt to give Montshiwa authority over the whole of the Mafikeng district, authority which did not belong to him alone. This demarcation was a great source of friction and was in sharp contrast to the ideals of the British peace mission in Bechuanaland. Montshiwa accepted jurisdiction over the Molopo Reserve knowing fully well that the Rapulana would resist his authority as they had done in 1884. This was a clear indication that Montshiwa wanted to extend his authority over other sections of the Barolong and was prepared to use force to prevent any secession from the Molopo Reserve.

Motuba, who was arrested by the British authorities with the help of the Ratshidi for assisting the Boers during the siege of Mafikeng stood trial in Cape Town. He was freed after one year and six months prison sentence , and sent back to Lotlhakane (Reitfontein).¹ Moreover the Ratshidi, supported by the British, also arrested Israel Matlaba for the same offence and he appeared in the Kimberly High

¹ NASA Vol. 12 File No. 718, "The Secretary for Native Affairs", 2 July 1913.

Court where he was found guilty of helping the Boers during the siege. He was imprisoned for a period longer than that of Abram Motuba. During Matlaba's absence, the Ratshidi occupied Bodibe, which was outside the Molopo Reserve and took possession of the cattle belonging to the Rapulana. This happened because Montshiwa claimed the whole region of Bechuanaland and yet his chiefly jurisdiction was only over the Molopo Reserve.² Clearly, therefore, the Ratshidi chief wanted to establish his authority over the Rapulana. The question is, what motivated Montshiwa to occupy Bodibe which was beyond the line recommended by the British authorities? Montshiwa wanted to rule the Rapulana. On his return from prison Abram Motuba found that the Ratshidi Chief Lekoko Montshiwa had replaced him with his brother Paul Montshiwa as the headman of the Rapulana. This was done to impose Lekoko's rule over the Rapulana because they were regarded as the junior branch of the Barolong.³ Paul Montshiwa exercised all rights and authority as a headman, including the right to allocate land and to

² The Boers wanted to take the land of the Barolong by right of conquest of the Amandebele earlier in 1837, then Montshiwa claimed all the land of the Barolong occupied by his forefather Tau which included Khunwana, Bodibe and the Molopo Reserve. See Molema, *Montshiwa*, p.61.

³ See Chapter One for more information.

handle legal wrangles within Lotlhakane. His reign was perceived by the Rapulana as harsh and oppressive.⁴ Over the years Chief Matlaba of the Rapulana had used a strategy of collaboration with the enemies of the Barolong to escape attacks. He had initially made an alliance with Moletsane against his brothers, and then when Mzilikazi⁵ came on the scene he willingly became his vassal, and later he collaborated with the Boers. This strategy has always been resented by the Barolong and this is true even today.⁶ In the early twentieth century, this could have motivated Montshiwa to extend his hegemony over the Rapulana in an effort to prevent them from being traitors to the Barolong yet again. Chief Lekoko died in 1915 and was replaced by John Montshiwa whom the government officials accused of exercising a highhanded policy against the Rapulana and yet they had believed earlier that the new chief would not emulate his predecessor.⁷ The Rapulana Chief Matlaba had every right to rule Lotlhakane because it was he who had taken his brothers Mothibi and Mothuba to settle there and decided with the

⁴ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Dispute regarding land at Lotlhakane", 2 February 1917.

⁵ Molema, *Chief Moroka*, p.43.

⁶ Molema, interview, Ratshidi *Kgotla*, Stad, 12 March 1999.

⁷ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Reitfontein Affairs: George Motuba", Lotlhakane, 5 July 1917.

larger following, to settle in Bodibe in 1874.⁸

In 1913 Abram Motuba demanded that Paul Montshiwa vacate his position as headman because he was the headman at Lotlhakane before he was imprisoned. But Paul refused to do so because John Montshiwa, the acting chief of Mafikeng district, supported him. He asked W.H. Hall the Sub-Native Commissioner in the district to remove Paul Montshiwa and the matter was still under consideration when Hall was transferred from the district and handed over the case to H.J. Frost, the Superintendent of Native Affairs in Mafikeng.⁹ Before a decision could be taken, Abram Motuba, who had been ill for years, died, and was succeeded by his son George Motuba as the chief of the Rapulana.¹⁰

In 1917 Chief Matlaba and George Motuba met H.J. Frost in Mafikeng. They explained the situation of Abram Motuba who had died before a decision could be taken and they emphasized the fact that the chieftainship of the Rapulana at Lotlhakane had for the past generations been in the hands of the Motuba

⁸ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Reitfontein Affairs", 5 July 1917.

⁹ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Reitfontein Affairs", 5 July 1917.

¹⁰ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Reitfontein Affairs", 5 July 1917.

family.¹¹ Matlaba requested the Native Affairs Department, through H.J. Frost, to investigate the matter and demanded that George Motuba's land be returned to him and that his unquestioned right to rule over his late father's people be established.¹²

However, Matlaba and George Motuba were disenchanted when the decision confirmed Paul Montshiwa as the chief of Lotlhakane and H.J. Frost communicated the information to Motuba. The reason for refusing to give Motuba the position of a headman was that there were allegedly certain papers in the magistrate's office about George Motuba, the detail of which were not disclosed even to him, and which influenced the government to rule against him. Motuba was not given the opportunity to reply to the allegations contained in those papers. He went to the superintendent's office and asked to be able to verify what was written in the documents, but the superintendent refused.¹³ This refusal to give reasons for turning down George Motuba's headmanship was highly questionable, suspicious and unfair. It is possible that the authorities wanted to keep Motuba out

¹¹ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Reitfontein Affairs", 5 July 1917.

¹² NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Reitfontein Affairs", 5 July 1917.

¹³ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Reitfontein Affairs", 5 July 1917.

of the picture so as to implement the Ratshidi's authority over Lotlhakane. Moreover George had never been a headman; his father Abram was the leader, and it was ludicrous that he could be in the bad books of the government even before he had taken over. The British authorities deliberately complicated the issue of chieftainship in Lotlhakane by attempting to impose Montshiwa's hegemony upon the Rapulana.

George Motuba called upon Matlaba, the paramount chief of the Rapulana, to resolve this matter of "the papers". Matlaba, with Moshete the chief of the Ratlou who was also recognised by Matlaba as the "paramount chief" of all the Barolong, mobilized other chiefs who were ardent enemies of the Ratshidi and who would assist in any matter against the Ratshidi.¹⁴ The three chiefs, namely, Matlaba, Moshete and Motuba agreed that the presence of Paul Montshiwa and his right to rule over the Rapulana would cause friction because he would not be accepted by the Rapulana. Furthermore Matlaba was the superior chief over Motuba and it would be difficult for him to maintain order in the presence of Paul Montshiwa. It was agreed that George Motuba be reinstated with all chiefly

¹⁴ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Reitfontein Affairs", 5 July 1917.

authority as his ancestral right and that Paul be evicted from Lotlhakane. Those who had been forbidden to plough their land could now do so. In making this representation, Chief Matlaba had the full support of Chief Moshete, who was the “paramount chief” of all the Barolong.¹⁵

On 2 February 1917, E. Barrett, the Secretary for Native Affairs, called upon the Rapulana to present their case to him. The Rapulana complained bitterly about the “oppressive rule” of their headman Paul Montshiwa.¹⁶ Accordingly, Barrett gave the Rapulana’s land in Lotlhakane back to the Ratshidi. However, the Ratshidi tried to prove that the Rapulana had merely been allowed by Montshiwa to settle at Lotlhakane. The Rapulana insisted that the land was undoubtedly theirs both by inheritance and by conquest.¹⁷ Barrett was satisfied by the Rapulana’s testimony that the land had been taken from them by Paul Montshiwa and given to the Ratshidi. Barrett invited the Rapulana to nominate a

¹⁵ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, “Reitfontein Affairs”, 5 July 1917.

¹⁶ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, “Dispute regarding land at Lotlhakane”, 2 February 1917.

¹⁷ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, “Dispute regarding land at Lotlhakane”, 2 February 1917.

headman and they appointed Motuba to the position.¹⁸ The authorities backed down on the Rapulana's demand because they realised that the Rapulana had mobilised Moshete to assist them and the situation threatened to reopen the old intra-Barolong wars of the 1880s. The settlement was, however, only a provisional solution because the Rapulana at Lotlhakane, as has been shown, acknowledged Matlaba of Bodibe in the ZAR as their chief. Barrett made it clear that while the government had no objection to a purely sentimental attachment of the Rapulana to their chief at Bodibe, the Union government made provision for magisterial areas, and did not approve of a chief in the Lichtenburg district (ZAR) exercising authority in the district of Mafikeng.¹⁹ Despite Barrett's ruling, however, the Rapulana would not submit to John Montshiwa's authority because they wanted to be free from his jurisdiction.

In June 1917, John Montshiwa launched a complaint about George Motuba's disobedience in failing to respond to justifiable instruction to go to Mafikeng. He reported the complaint to Barrett saying that George Motuba had ploughed a

¹⁸ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Dispute regarding land at Lotlhakane", 2 February 1917.

¹⁹ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Dispute regarding land at Lotlhakane", 2 February 1917.

certain piece of ground at Lotlhakane which had always been recognised as the chief's ground and had traditionally been ploughed by his predecessors as far back as the eras of old Montshiwa and Tawana.²⁰ Barrett went to Lotlhakane to investigate the matter. On three occasions Motuba refused to go to Montshiwa when summoned and insisted, instead, that Montshiwa go to him. He even claimed that he did not know about the land which belonged to the chief of Mafikeng in Lotlhakane.²¹ The chief of Mafikeng concurred that George Motuba should not have ploughed the ground without obtaining permission from him. John Montshiwa, acting on the advice of his councillors, fined Motuba two cows for refusing to come to him when asked to do so and thus ignoring his authority as a chief. Motuba neither paid the fine nor apologised as Barrett had advised him to.²²

The chief accused George Motuba of being misled by four advisors, namely Sehishu Mothibi (his uncle), Isaac Lerane, Johannes Goapili and Ranasilidi. These men did not recognise Montshiwa as their chief and so he wanted them out of his

²⁰ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Headman George Motuba, Lotlhakane", 29 June 1917.

²¹ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Headman George Motuba", 29 June 1917.

²² NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Headman George Motuba", 29 June 1917.

district because they allegedly misled the Rapulana against Montshiwa. Montshiwa was determined to expel them from the Molopo Reserve for disobedience.²³

Barrett agreed to the fine imposed by Montshiwa on George Motuba, and emphasized that he should recognise John Montshiwa and not Matlaba as the chief. Barrett, however, rejected the chief's plan to evict the four men. He advised Sehishu Mothibi to live with his relatives in Bodibe to avoid trouble, or alternatively to join his son in France by enrolling with the Native Labour Contingent. Barrett was told that Sehishu Mothibi was a troublemaker, that Ransilidi had driven his own father from his kraal because he recognised Montshiwa as the chief, and that Isaac Lerane was a secretary to Sehishu Mothibi.²⁴ The Ratshidi seized cattle belonging to the Rapulana because they claimed that the Rapulana were ploughing a piece of ground belonging to the Ratshidi. Joshua Molema, Silas Molema's brother, informed Barrett that all they wanted was that Motuba should recognize John Montshiwa as chief. He insisted that in this dispute it was the duty of the government to support the chief.

²³ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Headman George Motuba",
29 June 1917.

²⁴ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Headman George Motuba",
29 June 1917.

