

# Fragment of an Oral History of Opposition to the 1986 Paramilitary Overthrow of Chief Leabua Jonathan's Government

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## Abstract

In January 1986, the Lesotho Paramilitary Force (LPF) overthrew the Basotho National Party (BNP) government of Chief Leabua Jonathan. In the aftermath of the coup d'état, Major General Justin Metsing Lekhanya led a military government with a civilian cabinet made up of individuals, some of whom, like Major General Lekhanya himself, were members of the BNP. The coup followed years of (a) general fear in the country as a result of acts of political violence and brutality perpetrated by the BNP Youth League against individuals and groups considered as anti-BNP government; and (b) the BNP government's vociferous support of the struggle against apartheid in regional and international forums. Against that background, the overthrow of Chief Jonathan's government was welcomed on the one hand by the people of Lesotho—happy to be rid of the BNP Youth League terror—and on the other hand by the South African government—happy to be rid of a fierce critic, Chief Jonathan, whose small country greatly depended on the South African economy. Indeed, the South African government was known to have encouraged the overthrow of Chief Jonathan's government. This article presents oral testimonies about the events around, and opposition to, the coup. In this way, it seeks to draw attention to the experiences of those who could be said to have failed, as opposed to the stories of the victors, which tended to dominate writings on the 1986 coup.

**Keywords:** oral history methodology; military coup; resistance to apartheid; Lesotho-South Africa relations; ANC in Lesotho

## Introduction

The Basotho National Party (BNP) government was inaugurated in 1965, following the party's victory in the general elections in April that year. The BNP's leader, Chief Leabua



Jonathan, himself had lost in his home district, Leribe, in the constituency of Manka. For a while, his deputy, Chief Sekhonyana 'Maseribane, assumed premiership, while the party made arrangements for Chief Jonathan to stand for a by-election in the safe constituency of Mpharane in the Mohale's Hoek district.

Within 18 months, on October 4, 1966, Lesotho became an independent country, by which time Chief Jonathan was prime minister.

For five years after the 1965 elections, Chief Jonathan's government experienced a number of difficult political hurdles. Perhaps the most important of these was the fact that the BNP's majority in parliament was slender, and the survival of the BNP government depended largely on the political craftiness of the party's leaders. In the first post-independence elections in January 1970, Chief Jonathan annulled the election results, suspended the Constitution and ruled the country in a civilian dictatorship. This lasted for 16 years until the BNP government was overthrown in January 1986 by a group that consisted of disgruntled BNP leaders, the king, his civilian supporters from among chiefs, middle-class non-chief supporters, and the king's relatives in the country's paramilitary. The commander of the paramilitary, Major General Justin Metsing Lekhanya, became head of the post-coup d'état government.

This article does not pretend to be a treatise on the evolution of Chief Jonathan's government's relations with apartheid South Africa between 1965 and 1986. Because the article is about the 1986 coup d'état, it tends to focus on events and developments around that time. It is acknowledged that, in the time leading up to independence, and for some years after, Chief Jonathan was described as being pro-apartheid South Africa, based on some of the things he said and did during that period. The nature of the relationship between Chief Jonathan's government and apartheid South Africa at this time will be referred to, where necessary.

Also, the article is not about how Chief Jonathan's dictatorship played itself out in society and politics in Lesotho. Given the nature of the topic, a foray into a discussion of that subject would not only be largely irrelevant but it would unnecessarily lengthen this article.

## **This Study**

This article is built around the oral testimonies of three individuals who were public servants during Chief Jonathan's regime. One was a soldier, and the other two were high-ranking civil servants. It also quotes a significant number of oral testimonies that were collected in 2004 during interviews with two former leaders of BNP youth organisations.

Of the many things that can be said about the manner in which the events of January 1986 in Lesotho have been written about, this article is interested in two. Firstly, writings and reports about the military coup in Lesotho tended to be dominated by a focus on the "coup-as-it-succeeded." In other words, the success of the coup was reported on, and the stories,

experiences and interpretations of the coup-makers—the victors—dominated reports. This had two consequences: it created the impression that the coup was not opposed; and it meant that, where the presence of opposition to the coup was admitted, little was said about it (beyond brief references), giving the impression that opposition to the coup represented minor glitches to an otherwise successful coup. In this way, not only has opposition-to-the-coup, as an independent subject, been neglected but so have experiences and interpretations of those who opposed the coup.