If it did not do so there would be men with a small following in opposition to the chief, and chaos and anarchy would result, all of which could be blamed on the government.²⁵

John Montshiwa wanted to show these four Rapulana men that he was the undisputed chief in the Molopo Reserve and that any person who resisted his authority would pay for his actions. On 14 July 1917, John Montshiwa sent out a party of about three hundred men to Lotlhakane led by Paul Montshiwa and collected forty-seven cattle and forty-seven ploughs from the four men. This action was designed to put pressure on the Rapulana to accept John Montshiwa's authority.²⁶ According to the government the seizure by John Montshiwa of Rapulana property and the ordering of Sehishu Mothibi and others to leave the Reserve clearly demonstrated that the acting chief of Mafikeng was adopting a high-handed policy. Indeed it was similar to that of Lekoko, noted earlier, which nearly resulted in bloodshed.²⁷ John Montshiwa wanted to use the leadership style

²⁵ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Secretary of Native Affairs", NA office Pretoria, 5 June 1917.

²⁶ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Resident Magistrate in Mafikeng", 5 June 1917.

²⁷ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Resident Magistrate in Mafikeng", 5 June 1917.

followed by his forefather, Montshiwa, who resisted the Boers and attacked the Rapulana in the 1880s. He did not realise that the role of chiefs in the twentieth century was marshalled by the British legal system.

A meeting between Motuba, Matlaba and Moshete was convened by Barrett to ascertain the grievances of the Rapulana and a number of significant observations were made. The Rapulana land was still under Ratshidi control and as the Ratshidi “hated” the Rapulana there could be no peace. Despite lawless acts committed by the Ratshidi, the Rapulana endeavoured to observe the law and looked to the government for justice. It was clear that Motuba had ploughed the land of Montshiwa’s forefathers but Montshiwa had then removed eighteen cattle and ploughs from Sehishu, Ranasilidi, Johannes Goapele and Isaac Lerane. These men were then forbidden to plough the land in Lotlhakane and, moreover, Lerane’s land was taken by Paul Montshiwa and handed to a Xhosa-speaking man to plough on behalf of Letsapa Lekhoma, John Montshiwa’s friend. Finally, it was alleged that John Montshiwa had ordered Sehishu, Goapele and Lerane to leave

Lotlhakane.²⁸

The strategy employed by John Montshiwa to stamp his authority on Lotlhakane forced Motuba, Matlaba and Moshete to regroup and place their case before the government. They intended to show the government that the Rapulana were not prepared to be under the control of Chief Montshiwa and the Ratshidi. It appears that Montshiwa wanted to subjugate Matlaba's people because of the old grudge that they had assisted the Boers during the South African War. Another issue was that although Lotlhakane was occupied by both the Ratshidi and Rapulana, Montshiwa's authority was not welcomed by everybody there. Kevin Shillington claims that Lotlhakane was Montshiwa's old town but gives no explanation as to why it was his town. Shillington's judgement falls short of explaining that the Rapulana arrived first at Lotlhakane, long before 1800, whereas Montshiwa arrived there only in 1847.²⁹

The grievances raised by the Rapulana were rejected by the government because of the presence of Matlaba and Moshete. According to proclamation 2BB of

²⁸ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Resident Magistrate in Mafikeng", 5 June 1917.

²⁹ Shillington, *Colonisation*, p.128.

1895, they did not have any jurisdiction over the Molopo Reserve and the government thought they were assisting Motuba because Moshete and Matlaba hated Montshiwa and the Ratshidi. However, the reality was that historically the Rapulana regarded Matlaba as their chief and part of his people lived in Lotlhakane, within the Molopo Reserve.³⁰ Moshete could claim paramountcy over all the Barolong because he was a Ratlou chief and, moreover, there were the Ratlou who lived under Montshiwa's jurisdiction in Phitshane, Leporung and Tshidilamolomo. But the jurisdiction of Chief Montshiwa over the Molopo Reserve established by the British government, alienated the two chiefs from their people in the Molopo Reserve because they had supported the Boers during the South African War. The drama was not yet over. In 1917 Montshiwa sent forty-seven men armed with rifles, axes and other weapons to drive four councillors out of Lotlhakane because they misled Motuba. Montshiwa's men openly paraded with arms in Lotlhakane. Matlaba was determined that if there was no immediate settlement, he would resort to a tribal war.

³⁰ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Resident Magistrate in Mafikeng", 5 June 1917.

In April 1917 Montshiwa asked for permission to evict the above-mentioned four men from Lotlhakane, but the government regarded such action as high-handed and rejected the request, arguing that it might worsen the conflict and reduce chiefly authority even further.³¹ This was evidence that the government was increasingly becoming discontented with Montshiwa's rule of the Rapulana and was determined to prevent a possible war between the Ratshidi and the Rapulana.

Another incident which demonstrated John Montshiwa's high-handed rule against the Rapulana took place on 31 August 1917. Montshiwa invited Motuba to attend a recruitment meeting for the Native Labour Contingent and Motuba attended the meeting of about four to five hundred men. The chief requested Motuba to address them, which he did and after the gathering he returned to Lotlhakane.³² The meeting had nothing to do with the dispute but was merely a ploy by Montshiwa to remove Motuba from Lotlhakane while a raid was launched against those who defied Montshiwa's control. When Motuba arrived an African constable informed him that Montshiwa had gone with a strong force to

³¹ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Resident Magistrate in Mafikeng", 5 June 1917.

³² NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Resident Magistrate in Mafikeng", 5 June 1917.

carry out a raid on Lotlhakane. Motuba immediately rushed to the scene and the chief and his force agreed to return to Mafikeng. However, his men raided Sehishu Mothibi's house and assaulted his wife in spite of Motuba's appeal for their withdrawal.³³ From these provocative acts committed by the Ratshidi it is clear that the government had given freedom and latitude to the Ratshidi chief to harass the Rapulana and that it had no intention of stopping John Montshiwa's actions. The government's reluctance to take steps against Montshiwa even though he had broken its agreement with him not to evict any one until permission was sought from the relevant minister, F.S. Malan, clearly fuelled this conflict. The Rapulana were becoming weary of looking to the government for solutions.³⁴

The Rapulana *Kgotla* at Lotlhakane openly recognised Matlaba as their chief and rejected Montshiwa's authority for reasons already outlined.³⁵ But, in spite of the harassment that Montshiwa had instigated against the Rapulana, Barrett insisted that Motuba's *Kgotla* was under Montshiwa's jurisdiction at Mafikeng. It was also

³³ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, Office of Superintendent of Natives, "Raid by John Montshiwa on Lotlhakane", 4 September 1917.

³⁴ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Raid by John Montshiwa on Lotlhakane", 4 September 1917.

³⁵ This was John Montshiwa, the chief of the Mafikeng district.

clear that the government was biased in its intervention and favoured the Ratshidi.

The magistrate in Mafikeng accused John Montshiwa of wrong-doing by illegally raiding Lotlhakane, looting Sehishu Mothibi's house and assaulting his wife. Mothibi was close to the chief and on certain occasions acted as the headman. He had been attending the meetings with Montshiwa and Montshiwa might have read Mothibi's attitude towards the chief of Mafikeng. The magistrate asserted that "Montshiwa knew that the government officials would support him, in spite of his wrongdoing". The government clearly supported Montshiwa's draconian rule over the Rapulana. Because of this there was widespread discontent and the Rapulana decided to take their complaints about Montshiwa's activities such as looting and harassment, to the magistrate. This was to no avail and subsequently they decided to take the matter to court and the Ratshidi were found guilty of attempting to subjugate the Rapulana in Lotlhakane.³⁶

On 2 May 1917 the acting Chief John Montshiwa held a meeting of the Rapulana and some of their leaders at Lotlhakane to explain his motives for attacking

³⁶ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Raid by John Montshiwa on Lotlhakane", 4 September 1917.

the Rapulana . He urged his people to live in peace with the Ratshidi and claimed that the former Chief Lekoko's reign was harsh and this was why the government requested John Montshiwa to succeed him.³⁷ He promised the Rapulana that he would return all their agricultural land taken earlier from them by the Ratshidi. He maintained that Motuba would decide on small matters in his village of Lotlhakane but he himself would decide on all the more serious matters about the land and the people. George Motuba, for example, would take decisions about the cutting of tree-branches at Lotlhakane. Lastly, Montshiwa mentioned that the land in Lotlhakane, known as "*Phasha*" had been cultivated by Paul Montshiwa and the Ratshidi for Montshiwa, but now it had to be cultivated by George Motuba and the Rapulana for the chief of Mafikeng. Montshiwa offered to give the land in Lotlhakane to the Rapulana on condition that they agreed to recognise him as their paramount chief and Motuba as their headman, who in turn would only be accountable to the chief of Mafikeng. He outlined the hierarchy of leadership to both the Ratshidi and the Rapulana showing that he was the highest authority over Motuba in Lotlhakane and would try to offer peace to the Rapulana if they

³⁷ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Raid by John Montshiwa on Lotlhakane", 4 September 1917.

accepted his authority.³⁸ Montshiwa assured the Rapulana that they would receive their land back and urged them to live in peace with the Ratshidi. He wanted the support of the Rapulana and projected himself as a peaceful man who had their interest at heart. His approach was very different to the rough treatment of the leading Rapulana men under Motuba.

John Montshiwa entrenched his authority among the Rapulana at this meeting by trying to show that, despite his differences with Motuba and others who opposed his authority, he was not against the Rapulana and that he treated them equally with the Ratshidi. But, on the other hand, he clearly demonstrated that those who opposed his authority would be evicted from the Molopo Reserve. Not everything said by the chief was welcomed. There were two controversial announcements to the Rapulana that were unpalatable and these made them aspire to secede from the Ratshidi-dominated Molopo Reserve. Firstly, that the Rapulana land in Lotlhakane belonged to the Ratshidi and, secondly, that George Motuba and the Rapulana should cultivate the chief's land for him in Lotlhakane. This was unacceptable because the Rapulana did not accept Montshiwa as their chief but,

³⁸ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Report of meeting held by the Barolong at Rietfontein", 2 May 1917.

instead, paid allegiance to Matlaba the chief of Bodibe as a paramount chief of the Rapulana.³⁹ The dispute for land in Lotlhakane had reached breaking point and a tribal war was imminent. Matlaba mobilised Moshete to assist him against Montshiwa. The Rapulana decided to take the issue to court.

THE RAPULANA LITIGATION AGAINST THE RATSHIDI

The disillusionment of the Rapulana about their dispute over Lotlhakane was demonstrated by their reaction of taking the matter to court. The Rapulana accused the Ratshidi of encroaching on their land, raiding their cattle and evicting the Rapulana councillors from their land. They challenged Montshiwa's claim of jurisdiction over Lotlhakane and that, in fact, it belonged to the Rapulana. They insisted that they should not be subjected to Montshiwa's control. The government sided with the Ratshidi in this case because they believed that Matlaba and Moshete had no jurisdiction over the Molopo Reserve, a stance which was highly repugnant to the Rapulana.

In 1917 the government outlined the nature of the Ratshidi-Rapulana dispute to the

³⁹ Mothibi, interview, Rapulana *Kgotla* in Bodibe, 28 February 2001.

Supreme Court and stated that Matlaba, who claimed to be the paramount chief of the Rapulana, had no jurisdiction over Lotlakane (Rietfontein). Furthermore, the government stated that Montshiwa was the principal chief of the Molopo Reserve which included the Rapulana in Lotlhakane, the Ratshidi in the Stad and the Ratlou in Phitshane. According to the government, there was no provision for the exercise of judicial functions by a paramount chief over the whole of the Molopo Reserve and for administrative purposes, such as the nomination of headmen, collection of tax and receiving representative from the Molopo Reserve, the government recognised Montshiwa as the principal chief because he controlled a larger area and had always been considered reliable by the British government.⁴⁰ However, Montshiwa had failed to act within the perimeters circumscribed to him by the government because he had exercised judicial authority over the Rapulana instead of confining his jurisdiction to control of his own people, the Ratshidi.

The Rapulana rejected the fact that they were under Montshiwa's jurisdiction

⁴⁰ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, In the Supreme Court of South Africa (Griqualand West), "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba, George Motuba, Sehishu Mothibi, Isaac Lerane, Matsane Moseetlo, Mokone, Philemon, Silas, Matlaba and Paul Mothibi against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

and instead claimed that they had been brought to Lotlhakane by chief Matlaba of Bodibe. In addition to that, their first chief Rapulana had died there. They contended that the jurisdiction was forced upon them and they had resisted it. They further alluded to the fact that George's father, Abram Motuba, and also Sehishu Mothibi's uncle, were recognised by the government of British Bechuanaland as the headmen of the Rapulana people at Lotlhakane, and that Abram was succeeded by George Motuba, while Sehishu Mothibi acted on behalf of George because he was still a minor.⁴¹

The Rapulana led by Matlaba, Motuba and Sehishu Mothibi presented their case. They maintained that in 1886 the land in Lotlhakane had officially been allotted by the British authorities to the Rapulana people for their use and occupation. In 1901 Paul Montshiwa, a member of the Ratshidi people, who was acting on the instructions of the chief of the Ratshidi took a portion of the Rapulana's land situated east and west of Lotlhakane, and certain land to the north and south of Lotlhakane. Paul Montshiwa and the Ratshidi people regarded this land as theirs

⁴¹ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

because they had occupied it before fleeing to Moshaneng from the Boers in 1873. This land had remained in Ratshidi hands despite protests made from time to time by the Rapulana, until the matter was taken to court. In the same year, an official of the Union government confirmed the allocation and ordered the Ratshidi and Paul Montshiwa to vacate the land. Thereafter, George Motuba, Sehishu Mothibi and other members of Rapulana, after notifying Montshiwa of their intention, commenced to plough and sow the land.⁴² In June 1917, John Montshiwa with a large number of armed members of the Ratshidi prevented members of the Rapulana from ploughing and took over the land for themselves. The Rapulana added that John Montshiwa also took the property of Mothibi, Lerane, Motshane Moseetlo and injured Sehishu Mothibi's wife and certain other Rapulana people.⁴³

The Rapulana submitted that Montshiwa be ordered to restore all the property belonging to Sehishu Mothibi, Isaac Lerane, Matsane Moseetlo and Mokone and that Montshiwa should pay £500 to the first two victims for the

⁴² NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

⁴³ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

damages caused. They also claimed that he should pay £100 for the damages caused to Sehishu Mothibi.⁴⁴ Montshiwa, on the other hand, maintained that the Ratshidi and Rapulana were both sections of the Barolong. He had always been the paramount chief of the Barolong, and recognised as such by the government of the Union of South Africa. He had acted in his capacity as chief of the Barolong with the advice and consent of his councillors. He claimed that acts he had committed against the Rapulana were done in pursuit of the authority bestowed upon him by Bechuanaland Proclamation No. 2BB 1885 Sections 31 and 32.⁴⁵

Montshiwa agreed to the seizure of the cattle. He maintained that on or about 26 June 1917 eighteen cattle were removed from Sehishu Mothibi's house and taken to Mafikeng. The cattle were removed on instruction from Montshiwa as chief because Motuba had encroached on the land of Letsapa Lekoma at Lotlhakane. Moreover, Sehishu Mothibi repeatedly disobeyed the chief's orders. According to Montshiwa, Sehishu's cattle were kept until such time as he came to

⁴⁴ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

⁴⁵ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

the hearing but Sehishu did not attend. In addition, certain property which belonged to him was removed from his house and premises on the chief's orders and sent to Mafikeng. All this property had been returned to the Rapulanas' attorney on 8 October 1917. Montshiwa denied the accusation that any money had been taken.⁴⁶

The government rejected the claim by Matlaba that he was the paramount chief of the Rapulana residing in Lotlhakane, because he was resident at Bodibe, which was in the ZAR and he therefore did not have jurisdiction over the Rapulana at Lotlhakane. For administrative purposes the government recognised the chief of the Ratshidi at Mafikeng as the leading chief in the reserve and any questions affecting the common interest of the various other ethnic groups residing in the reserve were referred to him. However, the government did not allow the chief of Mafikeng to exercise any jurisdiction in the Molopo Reserve as far as judicial matters, allocation of land or other tribal affairs were concerned, over members of ethnic groups other than the Ratshidi, and control of minor chief's was also

⁴⁶ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

recognised by the government.⁴⁷

The government denied that the chief of the Ratshidi at Mafikeng had any right to lands at Lotlhakane, nor could he require the people of Lotlhakane to plough lands for him according to “*pasha*” custom. This was an ancient practice by which the Ratshidi cultivated the land for Chief Montshiwa under the authority of the minor chief of Lotlhakane. When his appointment of Paul Montshiwa failed to materialise (because Barrett installed Motuba) the chief insisted that Motuba should follow this custom and cultivate the land for him. The government did not recognise this custom and the only officers entitled to allocate land for cultivation on crown land were chiefs and minor chiefs who were officially recognised.⁴⁸

On 23 October 1919 the government stated through the Department of Native Affairs in Pretoria that chiefs and minor chiefs were entitled to exercise jurisdiction over members of their own people but only after having

⁴⁷ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, “In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs”, 1 December 1917.

⁴⁸ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, “In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs”, 1 December 1917.

been duly recognized by the government.⁴⁹ In the Mafikeng district it was decided that the various sections of the Barolong, that is, the Ratlou, the Ratshidi and the Rapulana were different ethnic groups and that the chiefs appointed over these various sections could only decide cases between people of their own particular ethnic communities. In other cases, as provided in the proclamation, the magistrate should decide if there was a dispute.⁵⁰ The court resolved that the chief's jurisdiction was "personal" and not "territorial". For example, a chief could not claim jurisdiction over any particular area such as the Molopo Reserve but only over the people in the reserve belonging to his particular ethnic group.⁵¹ The court ended Montshiwa's authority over the Rapulana and urged the Ratshidi not to enforce their control over them either. It suggested that the Rapulana, and the Ratshidi should each choose the chief they wanted to live under. This court ruling

⁴⁹ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

⁵⁰ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

⁵¹ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

brought anarchy in Lotlhakane because it empowered the ordinary people to defy the chief. In addition, it was difficult for the chief to exercise discipline as the guilty parties switched their loyalty time and again because the ruling maintained that allegiance to a chief was by choice. Silas Molema, one of the members of the Ratshidi royal family, was worried about this situation but was helpless because the Ratshidi had lost the case and did not wish to bother the Rapulana again. For the Rapulana the court ruling was a victory because they had always wanted to break away from Montshiwa's rule. In spite of the court decision, Ratshidi-Rapulana relations soured, but there was no longer any encroachment on the Rapulana land by the Ratshidi. The testimony of the Rapulana and the government showed that the Ratshidi were guilty of infringing on the Rapulana land. The court decided that John Montshiwa as chief of the Ratshidi did not have the right to summon and put on trial members of the Rapulana; they could only be summoned by their own chief.⁵² The court further ruled that Montshiwa had no right to any land at Lotlhakane and that the *pasha* custom could not be imposed upon the Rapulana. The Ratshidi were required to pay the litigation costs as well as those of

⁵² NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

the Rapulana attorney, De Kock. The Rapulana were also liable to pay De Kock but their dues were lower than those of the Ratshidi, who were ordered to give back to the Rapulana all property taken from them.⁵³ Chief Montshiwa of the Ratshidi had virtually lost control of the Molopo Reserve because his jurisdiction was confined to the Stad and Mareetsane where the Ratshidi resided. His authority in Lotlhakane and Phitshane was thus curtailed.

The problems of the Ratshidi increased when another setback hit them particularly hard. They experienced internal chieftainship problems which stemmed from several sources, including the Ratshidi-Rapulana conflict. When Chief Kebalepile (who had succeeded Wessel Montshiwa) died in 1917 while Letlamoreng, the heir to the throne was still a minor, Paul Montshiwa, one of the elders of the Ratshidi, appointed John Montshiwa as the acting chief until Letlamoreng was old enough to take over.⁵⁴ This appointment was approved by Barrett and the Ratshidi in 1917. It appears that the leading men of the Barolong were disappointed by John's conduct.

⁵³ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "In the matter between plaintiffs, Israel Matlaba and others against John Montshiwa and Minister of Native Affairs", 1 December 1917.

⁵⁴ NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Notes of a meeting held at court house between the honourable Minister of Native Affairs and the Ratshidi-Barolong", Mafikeng, 17 November 1919.

According to Paul Montshiwa, John disrespected him and Letlamoreng, sold cattle which belonged to Letlamoreng without his permission, was always away and did not attend the *Kgotla* to address the problems of the Ratshidi.⁵⁵ Furthermore he was an alcoholic and discussed the community problems in canteens with his friend M. Lekomo. Lastly, he harassed and undermined the Rapulana without consulting his counsellors. In 1919 Paul Motshiwa, Tiego Tawana, William Tawana and Zachariah Nko presented these complaints about John Montshiwa before the Minister of Native Affairs, F. S. Malan and the Acting Secretary, E. Barrett. Malan told John that he had harmed his reputation and deposed him, replacing him with Letlamoreng who had now reached maturity. John on the other hand was supported by Silas Molema, M. Lekomo and Jackson Montshiwa.⁵⁶ John was disappointed by the decision and maintained that he would not recognise Letlamoreng. It soon became clear that John Montshiwa's activities in Lotlhakane were not approved by his counsellors and the Ratshidi and, moreover, his idiosyncratic behaviour caused the Ratshidi to lose money in the form of payments

⁵⁵ NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Notes of a meeting held at court house", 17 November 1919.

⁵⁶ NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Notes of a meeting held at court house", 17 November 1919.

for litigation, money which should have been used instead to improve their standard of living.

THE DEMARCATION

Even though the Supreme Court had taken a final decision over the dispute for land and the question of jurisdiction in Lotlhakane, the dissent was far from over. On Thursday 6 November 1919, the Minister of Native Affairs, Malan, received a delegation of the Barolong chiefs and councillors accompanied by the Mafikeng attorney, De Kock. The deputation included Chief Aaron Moshete from Khunwana in the ZAR, Sub-Chief Monchusi Matlaba of Bodibe in the ZAR and De Kock. The purpose of the delegation was to request the minister to agree to a boundary that would separate the Ratshidi from the Rapulana. De Kock outlined the position of the Rapulana and the Ratlou after the judgement on Montshiwa's case, showing how it had affected the Rapulana's affairs at Lotlhakane. This decision clearly established that George Motuba had jurisdiction over the people at Lotlhakane. But the decision on the payment of costs for litigation caused trouble at Lotlhakane. The Rapulana headman, Motuba, experienced opposition from some members of the Barolong although he was uncertain whether they were

Ratshidi or Rapulana. There were several petty cases arising from a levy imposed upon the people by their chiefs to pay the legal costs in the Ratshidi-Rapulana case. Some people in Lotlhakane resisted this levy, although they had resided there for years under Motuba.⁵⁷ When attempts were made to enforce the levies, the people concerned went to the courts for redress and this led to a number of litigation cases. These litigation cases resulted in economic loss to the Rapulana and provoked further disputes from within.