Secondly, the coup was largely presented as an event whose causes could be traced back to the period between the late 1970s and early 1980s. A major shortcoming of this presentation is that it suggests that Chief Jonathan's regime dramatically metamorphosed from a regime that was acceptable (1965 to mid-1970s) to an unacceptable regime that had to be overthrown by the mid-1980s. To an extent, that may have been so only where South Africa—which encouraged and played a critical role in precipitating the 1986 coup—was concerned.

According to one of the people interviewed for this study, while some of the changes that took place in society and politics between independence in 1966 and 1986 are helpful in explaining the coup, there are also constants that lie at the heart of the causes of the coup. It was implied that, as early as the period during which Lesotho's independence was negotiated, a continual struggle existed between Chief Jonathan on the one hand, and his opponents on the other. Some of these opponents became important players in the planning and execution of the coup.

### **An Outline of the Basotho National Party Government, 1970–1986**

The first post-independence elections were held in January 1970. Given the largely liberal political atmosphere which had prevailed under BNP rule, campaigning was generally free, as was voting on polling days. Chief Jonathan himself went on air a day after the elections, announcing that the elections had passed off peacefully.

However, when it appeared from the announcement of the election results that the BNP had lost, Chief Jonathan suddenly changed his tune. In another broadcast he claimed that the elections had been marred by violence perpetrated by members of opposition parties. He seized power, suspended the Constitution, declared a state of emergency, and arrested leaders of opposition parties.

Consequent upon this unconstitutional seizure of power, Lesotho joined a list of sub-Saharan countries that had become independent during the 1960s and that fell under dictatorial rule after the first post-independence elections. The majority of these were civilian dictatorships. Of the countries in the Southern African region that had become independent in the 1960s, only Botswana continued on a path that was generally regarded as democratic.

Chief Jonathan's justification of his seizure of power in 1970 followed along the lines of other unconstitutional seizures of power on the continent. As those who had seized power elsewhere on the continent had explained their action, Chief Jonathan decried the alien system of rule—liberal democracy and multi-party politics—that had been adopted at independence, and blamed it for sowing divisions among Basotho. The government he established after the coup, he said, would work to produce a dispensation that would be suited to Basotho and would promote national unity (Khaketla 1972).<sup>1</sup> However, 16 years into its rule, the regime had achieved little national unity. Indeed, the ruling party itself had become divided because of policies Chief Jonathan adopted from the 1970s.

By the 1980s, Chief Jonathan's government was faced with a number of old and new political challenges. On the domestic front, tensions arising from poor relations between king Moshoeshe II and Chief Jonathan continued to simmer. The nature of their relationship came to the fore during negotiations for Lesotho's independence, when the king fought for a post-colonial, constitutional dispensation that gave him executive power (Khaketla 1972, 208).<sup>2</sup> The move was successfully opposed by Chief Jonathan and leaders of the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP). Arising from these frosty relations with Chief Jonathan, the king engaged, alone, or in cahoots with leaders of opposition parties, in political activity that destabilised, or had the potential to destabilise, Chief Jonathan's government. Crucially, as a result of a long history that began when Moshoeshe I's sons joined the colonial police force, and continued throughout colonial and post-colonial periods, many in higher echelons of the paramilitary and the police were descendants of Letsie and Lerotholi.<sup>3</sup> This gave the king significant support in the police and paramilitary, including support of relatives in senior echelons of the two forces.

In a programme that had intensified after Chief Jonathan's seizure of power in 1970, the lines between party and state had become increasingly blurred by the early 1980s. Evidence of this included the fact that the Lesotho Youth Service (LYS), established in 1971 along lines of Dr Kamuzu Banda's Young Pioneers, had become a source of recruits into Lesotho's paramilitary.<sup>4</sup> LYS was a publicly funded institution recruitment to which, according to a former director, favoured, almost exclusively, daughters and sons of

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1 Khaketla, B. M. 1972. *Lesotho 1970, an African Coup under the Microscope*. Los Angeles: University of California Press. See especially chapter iv.

2 Khaketla. 1972. *Lesotho 1970*: 208.

3 Moshoeshe I's sons, Nehemia and Tšekelo, were some of the first Basotho to join the Basutoland Mounted Police when it was formed in 1872. See Sandra Burman. 1976. *Justice of the Queen's Government, the Cape's Administration of Basutoland, 1871–1884*: 51. Leiden: Afrika Studiecentrum, Cambridge: African Studies Centre. Quoting *Annual Report of Governor's Agent, Basutoland, 1873*. Any cursory examination of names of senior officers in the police and the paramilitary, at any point in colonial and for much of the post-colonial eras, will reveal a preponderance of men with the surnames "Letsie" and "Lerotholi" of senior chiefs.