Another matter raised by the delegation was that before the boundary was set between the ZAR and Molopo Reserve, Lotlhakane areas were united. Until 1885, Matlaba had been regarded as more senior than Motuba. The Rapulana at Lotlhakane were in the habit of taking important matters to Bodibe for settlement, while small issues were submitted to Motuba. As regards Chief Moshete, the Rapulana recognised him as their paramount chief. They were aware that the government did not recognise the claims of Moshete and Matlaba to exercise jurisdiction over the people at Lotlhakane, but they were anxious that

⁵⁷ NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Meeting at Rietfontein between the honourable Minister of Native Affairs and the Rapulana Tribe : Fixing of Boundary between chiefs of the Ratshidi and the Rapulana at Rietfontein", 18 November 1919.

these chiefs be accorded such rights.⁵⁸

The third matter they presented was the recovery of the litigation costs from the Ratshidi. The liability of the losing side amounted to approximately £2000. They had not formally demanded payment from Montshiwa's people, but had heard from some members of the Ratshidi that there was little prospect of recovering the money. Montshiwa told the Rapulana that his people were not in a position to pay because they were poor and many did not cooperate in making their contribution. In addition, some individuals imitated the Rapulana and took the headmen who had forced them to pay, to court.⁵⁹ Lastly, De Kock explained that there were "river lands" at Lotlhakane, which his clients claimed had been dispossessed by the Ratshidi. Although these lands fell within George Motuba's jurisdiction, a number of Ratshidi who recognised Montshiwa lived there too. If boundaries were fixed the position would be clearly defined and anyone who did not want to submit to Motuba's authority would be free to leave.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Fixing of Boundary between chiefs of the Ratshidi and the Rapulana at Rietfontein", 18 November 1919.

⁵⁹ NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Fixing of Boundary between chiefs of the Ratshidi and the Rapulana at Rietfontein", 18 November 1919.

⁶⁰ NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Fixing of Boundary between chiefs of the Ratshidi and the Rapulana at Rietfontein", 18 November 1919.

Malan asserted that Chiefs Matlaba and Moshete had no jurisdiction over Lotlhakane, but if the Rapulana chose to cross the border and submit their disputes to them for settlement, the government offered no objection. People could not be compelled to pay allegiance to a chief they did not want. As regards a boundary, he said that he would like to hear the Ratshidi's side of the story.⁶¹ The court did not order the establishment of boundaries and it was maintained by Barrett that the Ratshidi and Rapulana in Lotlhakane should learn to live together. Allegiance to the chief of the Ratshidi or that of the Rapulana was their choice. Malan subsequently called a meeting of the Rapulana and Ratshidi to discuss the fixing of the boundary between them. The Ratshidi complained about the lack of adequate notice and stated that they should have been notified three months in advance so that they could consult their people. Moreover, they were preoccupied with the logistics of the internal dispute over the chieftainship between John and Letlamoreng Montshiwa.⁶² Malan reiterated the decision of the Supreme Court and Appeal Court that the Rapulana and Ratshidi were two different communities and

⁶¹ NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Fixing of Boundary between chiefs of the Ratshidi and the Rapulana at Rietfontein", 18 November 1919.

⁶² NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Fixing of Boundary between chiefs of the Ratshidi and the Rapulana at Rietfontein", 18 November 1919.

that the Ratshidi were not in the Rapulana's jurisdiction and *vice versa*. Wherever a man lived he had to be loyal to his chief, and if a Ratshidi wanted to be loyal to the Rapulana chief it was his own choice. However, Malan agreed to demarcate lines only for the purpose of occupation of land and ploughing. The Ratshidi and Rapulana agreed to this, and three Ratshidi and three Rapulana representatives were appointed to work with Malan in the demarcation process. After the decision had been made it was decided that Malan would demarcate the land.⁶³ The border was ultimately demarcated and the process was monitored by representatives of both the Rapulana and the Ratshidi.⁶⁴

THE DISPUTE AND LITIGATION

The litigation fund was for payment to lawyers who participated in the Rapulana litigation against the Ratshidi and was formed in 1920. In addition, the Ratshidi had to pay the Rapulana because they had lost the case. However, neither party had instant cash and both had to raise the money from their people. The

⁶³ NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Fixing of Boundary between chiefs of the Ratshidi and the Rapulana at Rietfontein", 11 November 1919.

⁶⁴ NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Fixing of Boundary between chiefs of the Ratshidi and the Rapulana at Rietfontein", 11 November 1919.

Ratshidi and the Rapulana named it the “litigation fund”. The fund polarised the Barolong further into cliques, because those who did not want to pay instigated proceedings against the chief, which resulted in an avalanche of litigation cases. These cases exhausted the finances of both parties. Long before the dispute between the Rapulana and the Ratshidi was over, internal dissension divided the two groups. Montshiwa and Matlaba found themselves at loggerheads with their own people when they attempted to enforce people to make their contributions to the fund.⁶⁵

On 12 July 1921, Chief Matlaba was sued by some of his subjects who objected to being compelled to contribute to the legal costs payable by the Rapulana of Bodibe, in their litigation against the Ratshidi.⁶⁶ The judgement was given against the Rapulana chief. Matlaba then wanted the liabilities of this case to be paid out of the money raised by the Rapulana because the case had arisen from the main dispute. Matlaba thus increased the amount owed by the Rapulana in his attempt to help them. Matlaba did not however intend paying his new litigation costs from his

⁶⁵ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, “Silas Molema and others: Ratshidi Dispute”, 19 November 1920.

⁶⁶ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, “Meintjes versus Chief Matlaba”, 12 November 1921.

own coffers, and he was hoping he could draw them from the litigation fund.

On 24 November 1921, Chief Moshete had similar problems and held a meeting in Lotlhakane where the Assistant Magistrate, Muller⁶⁷, who had succeeded Barrett, and Superintendent of Native Affairs, C. Nicholson, were present. They discussed the litigation costs of the case in which Arie Kgosi sued Chief Moshete and others.⁶⁸ This meeting failed to come out with a solution. The Ratlou and Rapulana chiefs held a series of meetings and in 1925 it was agreed that the main dispute case and Matlaba's, should be treated in the same way as the case of the Rapulana litigation costs.⁶⁹ They also agreed that a levy of 10 shillings be imposed on all the people over eighteen years of age and living in Khunwana, Bodibe and Lotlhakane areas. The Rapulana were very anxious that government officials should undertake the collection of the levy because they wanted to avoid corruption, accusations and friction among the people.⁷⁰ They realised that the

⁶⁷ The Assistant Magistrate, is just referred to as Mr Muller, by primary sources.

⁶⁸ NASA, Vol. 3159, File No. 718, "Arie Kgosi versus Moshete and others", Mafikeng, 24 November 1921.

⁶⁹ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Ratshidi-Rapulana Litigation: complaint of Chief Aarone Moshete against Rapulana in regard to payment of costs", 10 February 1925.

⁷⁰ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Ratshidi-Rapulana Litigation", 10 February 1925.

progress of the fund was not only hindered by the non-payment of the levy but also misappropriation of the fund by headmen who were responsible for the collection process.

The Ratshidi also requested the government to collect an additional 20 shillings per annum from every person paying government tax in the Molopo Reserve and a portion of the Setlagole Reserve, for the litigation fund. They proposed that the fund be termed the Ratshidi Litigation Fund and that when the costs had been paid off, the balance should be transferred to the existing Barolong National Fund.⁷¹ The government agreed to collect this levy from both the Ratshidi and the Rapulana. However, the Barolong were angered by having to pay these heavy costs, and blamed the government officials for not protecting them against incurring disastrous legal costs. The Barolong lost confidence in the local colonial administration and saw the payment of litigation costs as a ploy by the authorities to destroy them economically.⁷²

⁷¹ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Ratshidi-Rapulana litigation", 10 February 1925.

⁷² NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Ratshidi-Rapulana litigation", 10 February 1925.

The Ratshidi in the Molopo Reserve, as well as the Rapulana and the Ratlou, who also lived there, contributed to the Barolong National Fund. The Ratshidi wanted to use the fund to pay their litigation costs,⁷³ but because the Rapulana were opponents of the Ratshidi in the litigation case it is doubtful whether it was fair that the Ratshidi should have paid any portion of the litigation costs from the Fund.⁷⁴ The process of collecting the litigation fund therefore caused further dispute and schism between the Ratshidi and the Rapulana.

On 16 March 1926 Chief Letlamoreng Montshiwa (who had succeeded John in the same year) and one his councillors requested the Superintendent of the Native Affairs whether the outstanding amount of the litigation costs could perhaps be paid from the Barolong National Fund. This became yet another source of conflict because the fund belonged to both the Rapulana and the Ratshidi. In the event, the government did not agree because it did not want to become embroiled in the Ratshidi-Rapulana dispute again and the financial struggle to settle the litigation costs therefore continued.

⁷³ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Ratshidi-Rapulana litigation", 10 February 1925.

⁷⁴ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Ratshidi-Rapulana litigation", 10 February 1925.

The voluntary levy imposed on the Rapulana did not materialize because the community did not have money. The government asked the Rapulana to impose a compulsory levy but the chiefs were dissatisfied with this state of affairs. On March 1927, the Ratlou refused to assist the Rapulana, arguing that they were independent. By 1936, the litigation costs had still not yet been fully paid.⁷⁵ The government did not want to intervene and suggested to Montshiwa that he should avoid any activities which might prolong the dispute.

In conclusion, the Molopo Reserve divided the Rapulana into two sections, namely those in Bodibe under Matlaba and those in Lotlhakane under Motuba. All the Ratshidi were located under the authority of Montshiwa in the Molopo Reserve. But the British authorities brought the Ratlou in Phitshane, Madibogo, Kraaipaan and Setlagole and the Rapulana in Lotlakane under the Mafikeng district. The paramount chiefs of the Ratlou and Rapulana remained outside the Molopo Reserve, out of touch with their own people. The British authorities in South Africa thus contributed in no small measure to the anarchy in the Molopo Reserve.

⁷⁵ NTS 144, Ref. 2/43/1, Part 3, "Rapulana litigation costs", 24 August 1936.

The Rapulana resisted this onslaught by the British and the Ratshidi by settling the issue in court and came out victorious.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BAROLONG NATIONAL COUNCIL FROM 1915 TO 1920

This chapter discusses the formation Barolong National Council (BNC) which is one of the rural organisations most neglected by historians. It examines the circumstances that led to the formation of this organisation within the Rapulana and Ratlou. The chapter explores its origins and social composition. It also deals with the contribution of the organisation to the First World War and finally highlights the obstacles faced by the organisation, which threatened to destroy it.

THE ORIGINS AND THE ACTIVITIES OF THE BNC

In April 1915 the Ratlou and Rapulana formed the BNC. Its establishment stemmed from the Ratshidi-Rapulana dispute, and particularly the Rapulana litigation against the Ratshidi, because some leaders of the Ratlou and Rapulana were tired of these squabbles and wanted to unite all the Barolong. They felt that the attorneys who had advised the Barolong to take their case to the Supreme Court had intended to cripple the economy of the Ratshidi and the Rapulana. Leaders of the two communities therefore decided to form the BNC to try to solve the dispute.¹ The organisation's

¹ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 201, "Barolong National Council: Memorandum of the Minister of Justice from E. H. Sehemo" (President of BNC), 19 April 1915.

main aim was to unite all the Barolong through negotiations and mutual economic assistance. The BNC was intended to end the conflict and amalgamate all sections of the Barolong into one “nation” under one paramount chief. Sehemo, the former secretary of Chief Matlaba of the Rapulana, was elected as its leader and EM Matlaba, the secretary.

The BNC was formed by the petit bourgeois such as teachers, ministers, tailors, interpreters, clerks, carpenters, police and drivers. There was also a priest, Sehemo, a protagonist of the independent church, the African Catholic Church.² These people were not intellectuals like the Ratshidi’s leading men, Sol. Plaatje and S.M. Molema and they related well with the chiefs and the ordinary people. Many of the Rapulana who were farming people, also joined the organisation, as did the royalists like Sehemo, J.R. Matlaba, E. Matlaba and Ramosiane Matlaba (the uncle of chief Moshete whom he claimed to represent).³ The BNC invited all the Barolong in South Africa to become part of this move towards unity of the Barolong. It was clear that the BNC was well coordinated by the leading members of the Rapulana and Ratlou chieftainship, and that it needed to have the support of Chief Matlaba and Moshete.

² NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 201, “Barolong National Council: Memorandum of the Minister of Justice from E.H. Sehemo” 19 April 1915.

³ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 201, “Barolong National Council”, 19 April 1915.

As indicated in the previous chapter, the Ratshidi and the Rapulana were locked in a serious showdown when John Montshiwa attempted to evict the leading Rapulana men and the Rapulana took the matter to court and came out victorious.⁴ After the court a network of problems surfaced within both the Rapulana and Ratshidi. The chiefs found themselves in conflict with their own people when they imposed the tax levy for the payment of the litigation fund. The Ratshidi leading men blamed John Montshiwa for concentrating upon matters in Lotlhakane and leaving problems such as land disputes and cases in the Stad unresolved. This led to a division within the tribal hierarchy and John was deposed.⁵ But the problem of litigation remained. The Rapulana also on other hand experienced problems because their members took Matlaba to court for imposing a levy upon them. Matlaba was in the ZAR and some members in Bodibe were angry that they suffered economically because of matters in Lotlhakane. When Matlaba forced them to pay they took him to court and he was found guilty and forced to pay money to the victims.⁶ In Bodibe it was difficult for Matlaba to collaborate with the ZAR government which did not interfere with the collection of litigation funds but demanded government taxation. The Ratlou also

⁴ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Notes of meeting held at Court House, Mafikeng, between, the Honourable Minister of Native Affairs and Ratshidi-Barolong", 17 November 1919.

⁵ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Notes of meeting", 17 November 1919..

⁶ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Complaint by Chief Moshete: Ratshidi and Rapulana litigation costs", 23 February 1925.

had problems because Moshete's attempts to enforce the levy brought him into conflict with his people.⁷ The Ratlou in Khunwana were under Moshete and the Ratlou in Setlagole Reserve were under Chief Phoi. Khunwana was in the ZAR and the Setlagole Reserve was in the Mafikeng district under Montshiwa, and Moshete did not have any jurisdiction there.⁸ In addition, Chief Phoi did not accept Moshete's authority. Moshete had written letters to Barrett insisting that the fence which was the boundary between Khunwana and the Setlagole Reserve be removed and that all the Ratlou were his people because he was the senior chief. Moshete held a meeting in the Setlagole Reserve with the help of his puppet councillor, Ramosiane (in the Setlagole Reserve) and told the Ratlou to pay the litigation fund to assist the Rapulana. The Ratlou headman and Chief Phoi disagreed and when the matter was taken to the government and Moshete was told that he had no jurisdiction in the Setlagole Reserve.⁹ These disputes within the Barolong became the focal point of the BNC.

E. M. Sehemo was regarded by the Ratlou and Rapulana as a man of unquestioned

⁷ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Complaint by Chief Moshete", 23 February 1925.

⁸ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Interference of Chief Aaron Moshete, Khunwana, Lichtenburg District with Chief John Montshiwa's followers residing at Mareetsane, Setlagole Reserve", 12 April 1918.

⁹ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 44, "Barolong Tribal Matters", 07 October 1927; NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 1237, "Request for the removal of fence by Chief Moshete", 16 June 1913.

integrity and they had recognised him since 1903 for the religious services he rendered towards them. He encouraged them to be loyal to the government and he received unprecedented support to lead the council. He assisted in resolving the dispute of chieftainship within the Rapulana in Bodibe and Lotlhakane, and before long he was elected the president of the BNC.¹⁰ The chiefs, headmen and counsellors representing various sections of the Barolong congratulated the Rev Sehemo and expressed the hope that he would follow the good work of his grandfather the late Chief Matlaba who had fought for the right of the Rapulana to be ruled by their legitimate leader in Lotlhakane.¹¹ He was from the Rapulana Royal House and had formerly been secretary to his uncle, the late Chief Mokgothu Matlaba. Sehemo was also a superintendent of the African Catholic Church that was a breakaway church from the Church of England. Sehemo's role in leading the Africans out of the Roman Catholic Church and forming the African Catholic branch was viewed by the Rapulana and Ratlou as an act of heroism and certainly not denigrated as suggested by the Ratshidi. It was this leading role in the church that made him an appropriate choice for the position of president. The Rapulana and the Ratlou trusted that Sehemo would

¹⁰ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 44, "Barolong Tribal Matters", 07 October 1918.

¹¹ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Resolution of the executive council of the BNC", 28 June 1918.

guide the Barolong to act constitutionally as people with laws and customs.¹²

Understandably, the BNC was not only formed to quell the disorder among the Barolong, but also to help them to develop economically. It intended to “collect the National fund with which to buy stock, a farm and landed property”.¹³ The leaders realised that it would be fruitless to build the economy and ignore nation building, because the former depended entirely on the latter. The unity of the Barolong was fundamental and would be preceded by economic development.¹⁴ The BNC wanted all sections of the Barolong to be one nation bound by economic assistance and the common allegiance to one council and one paramount chief, Moshete.

According to its leaders, the BNC did not purport to be a political party, but a traditional council which existed under the tribal laws and customs of the Barolong people. The leadership also made it clear that the BNC intended to represent only the Barolong group and it was not open to other ethnic groups. The council claimed that its existence was approved by the paramount Chief Moshete. That may well have been true because Moshete was always represented by his puppet councillor, Ramosiane,

¹² NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, “Resolution of the executive council”, 28 June 1918.

¹³ A979, Cc4.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, “The Barolong National council”, April 1918, p.29.

¹⁴ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, “Barolong National Council: handwritten notes of names of committee members”, August 1916.

and, in addition, the council favoured Moshete's paramountcy. However, the collaboration of this council with Moshete and Matlaba clearly shows that there was a political motive on the part of the Rapulana and the Ratlou. They wanted to use the BNC as a lever to inaugurate Moshete as the paramount chief of all the Barolong. This appears to be the prime objective of the organisation and other endeavours such as nation building, unity and economic assistance probably became secondary. This apparent political agenda was the reason why the Ratshidi were sceptical about the BNC and rejected it. They complained that they had not been consulted and that the organisation was led by the Rapulana and Ratlou who wanted to elevate Moshete into a paramount chief. In their eyes this European-style organisation was just another attempt by the Rapulana and Ratlou to attain authority over Montshiwa. Montshiwa and the Ratshidi were, in a word, at variance with the BNC since its inception.¹⁵

Whereas the focus of the BNC was ethnic in character, educated blacks elsewhere in South Africa were aiming at pan-South African unity. The South African Native National Congress, for example, was formed in 1912 by educated blacks such as John Dube. The educated Ratshidi leaders such as Montshiwa, Molema and Sol Plaatje joined various ethnic groups such as the Zulu, Xhosa and others to form the SANNC.

¹⁵ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Barolong National Council: Memorandum the Right Honourable Louis Botha, by M. J. R. Matlaba, M.M. Matlaba and E. H. Sehemo", 18 April 1916.



Matlaba and Moshete did not join this organisation and it is unclear whether they were invited to do so or not but, nevertheless, they were not represented on the SANNC. According to the testimony of the present Rapulana chief, Matlaba, the Ratshidi underestimated them even at the beginning of the twentieth century because they considered themselves more educated than the Rapulana and claimed to understand national politics better.¹⁶

The Ratshidi elites, Molema, Plaatje and Montshiwa joined the SANNC because the South Africa Act passed at union in 1910 abolished the Cape qualified franchise. This was what led them to turn against the British government.¹⁷ They were also disappointed by the fact that the Barolong were not compensated for their efforts during the siege of Mafikeng. In addition, the Ratshidi failed to take total control of Lotlhakane. Sol Plaatje, who was elected general-secretary of the SANNC, was a recruiting agent of the organisation and believed in the paramountcy of the Ratshidi over all the other Barolong. As an intellectual politician, Plaatje did not attempt to unite the Rapulana and Ratlou people in the spirit of African nationalism echoed by the SANNC, and this made the Ratlou and the Ratshidi feel left out of the SANNC and all that it stood for.¹⁸ However, members of the Rapulana, including Chief

¹⁶ Matlaba, interview, Rapulana *Kgotla*, Bodibe, 28 February 2001.

¹⁷ Karis and Carter, *From Protest*, p.18.

¹⁸ Karis and Carter, *From Protest*, p.18.

Matlaba, joined the SANNC later because they realised that it was formed to unite all the ethnic groups of South Africa against the expropriation of land by whites after the South African War.

In 1915 the magistrate in Mafikeng asked Chief Lekoko Montshiwa of the Ratshidi about his knowledge of the existence of the BNC because he was suspicious that the Rapulana and the Ratlou formed it in order to curtail Montshiwa's role in the Molopo Reserve. The chief stated that president Sehemō of the BNC was a wandering minister of religion whose headquarters were in the ZAR, and who had no authority to represent many of the Barolong, for example, those living in the Free State, ZAR, northern Cape and Bechuanaland Protectorate. Montshiwa asserted that Sehemō's conduct on several occasions was appalling because he realised that the leader of the BNC wanted to subjugate him and the Ratshidi. The chief concluded that the BNC had no legitimacy at all.¹⁹ The Ratshidi were apparently intimidated by the genesis of the BNC and were afraid that the Rapulana and Ratlou would succeed in uniting the Barolong despite the disapproval of members of the Ratshidi royal family.

This negative reaction by Chief Lekoko clearly shows that the Ratshidi would not

¹⁹ NASA, Vol. 108, File No.48, "Barolong National Council 'Humble petition' from the Barolong Chief and Tribes representing the Barolong National Council to General Louis Botha", 23 May 1916.

accept any peace-keeping project initiated by the Rapulana or Ratlou. The Ratshidi wanted to take the lead, with others following their initiative. Lekoko felt that he could not cooperate with the Rapulana and Ratlou because the two groups had refused to join the Ratshidi in the siege of Mafikeng. Moreover, they had refused to collaborate with Montshiwa against the Boers and regarded Montshiwa as the minor chief. Subsequently, the Ratshidi despised the Rapulana and the Ratlou for non-cooperation and for giving a part of the Molopo Reserve to the Boers.

On 11 April 1916, a meeting of the BNC was held in Mafikeng to solve certain disputes among the Barolong and it was attended by chiefs from Bodibe, Lotlhakane, Tlhokoyeng, Khunwana and Mafikeng. The meeting expressed loyalty to the government and resolved to hold a peace conference of the BNC in Johannesburg on 19 and 29 May 1916 to demonstrate the fact that its jurisdiction was beyond northern Cape region of the Barolong.²⁰ This proposed meeting was intended to press for recognition of the BNC by the government, to unite and organise all the Barolong to belong to only one body, the BNC, and finally to assist in raising money for the Governor-General's Fund to help soldiers who were engaged in the First World War.²¹

²⁰ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "John Montshiwa to chief Aaron Moshete Khunwana", 4 August 1917.

²¹ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "John Montshiwa to chief Aaron Moshete", 4 August 1917.

However, the meeting did not materialise because the government refused to recognise this council as it did not represent the Ratshidi. It felt that the organisation might worsen the existing Ratshidi dispute.

The acting chief of the Ratshidi, John Montshiwa, who succeeded Lekoko, also claimed that he knew nothing about the BNC. He asserted that “names such as J. R. Matlaba and Sehemo mentioned from the *Daily Mail* showed that the movement came from the Rapulana”.²² The chief maintained that Sehemo was an Ethiopian church minister and Matlaba a chief at Bodibe. Therefore, according to Montshiwa, the BNC was formed by the Ratlou and Rapulana and was intended to advance their territorial interests particularly in Lotlhakane and the Setlagole Reserve. Matlaba and Moshete were prevented from controlling their people in the Molopo Reserve where they had no jurisdiction, but Montshiwa was sceptical about the Rapulana and Ratlou and did not trust them.²³

On 13 December 1916 the BNC sent a second petition to General Louis Botha for recognition. It mentioned that it intended to establish branches in Mothibistad, Klerksdorp, Wolmaranstad, Hartebeesfontein, Randfontein, Krugersdorp,

²² NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, “John Montshiwa to chief Aaron Moshete”, 4 August 1917.