4 PLM, Transcript of tape-recorded interview, January 15, 2004: 9. See also ABS, Transcript of tape-recorded interview, January 12, 2004: 12.

members of the BNP.<sup>5</sup> To the annoyance of some in the paramilitary these youths had assumed roles in state functions by 1984, some of which were set aside to be performed by the paramilitary. The humiliation that members of the paramilitary experienced as a result of this development was not limited only to institutional matters but it could also be personal; for example, when, according to a former director, members of the LYS threatened to assault Colonel Thaabe Lestie in 1984:

[I]t is one of the things [Thaabe Letsie] does not forget. He says they got hold of him *literally for four hours*. They even threatened to assault him. They knew who he was. *So*, these were some of the things that made soldiers aggrieved.<sup>6</sup>

In international relations, by the late 1970s, Chief Jonathan had abandoned his pro-South Africa posture of the 1960s, and adopted an anti-apartheid stance that was characterised by granting political asylum to liberation movements' members fleeing South Africa, and condemnation of apartheid at international forums. In what one interviewee considered a counter to the threat posed by South Africa in its response to Chief Jonathan's refusal to abandon the stance, Chief Jonathan established relations with eastern bloc countries, further increasing tension between the two governments. Significantly, establishment of relations with eastern bloc countries also alienated some within the ranks of the BNP, and thereby divided the party. In this way, to opponents of the BNP government outside the BNP—South African government, the king and his supporters within the army—were added groups and individuals, from within the party and government, who had become opponents of policies of their party and government. Some of these joined in activities aimed at overthrowing the government.

In relations with South Africa, negotiations over Lesotho's highlands water were recording little progress, and the South African government regarded Chief Jonathan as a stumbling block in this matter, as well as in signing a security agreement similar to the one Mozambique had signed in 1984.

It is important to indicate that, as will become apparent in oral testimonies presented below, in the eyes of BNP leaders—in particular, Chief Jonathan—the hurdles the government faced at this time and in later years, were part of a big plot designed by white settlers and colonisers to subjugate Lesotho; and those involved in mounting and manning the hurdles were considered as working in the interests of white settlers.

## **Oral Evidence: Methods and Methodology**

Of the three individuals who were interviewed for this study, one was quite open and had no problem talking about and answering questions on events that took place before, during and immediately after the coup. This interview was tape-recorded. The second individual

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5 ABS, Transcript of tape-recorded interview, January 12, 2004: 7.

6 ABS, Transcript of tape-recorded interview, January 12, 2004: 17.

was more circumspect. Although quite willing to talk, he/she warned that some of the things involved in the information being sought were still “alive” and could not be talked about without a lot of care, as some of the individuals involved were “important people.” I was asked to take notes, instead of the interview being tape-recorded. Requests and arrangements for an interview with the third interviewee were handled by the second interviewee, a friend. In conversation to secure an interview for me, the third interviewee was asked to “speak about that which you feel you can.” A decision was made not to tape-record the interview but to take notes instead.

The identities of the three individuals interviewed for this study have been concealed. Not even the names of the offices that the two high-ranking officials occupied can be mentioned here. Were that done, anyone knowledgeable about office-holders in Chief Jonathan’s government would easily identify this study’s interviewees. Below, texts of quotations from interviews are identified by the dates on which the interviews took place. Quotations from the oral testimonies of the two former BNP youth leaders are identified with the letters ABS and PLM.

This research is an attempt to present views and experiences of those who opposed the 1986 coup and whose voices are absent in published scholarly accounts of this coup, which tended to be dominated by voices and experiences of the coup-makers.<sup>7</sup> As far as possible, the collection of the oral information presented here was not informed by a need to confirm or dispute documentary and oral information in existing accounts of the coup. Instead, this research proceeded from the premise that voices, views and experiences of those who *opposed* the coup remain unrepresented in accounts of the 1986 coup; the research was an attempt to address this. Consequently, this article should be seen as a presentation of views, interpretations and experiences of *the other side*—the side whose mission did not succeed. No attempt has been made to test the veracity of the testimonies against information contained in documentary sources, or vice versa, neither has there been any attempt to “reconcile” information obtained from interviewees with these opponents of the coup, where such information seemed to conflict. Each of the interviewees was allowed to relate her or his experiences, and to present her or his views about opposition to the coup.