²³ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, “John Montshiwa to chief Aaron Moshete”, 4 August 1916.

Johannesburg and Lichtenburg.²⁴ It wanted to show the government evidence of its expansion and constituency to justify its existence. In its application for recognition the BNC mentioned headman Ramosiane Matlaba who represented Moshete of Khunwana and John Montshiwa of Mafikeng, E. Matlaba and T. Tawana of the Rapulana from Bodibe and Lotlhakane, S. Gabashane and Almaga from Krugersdorp. These people were named to demonstrate the all-inclusiveness of the council but in reality Montshiwa did not participate in the activities of the BNC because he was not invited to do so and did not want to be led by the Rapulana and Ratlou.²⁵ In the event, the organisation was not recognised by the government because it was not sanctioned by the Ratshidi.

John Montshiwa was extremely surprised and disappointed when he heard that the BNC leaders had mentioned his name with the membership of this council. He said in a letter to Moshete that he should advise Rev Sehemo that the BNC had no place in Johannesburg. Montshiwa's reaction showed that he was threatened by the expansion of the BNC. He wanted an explanation as to why his name was included and communicated to the press even though he was not a member. Montshiwa maintained

²⁴ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, "Barolong National Council leaders, W.R. Matlaba, E.M. Matlaba and Sehemo", 13 December 1916.

²⁵ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, "Barolong National Council", 13 December 1916.

that the Rev Schemo who brought the BNC delegation to Pretoria and Johannesburg had done so for his own leadership interests and had misled Matlaba and Moshete to follow him. John Montshiwa was threatened by the expansion of the BNC in Pretoria and Johannesburg because he realised that this organisation's jurisdiction was not only centred in the Molopo Reserve, Bodibe, Khunwana and Setlagole Reserve. He realised that the BNC advocated a pan-Barolong ethnic nationalism of all the Barolong throughout South Africa. The organisation's secretary, Emis Matlaba, was even holding meetings of Barolong working on the mines to propel the euphoria of ethnic nationalism.

In 1916 the BNC established the Bechuana Union Limited for the collection of the Governor-General's Fund to help ex-soldiers of the First World War. The Bechuana Union's board of directors consisted of Chief Matlaba, E.M. Schemo, J. Ramoa and others. The Union mandated E.M. Matlaba to form committees in the Rand mines for collecting money. About £ 34.10s had already been paid to the Roodepoort magistrate. According to the BNC, Chief Moshete officially appointed the Barolong members of the Bechuana Union Limited. The Union maintained that the collection of the Governor-General's Fund was approved by the Lichtenburg magistrate and a public meeting of the Barolong had been held on 25 March 1915. The annual synod of the African Catholic Church unanimously agreed to assist with the collection

contributions.²⁶

This resolution was forwarded to General Louis Botha on 27 April 1915. However, Whitehead, a government official who was given the authority by the government to collect the money for the fund, was instructed to form fund-raising committees among the Barolong people working on the mines. However, he refused to approve the Bechuana Union Limited's fund-raising campaign because he was afraid it could cause confusion and division, which might fuel ethnic cleansing by the majority ethnolinguistic groups such as the Zulu and Xhosa against minorities like the Barolong.²⁷ Moreover, he feared that the money might be misappropriated. Evidence of litigation records reveal that the Ratlou and Rapulana had failed to collect the litigation fund properly and it was felt that they should not be trusted with monies for this fund.²⁸ Whitehead appointed M.W. Taberer to form committees of various ethnic groups for the collection of the Governor-General's Fund on the Rand mines.²⁹ According to E.M. Matlaba's observation, most of these committees were dominated by the Zulu

²⁶ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, "Barolong National Council, signed : E. M. Matlaba, W.R. Matlaba and E.M. Sehemó", Polfontein 13 December 1916.

²⁷ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, "Barolong National Council, signed : E. M. Matlaba, W.R. Matlaba and E.M. Sehemó", Polfontein 13 December 1916.

²⁸ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, "Barolong National Council, signed: E. M. Matlaba, W.R. Matlaba and E.M. Sehemó", 13 December 1916.

²⁹ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, "Barolong National Council, signed : E. M. Matlaba, W.R. Matlaba and E.M. Sehemó", 13 December 1916.

because they were in the majority. Matlaba felt that because these committees represented the Zulu the Barolong contributions would not be recognised. He felt that the Barolong should contribute to their own Barolong committees formed by him and he seemed determined to proceed even though permission was not granted.³⁰ Matlaba was insistent that he would create a body that united the Barolong and would bring them on a par with other ethnic groups like the Zulu and Xhosa. He echoed the sentiments of the BNC to stand for the Barolong as an entity and to avoid subjugation by the majority of other ethno-linguistic groups. This was an ethnic political landscape where the Ratshidi failed because they confined their campaign against the BNC and Moshete to the Mafikeng district. Meanwhile, in contrast, the BNC visited the mines and succeeded in uniting all the Barolong, including the Ratshidi in contributing to the Governor-General's Fund. It was here on the mines that the BNC demonstrated beyond all reasonable doubt that it had the capacity to unite the Barolong.

The BNC expressed its disillusionment over the non-recognition of the Bechuana Union Limited and complained to the government about Whitehead. Whitehead had accused E.M. Matlaba of the Bechuana Union of being disloyal to the government

³⁰ NASA, Vol. 14, "File No. 48, Barolong National Council, signed :E. M. Matlaba and W.R. Matlaba and Sehemó", 13 December 1916.

because he had challenged the legitimacy of the person appointed to collect money for the fund. The BNC attempted to convince the government that E.M. Matlaba, W. R. Matlaba and E .M. Sehemo were officially appointed to travel about and organise the money-collecting committees among the Barolong. However, Whitehead did not trust the Rapulana and he thought they might embezzle the money, so he advised Matlaba to work within the committees formed by Taberer. Matlaba refused and responded that he would first take the money to the chief and then to the government. Whitehead decided to try to stop Matlaba from collecting the money, but he had already formed the committees and they had begun to work.³¹

Taberer claimed that Matlaba had been to and from the Witwatersrand for a considerable time accompanied by numerous hangers-on and his activities had been more beneficial to himself and his party than the Governor-General's Fund. Taberer sent a circular letter to all the miners warning them against all "irresponsible Africans" who were going around holding meetings to collect money for the Governor-General's Fund.³² On 1 November 1916, the mine manager sent a letter to Taberer confirming that Matlaba was not allowed to enter the mine compounds to hold concerts to collect money. The campaign was doomed to fail if it did not include the

³¹ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, "Barolong National Council: Governor General's Fund", Lichtenburg, 21 November 1916.

³² NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, "Governor General's Fund", 21 November 1916.

miners because they were the men who sustained their households in rural areas and they could not be expected to pay twice, that is to the mine compound authorities as well as the Bechuana Union Limited.³³ The resistance by Whitehead was orchestrated by Montshiwa who was hailed by the government as the important chief in the northern Cape and who claimed that he did not recognise the BNC or its organ, the Bechuana Union Limited.

The very facts put forward by Matlaba to justify the fund-raising campaign caused its rejection by the government. Matlaba and Moshete were recognised by the government as separate chiefs of the Ratlou and Rapulana, respectively, in the ZAR, and had no jurisdiction over the Ratshidi. Any development that excluded the Ratshidi was declared invalid and was regarded as a ploy by the Ratlou Chief Moshete to impose his jurisdiction over the Ratshidi. Moreover, it was alleged that the Rapulana could not be trusted to collect any funds because they had previously proved unable to collect the litigation fund to pay legal costs to their attorney. The government was concerned that the Governor-General's Fund might even be transferred to the fund for the Rapulana legal costs. The government had also witnessed the Barolongs' failure to collect the litigation fund because of corruption and lack of financial records. It was also aware that Matlaba and Moshete were sued

³³ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, "Governor General's Fund", 21 November 1916.

by some of their followers for forcing them to pay towards the litigation fund.³⁴

The BNC made a breakthrough despite these hardships, because ultimately it received recognition from the government. The Inspector of Native Affairs, A.W. Rawlinson, granted them special permission to visit Barolong miners in the mine compounds in Krugersdorp and Randfontein without any hindrance from Whitehead.³⁵ The BNC advanced a persuasive argument and they wanted to contribute to the Governor-General's Fund unilaterally as the Barolong. Furthermore, their case was backed up by the 1917 court judgement that declared that the Rapulana were the winners in their dispute against the Ratshidi. The government disapproved of some of the actions taken by Montshiwa, who realised after the litigation that the government could benefit from what the Rapulana intended to do. The BNC was able to visit a number of mines, namely Robinson Deep, Randfontein and Witwatersrand Simmer Deep.³⁶

³⁴ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, "Barolong National Council: E.H. Sehemo, Whitehead, address St Michael's Church, Tlhakeng", Bechuanaland, 31 October 1916.

³⁵ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, Barolong National Council : a Copy of Special Pass for the party of Rev E .M. Sehemo, E. M. Matlaba "to visit the Compounds of the Krugersdorp and Randfontein D's for the purpose of seeing their people and obtaining contributions towards the GG's Fund" issued by A.W. Rawlison, Inspector of Natives, Krugersdorp, 10 May 1916.

³⁶ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, Barolong National Council : Rev E .M. Sehemo, E. M. Matlaba "to visit the Compounds for obtaining contributions towards the GG's Fund", 10 May 1916.

This was a major breakthrough for the BNC because it would be able to control the Barolong migrant workers who would in turn influence their families in the Molopo Reserve to learn about the BNC and to support it. The Barolong migrant workers paid less attention to whether they were Ratshidi or Rapulana because they simply wanted to earn money to sustain their families.³⁷

On 22 and 23 May 1918, a general meeting of the BNC was held at Khunwana. It was agreed that the annual meeting should be held at Lotlhakane, which was probably made to demonstrate that the BNC had access to all places, including Montshiwa's stronghold in the Molopo Reserve, which included Lotlhakane.³⁸ The objective of the meeting was to nominate new officials, read and approve the constitution and recognise delegates from Johannesburg. The use of Lotlhakane as a meeting place without the Ratshidi's intervention encouraged the organisation that the unity of the Barolong would succeed without the sanction of the Ratshidi.

It should be noted that the BNC was not a radical organisation. In its meeting on 25 and 27 June 1918, for example, the executive committee resolved that the BNC was

³⁷ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, Barolong National Council : Rev E .M. Sehemo, E. M. Matlaba "to visit the Compounds for obtaining contributions towards the GG's Fund", 10 May 1916.

³⁸ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, Barolong National Council : Rev E .M. Sehemo, E. M. Matlaba "to visit the Compounds for obtaining contributions towards the GG's Fund", 10 May 1916.

opposed to any general strike by the newly formed Industrial and Commercial Union because it would be detrimental to the economy. It believed that the proper manner of showing dissatisfaction would be to submit grievances in a constitutional manner to the government. The BNC resolved to enlist the services of various sections of the Barolong to help the government in the event of unrest.³⁹ This was a demonstration of the loyalty and apolitical attitude that dominated the organisation.

In 1918 chiefs and headmen the Barolong from all over the Union of South Africa assembled in Johannesburg to attend another meeting of the BNC. About fourteen chiefs and headmen attended. Their aim was to form a financing scheme for the Barolong "nation" in order to assist the people in disposing of their cattle and grain in the most profitable manner, as well as providing ploughs, harrows and other necessary farming implements at cost price.⁴⁰ The council intended to form branches throughout the Orange Free State and other districts where the Barolong were located. The Rev Sehemo asserted that:

We want to finance the nationour endeavour is to build it up intellectually, morally and educationally, so that we want not only to help our people to sell their produce and to provide agricultural machinery but also to build schools we have no political motive, we want simply to help our

³⁹ NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, Barolong National Council : Rev E .M. Sehemo, E. M. Matlaba "to visit the Compounds for obtaining contributions towards the GG's Fund", 10 May 1916.

⁴⁰ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Big Scheme for the Barolong", Johannesburg, 25 August 1918.

people to do their own business.⁴¹

THE SUCCESS OF THE BNC

The BNC managed to register itself as the first organisation of the Barolong in South Africa. This was achieved through the cooperation of the Rapulana and the Ratlou people who felt that unity among the Barolong could be achieved through negotiation and economic relations. It brought a new dimension of rural organisation which represented ordinary people with the intention of uniting all the Barolong. The nature of the Barolong response to colonial conquest changed from chief-driven resistance to one of more contemporary response led by the middle class. The organisation also succeeded in uniting the lower and upper middle classes in which Sehemo, superintendent of the African Catholic Church and other high profile men assembled policemen, teachers, carpenters, clerks among others, to champion the progress of the Barolong.

The BNC collected money for the Governor-General's Fund although they initially struggled with Whitehead on the Rand because he did not recognise E. M. Matlaba. Ultimately the contribution of the BNC was welcomed by the Mafikeng magistrate,⁴²

⁴¹ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Big Scheme for the Barolong", 25 August 1918.

⁴² NASA, Vol. 14, File No. 48, Barolong National Council : Rev E .M. Sehemo,

and the BNC also raised the political profile of Chief Moshete who was given the authority to hand over the fund to the magistrate on behalf of all the Barolong. This initiative portrayed the Barolong as united in supporting the British government and this was not normally the way Moshete was seen. The BNC in a way tried to repair the damage caused by the Rapulana and Ratlou in the late nineteenth century when they had supported the Boers against the British government during the South African War.

The Bechuana Union Limited succeeded in securing permission to collect money for the Governor-General's Fund. In its campaign the union influenced the Barolong to move within the perimeters that the BNC had circumscribed for them. The BNC's advocacy for "national" unity reduced the ethnic parochialism of the Ratshidi, Ratlou and Rapulana as disgruntled segments and regarded them just as the "Barolong".

The BNC's economic plan to help farmers was a positive step because the Barolong farmers were united. The BNC "collected national funds with which to buy stock, a farm and other landed property" to help poor farmers to grow.⁴³ This cooperation

E. M. Matlaba "to visit the Compounds for obtaining contributions towards the GG's Fund", 10 May 1916.

⁴³ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Big Scheme for the Barolong", 25 August 1918.

was aimed at assisting the poor farmers and integrating their efforts with those rich farmers to help one another with implements, for example.⁴⁴

THE SHORTCOMINGS OF THE BNC

The government's unwillingness to allow E.M. Matlaba to collect money for the Governor-General's Fund was perhaps not without foundation because the BNC needed money to uplift the living standards of the Barolong and it was impossible for them to hand over all the money to the government while they were suffering economically. The litigation costs had obviously crippled them financially and the government knew that; this was why it was reluctant to allow E. M. Matlaba to collect the contributions to the fund.

In October 1920 the BNC's financial wing, the Bechuana Union Limited, identified some discrepancies in the collection of the Governor-General's Fund and the Inspector of Native Affairs, Benoni, who had succeeded Rawlinson, was called in by the Union government to witness the investigations it instituted.⁴⁵ The Bechuana Union Limited asked Gabashane, E.M. Sehemo E.M. Matlaba and W.R. Matlaba to attend

⁴⁴ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Big Scheme for the Barolong", 25 August 1918.

⁴⁵ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Inspector Benoni asks S. Gabashane, E.M. Matlaba and E.M. Sehemo to attend meeting of the Bechuana Union Limited", Klerksdorp, 9 February 1920.

the meeting, produce their receipt books and the cash they had collected.⁴⁶ But those men refused to cooperate and intentionally evaded meetings of the Bechuana Union Limited because they had embezzled the money. On 3 February 1920 the Bechuana Union Limited wrote to the Director of Native Affairs Department detailing the above-named culprits. They were accused of failing to follow the rules for producing the cash they had collected and the receipts, as they had agreed they would do. They did not submit the subscription books and money to the Union as required.⁴⁷

The misappropriation of BNC money was illustrated by an incident involving E.M. Matlaba early in 1920.⁴⁸ He was urgently wanted by the Bechualand Union Limited and was eventually brought to the Marshall Square charge office in Bloemfontein by Constable Brimelow for trespassing. The chief was under the influence of liquor but was not charged and was allowed to leave. It was then discovered that Matlaba had misappropriated £1578. He had signed a receipt for this amount, but when interrogated, he denied it. It was assumed that the chief might have used the money he had collected for the Governor-General's Fund to buy liquor.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Inspector Benoni asks S. Gabashane, E.M. Matlaba and E.M. Sehemo to attend meeting", 9 February 1920.

⁴⁷ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Inspector Benoni asks S. Gabashane, E.M. Matlaba and E.M. Sehemo to attend meeting", 9 February 1920.

⁴⁸ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, Commander of Police, Johannesburg, 22 August 1920.

⁴⁹ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Commander of Police", Johannesburg, 22

Schemo had embezzled £78 which he had received on behalf of the Union and which he failed to account for. When he was elected as president people were jubilant because they regarded him as a man of unquestioned integrity. Not long afterwards, the funds under his responsibility could not be accounted for and he was reported to the government.⁵⁰ This was the end of Schemo's role in uniting the Barolong because his efforts were clearly geared to advancing his own enrichment. The four culprits were berated by the investigators from the government and charged with treating the council with contempt. The guilty men were forced to withdraw from the affairs of the BNC, although it is unclear whether they were prosecuted or not.

The BNC was an opportunity for the Barolong to come together in an organisation, to bury their differences and unite as individuals, families and clans sharing a common heritage. This was indeed the spirit of the SANNC. Prominent Barolong people like Sol. Plaatje were entrusted with the responsibility to unite the people of South Africa which included the Rapulana. Pixley Seme has this to say:

The demon of racialism, aberration of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, animosity that exists between the Zulus and the Tongas, between the Basotho and every other Africans must be buried and forgotten, it has shed among us

August 1918.

⁵⁰ NASA, Vol. 108, File No. 48, "Inspector Benoni asks S. Gabashane, E.M. Matlaba and E.M. Schemo to attend meeting", 9 February 1920.

sufficient blood! We are one people. These divisions, these jealousies, are the cause of all woes and of all our backwardness and ignorance today.⁵¹

The BNC failed to unite all the Barolong under the paramountcy of Moshete. The Ratshidi did not recognise Moshete as the paramount chief of all the Barolong. They challenged the existence of the BNC and its activities in Johannesburg and the Ratshidi were afraid that if the organisation was registered it could erase the reputation of the Ratshidi and their Chief Montshiwa because they were pivotal members of the SANNC. The BNC accentuated the hatred between the Ratshidi and Rapulana. Moreover, the BNC took sides and supported the Ratlou and Rapulana against the Ratshidi in their efforts to unite the Barolong.

The strength of the BNC rested on its ability to establish the first pan-Barolong organisation and it brought the Rapulana and the Ratlou together as one “nation”. It therefore laid the groundwork for Barolong ethnic nationalism. The BNC succeeded in uniting the Barolong petit bourgeois and the ordinary people. It attempted to solve the problems of the Barolong, but it was not given the opportunity by the Ratshidi, who did not want to be led by the Rapulana and the Ratlou. Then too, the BNC supported Moshete and regarded him as the paramount chief of all the Barolong. It tried to stop the Rapulana and the Ratshidi from taking their case

⁵¹ Karis and Carter, *From Protest*, p.72.

to the Supreme Court by suggesting it be taken to the council for arbitration, but it was clear from the criticism expressed by the Ratshidi that they would never accept the BNC's decision. The Rapulana who had endured the rule of John Montshiwa wanted nothing less than a court resolution of the dispute because they realised that he would not agree to any proposal that intended to curtail the Ratshidi's authority in Lotlhakane. It should be noted that in the period after the siege of Mafikeng the Ratshidi were ruled by acting chiefs, namely, Lekoko and John Montshiwa. Lekoko was removed because he "oppressed" the Rapulana and the Ratshidi and was replaced by John Montshiwa. Montshiwa who promised not to be harsh like his predecessor, maintained the *status quo* but was deposed because of his lack of cooperation with his counsellors and his activities in Lotlhakane that incurred financial loss for the Ratshidi. It was clear that Montshiwa's objectives were not geared to the well-being of the Ratshidi but for his personal satisfaction instead. Even in the case of the BNC, John Montshiwa wanted to secure his authority over this organisation.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

According to oral tradition the Batswana were at one time united under one king but fission has been the common feature of their history. This tendency to break up into smaller branches happened among all sections of the Batswana and this was a major weakness because they could not unite against outside forces. The Barolong were no exception to this process of fission and they too were polarised into four sections when their king Tau died. They experienced internal conflict within these branches which subdivided them further as in case of the Ratlou who had many branches, each one being independent from another. But during the *difaqane* in the 1820s and 1830s the Ratlou, Seleka and Ratshidi were superficially united in Phitshane and fled to Khunwana to escape the Batlokwa attacks.

The struggle for power was also an integral part of Batswana history and is even today. This internal dissent had resurfaced each time the chief died and an acting chief installed. When the legitimate heir had grown up the conflict usually began because the regent did not want to relinquish power to the rightful heir. This is the weakness of the Barolong and their vulnerability made them prone to anarchy, chaos and violence exacerbated by outsiders such as the Boers and the British.

This shows that the centralisation of the Barolong under one strong leader was not viable. The unfeasibility of the united Barolong was realised by the British and Boers but they nevertheless were desperate to impose paramountcy among the Ratshidi and Ratlou.

From 1805 to 1846 there was no conflict among the Ratlou, Ratshidi and Rapulana before the Boers came to the highveld.¹ These communities always alerted one another in the event of impending outside attacks by the Batlokwa and Amandebele. They would prepare themselves and unite in order to flee. They did not fight on their own against any force. Since the death of Tau the Barolong groups did not launch attacks on any group but masterminded the tactics of flight from danger. The branches of the Barolong experienced internal struggle for chieftainship within but they related and coexisted peacefully with one another. Also Tawana, the chief of the Ratshidi at that time married a Rapulana Mosele Molekane who gave birth to Molema.² This was evidence of some form of unity and co-existence between the Ratshidi and the Rapulana. Moreover, when the Rapulana were brought to Bodibe by the Boers, Chief Montshiwa who succeeded Tawana allowed Mosikare, Matlaba's brother, to settle at Lotlhakane in 1875. From the time of the Ratshidi-Ratlou skirmishes, which happened after the death

¹ A979, Ad6.1, Molema-Plaatje Papers, "The Barolong History", p.5.

² Monye and Molema, interview, Ratshidi *Kgotla*, Stad, 30 September 2002.

of king Ratlou in 1805, the two sections did not fight against each other until the Boers came to the highveld and influenced Matlaba and Moshete against his brother Montshiwa to fight for the paramountcy.

After the Boers had defeated Mzilikazi with Barolong assistance, they took the land of the Barolong as payment for driving out the Amandebele on their behalf. Although Mzilikazi attacked the Barolong in Khunwana, they managed to protect some cattle to sustain their lives. However, after the Boers, had defeated Mzilikazi, the Amandebele came during the night and took all their cattle and were practically without food. This episode showed that Mzilikazi was a threat to both the Boers and the Barolong and that both groups contributed to his defeat. Without the provision of food and regiments by the Barolong it would have been extremely difficult for the Boers to defeat Mzilikazi. What was common between the Boers and the Barolong was that neither group could alone defeat Mzilikazi and it was therefore ludicrous for the Boers to think that they could protect the Barolong when they failed to protect themselves and their cattle from Mzilikazi. The Boers did not fight Montshiwa alone but they formed a coalition with Moshete and Matlaba to attack the Ratshidi. The Boers wanted the Barolong's land. Their land grabbing campaign was boosted by the Sand River Convention of 1852 which officially allowed the Boers to occupy Barolong land without British intervention. After the death of king Ratlou the Barolong saw themselves as

independent chiefdoms. From 1877 to 1850 the Barolong did not want to become one “nation” under one chief. They accepted their divided entities and lived independently. However, in 1850 the Boers taught Moshete that he was the paramount chief of the Barolong because he was a descendant of Ratlou and offered to help him to claim this position. Moshete agreed and launched devastating attacks against the Ratshidi. Therefore, the Boers were to some extent responsible for the Ratshidi-Rapulana conflict.

The Boer encroachment did not go unchallenged. Montshiwa stood firm against the expropriation of land by the Boers. He tried to unite Matlaba and Moshete against the Boers but failed because they were already won over by the Boers. Montshiwa wanted to become the paramount chief of the Barolong but his ambition was thwarted by the Boers who supported Moshete for the paramountcy instead. This became a source of hostility because the Ratlou were sub-divided into Khunwana, Ganyesa, Setlagole, Phitshane and Madibogo and were ruled by independent chiefs. Therefore, Moshete was not the paramount chief of all the Ratlou but only a section which stayed in Khunwana. The Boers knew that they would not succeed but decided to enforce the paramountcy because it was crucial factor in their plan to seize Barolong land. The Boers interfered in the logistics of the Barolong paramountcy and its oral tradition. The Barolong failed to unite themselves into one nation and it was certainly impossible for the outsiders

to do so on their behalf. The Boer state of Goshen disappeared when Warren's forces drove the Boers into the ZAR and their land grabbing campaign in the Molopo region was a fiasco. They left without land and diamonds but took as much cattle as they could.

The British also contributed to the struggle for paramountcy. In 1852 they allowed the Boers to occupy the land of the Barolong and by 1884 realised that they had made a mistake and decided to "protect" the Barolong because they wanted to safeguard the strategic "Road to the north". The establishment of British Bechuanaland led to the creation the Molopo Reserve which ended Boer encroachment once and for all. The British did not have any interest in protecting the Barolong until diamonds were discovered. It is clear, Therefore, that the British motive behind the establishment of British Bechuanaland was to safeguard their economic interests. They promoted Montshiwa to become the paramount chief and granted him jurisdiction over the Rapulana in Lotlhakane and the Ratlou in Phitshane and Setlagole Reserve. If the British were interested in "peace" and "protection" they would have reversed the complication caused by the Boers by resettling the Rapulana in Lotlhakane under Matlaba in Bodibe and the Ratlou in Phitshane and Molopo Reserve under Moshete in Khunwana. Instead, the British established boundaries that excluded Matlaba and Moshete from their people in Molopo Reserve. They enforced the Ratshidi's authority in Molopo

Reserve on the Ratlou and Rapulana and reinforced the ethnic conflict encouraged earlier by the Boers. After the siege conflict was intensified in Lotlhakane and the British helped to fuel it by imprisoning Abram Motuba, who subsequently died. The Barolong did not have the strength to escape these encroachments by the Boers and the British. They succumbed to these forces of disunity and engaged themselves in a series of conflicts and disputes for land, particularly in Lotlhakane.

The siege of Mafikeng saw a continuation of the Ratshidi and Rapulana conflict which began in 1881. Between 1896 to 1898 a number of events took place which caused the Rapulana and Ratshidi to fight each other.³ The land commission instituted by the British government resolved that Lotlhakane should be ruled by Abram Motuba. Wessel Montshiwa reacted by taking the land of Abram Motuba and other Rapulana men from Lotlhakane and ordered those who did not obey him to leave.⁴ The relation between the Rapulana and Ratshidi was tense in Lotlhakane and when the siege erupted the two sides were ready to attack each other. The Rapulana were in a better position than the Ratshidi to settle old scores because they were outside the Stad. Immediately the siege ended the Ratshidi ousted Abram Motuba and installed Paul Montshiwa the headman of Lotlhakane as

³ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Land Commission", c/4889, Mafikeng, 1896.

⁴ NASA, Vol. 12, File No. 718, "Land Commission", c/4889, 1896.

an act of revenge against the so-called Rapulana's ruthlessness during the siege. The Ratshidi acted in vengeance against the Rapulana, and planned to subjugate them in Lotlhakane. The siege therefore, helped to propel the Ratshidi-Rapulana conflict from 1900 to 1920.

While the Boers and the British were in the process of reconciliation in 1910 the Rapulana and the Ratshidi fought against each other. Both groups were disarmed after the siege because the British and the Boers thought that they would be dangerous to the white people in South Africa. Unlike the Ratshidi and the Rapulana, the Boers and the British were not disarmed, but were given land and money to help them recover. The British relegated the Barolong effort during the siege to a futile exercise by not compensating them as it has done for the Boers. Their role was thus a forgotten episode until highlighted in recent years.

The British reinforced this situation by granting Montshiwa jurisdiction over the Rapulana in Lotlhakane. The Boers and the British simply withdrew from the affairs of the Barolong leaving the issue of Lotlhakane unresolved. The Barolong did not have the ability to rise above their ethnic parochialism and their chiefs failed to cooperate despite the absence of the whites. However, since the withdrawal of the British and Boers in 1900 from the affairs of the Barolong, the Rapulana and Ratlou seldom engaged in any open conflict as they had done in

1881 to 1884 and from 1899 to 1900. Therefore the presence of the Boers and British exacerbated conflict within the Barolong because the whites were unconcerned about peace among the Barolong their primary aim was to take the Barolong land. The British managed to annex the diamondiferous land was traditionally owned by the Barolong. They also prevented the Boers from occupying Mafikeng district and in so doing protect the road to the north. They failed in the peace enforcement role that they explicit claimed they had performed among the Barolong.

After the Court decision in favour of the Rapulana, the two antagonists, that is, Rapulana and Ratshidi were faced with litigation costs to pay to the court and the attorneys. The enforcement of the costs upon the Ratshidi, Ratlou and Rapulana caused these independent chiefdoms to crumble. The people were poor and complained that when the chiefs involved themselves in conflicts and litigations, they were not consulted and they therefore sued the chiefs. Matlaba and Moshete incorporated the litigation costs brought against them by their people into the Rapulana litigation fund. The Rapulana's claim to Lotlhakane was clearly valid because they were the first group to occupy the place in c.1777, while the Ratshidi only arrived there in 1846. Both the chiefs of these communities were buried here and this was a special place for the Ratshidi and the Rapulana alike. The problem was, who was in control, Motuba or Paul Montshiwa. The Rapulana fought

persistently and untiringly and ultimately won the land and freedom to secede from the jurisdiction of the Ratshidi. Although the court brought the conflict to an end the animosities between the Ratshidi and the Rapulana continued.

This study has made a close examination of the BNC, one of the rural, African organisations, most neglected by historians. Although this body did not claim to be a political organisation it had a hidden political agenda, namely to install Moshete as a paramount chief of the Barolong. Unlike the so-called Boer and British peace missions, this was a Barolong initiative to unite themselves into a “nation” under one paramount chief. This organisation was not supported by Montshiwa because he did not want to accept Moshete’s paramountcy. The organisation did manage to unite the Ratlou, Rapulana and Ratshidi in the mines where they all contributed to the Governor General’s Fund. However, it failed to unite the Barolong under one paramount chief and the various Barolong groups continued to be independent from one another a situation which still exists today. It was also unsuccessful in improving the economic lives of the Barolong.

The BNC invited John Montshiwa and Sol. Plaatje to join them but they refused because they were members of the SANNC and could not allow themselves to be led by the Rapulana. Threatened by the Ethiopian BNC leader Sehemo, Montshiwa repudiated and discouraged the Rapulana and Ratlou from joining the

organisation because he had always regarded the Ratshidi as the representative of all the Barolong. Montshiwa realised that the Ratshidi domination of the Barolong ethnic political culture was about to end with the advent of the BNC. This was an opportunity which Plaatje could have used to unite his own Barolong people rather than other ethnic groups in South Africa. Plaatje did not follow the example of John Dube, his leader in the SANNC, who was instrumental in enhancing Zulu nationalism.⁵ He failed to establish ethnic solidarity as an essential element of national unity. African nationalism was doomed to fail until ethnic nationalism was broken down because ethnic cleavage undermined national unity in both South Africa and Africa during the period that preceded decolonisation. The BNC knew that the Ratshidi, Ratlou and the Rapulana shared the same language, culture and history and could trace their lineage from a common ancestor, Morolong. But the BNC did not concentrate on those characteristics that bound them together. Instead they focussed on the question of chiefly paramountcy and this separated them and was the main reason for its failure.

In 1852 Molema Tawana, who became Montshiwa's advisor became an archetype of the christianisation and education of the Barolong. He created chapels in which the Barolong learned to read and write. He manage to convince Chief Montshiwa

⁵ Cope, *To Bind the Nations*.

of the importance of Christianity and education in improving the living standard of the Barolong. Molema's children became the prototypes of enlightenment among the Barolong because they educated the Barolong and entrenched the legacy of their father. However, this development did not filter through to other sections of the Barolong and it caused division because the Ratlou and the Rapulana associated education with the Ratshidi. The Ratlou and Rapulana claimed that the Ratshidi wanted to subdue them because they were less educated which made them feel threatened.⁶ Despite the fact that Molema's mother Mosele Molekane was a Rapulana, the Molema family had not played a role in mediating between the Rapulana and Ratshidi conflict but had supported the paramountcy of Montshiwa. The educated middle class reinforced the ethnic parochialism among the Barolong. For example, the Barolong had two powerful people on the opposing sides. Sol Plaatje was on the side of the Ratshidi and supported Montshiwa's chiefly paramountcy in spite of his national career as the Secretary of the SANNC. He did not advance unity but supported John Montshiwa when he undermined the Rapulana in Lotlhakane. Schemo, was the other strong man on the side of the Rapulana and Ratlou. He was influential because he was a superintendent of the Independent African Catholic church. He advanced unity among all the Barolong but promoted the idea of Moshete as the paramount chief of all the Barolong and

⁶ Mothibi, interview, Rapulana *Kgotla* , 28 February 2002.

he was unsuccessful in mobilising elites which could not work towards solidarity outside the jurisdiction of chieftainship. These two leaders did not meet to negotiate ties among the Barolong. They made no commitment to promote the authority of their chiefs above nation building. They thus contributed to intra-Barolong ethnicity and political culture by ensuring that ethnic ties fostered a permanent dichotomy among the Barolong.

This research contributes to the history of the Batswana because it is a social study which identifies the rural political dynamics of the Rapulana and Ratlou, their struggle for land, jurisdiction and paramountcy. It explicates interaction between chiefs, headmen, counsellors and community through the *Kgotla*. The study also reveals some of the traditional practices of the Barolong which were unique, like the *pasha* tradition discussed above. This will enhance our understanding of the present-day Batswana situation in which so many independent chiefdoms still exist because of the fission which has characterised Batswana history and Barolong history since at the time of Tau.

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