As all those who work with oral history and personal testimonies know, we depend a great deal on people’s willingness to give their time, and to share their experiences with us. In some cases, we interview the kind of individuals whose testimonies we can challenge and question freely, without fear of jeopardising their cooperation. In other cases, our ability to challenge and question what we are told, without compromising interviewees’ cooperation,

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<sup>7</sup> The fullest scholarly account of the 1986 coup available is that of L. B. B. J. Machobane’s *King’s Knights: Military Governance in the Kingdom of Lesotho, 1986–1993*, published in 2001 by the Institute of Southern African Studies, Roma, Lesotho. The book is, in large part, a piece of oral history, and draws significantly on material from the author’s interviews with senior army officers who planned and executed the 1986 coup.

can be severely limited. These are cases where we may *feel*, or there might be *evidence*, that challenging and questioning have to be done carefully, even extra-carefully.

Freedom to question interviewees' recollections and interpretations comes with strong relationships and trust. This is always difficult when interviews are focused on a specific topic, and last only a meeting or two. In these cases, we are left with little option but to treat these testimonies, and the views and interpretations contained in them, with a kind of respect that does not meet standards of scholarly rigour.

While presenting personal testimonies without adequate scholarly rigour raises intellectual and academic issues, such testimonies may still (hopefully) have limited merit of *quantitatively* adding to the historical record; quite where it fits in the intellectual activity of critical writing, interpreting and critical analysing history, is uncertain. It may be that, at this stage, we have to be content to create a record which those who will come later, or those who have no personal relations with interviewees, may feel less encumbered to authenticate, confirm, analyse, and interpret with little concerns about securing and maintaining cooperation with interviewees.

The former soldier interviewed for this study was a low-ranking officer in the Lesotho Paramilitary Force at the time of the coup. The other two were educated middle-class individuals who had risen to the highest possible positions in the civil service. All three were interested in the story of Chief Jonathan's regime, including how it was overthrown, being written. One of them indicated that he/she was already making the attempt. How these three individuals' social class position, political allegiances, and their interests to have the story written, might have influenced their testimonies, is not easy to determine. Also, the two civilians had read on Lesotho and Southern African history. One of them told me he/she had read a book on the 1986 coup, and was critical of the views and interpretations presented in the book. The other told me he/she was reading a recently published book on the history relations between Europeans and Africans on the Southern African Highveld. It is likely that some of the facts and interpretations of the interviewees have been influenced by the things they have read.

Indeed, consider a very striking similarity between Chief Jonathan's view—propounded by one interviewee (see below)—regarding Lesotho's centrality in resistance against apartheid, on the one hand, and, on the other, colonial justification for colonisation of Lesotho and Kwame Nkrumah's view of Lesotho's strategic importance to the liberation of South Africa. To persuade a reluctant British government to colonise Lesotho in the nineteenth century, colonial officials presented Lesotho as occupying a central place in "political agitation" among African societies in the region. They argued that the British colonisation of Basotho would "immensely strengthen" Britain, and put British government "in a position to dictate measures in all neighbouring" African communities (Theal 1964,

724).<sup>8</sup> Similarly, based on his consultations with BCP delegates at a conference in Ghana in the 1960s, Kwame Nkrumah is reported to have placed Lesotho at the centre of his strategies for the liberation of Africa and South Africa: discussions in “[h]is papers and books, through which he outlined the theory and practice of Africa’s liberation, came first to Lesotho from where they found their way into South Africa” (Mphanya 2010, 43).<sup>9</sup>

All having been said and done, the oral history accounts presented here are about events that took place over three decades ago. It is difficult to assess the extent to which they are narrations of facts about events as interviewees remember them, or interviewees’ interpretations of what they remember. About one thing we can be clear, however: these are accounts of individuals who wish to portray, in good light, and as sincerely as they can, the regime for which they worked, *its contribution to resistance against apartheid*, to which, in the view of their leader, Lesotho’s survival was inextricably bound.

In quotations from oral accounts that are presented below, *italicised* phrases were spoken in English during interviews, whereas unitalicised parts of quotations are translations from Sesotho.

### **BNP Government, 1966–1986: Self-Perception**

One of the ways in which to understand the background to the 1986 coup d’état is to examine the manner in which Chief Jonathan saw himself and his government. It is clear from the testimony of one of the people interviewed for this study that it is that self-perception which helped explain actions that Chief Jonathan’s government took, and the policies his government adopted—*some of which inspired the coup*.

Moshoeshe I’s wisdom, and his achievements, remained an important influence on what three of the political actors who fought against colonial rule over Basotho—king Moshoeshe II, Chief Jonathan, Ntsu Mokhehle—wished for independent Lesotho. More importantly, each of them portrayed himself, in deeds and words, as a great admirer of Moshoeshe I’s wisdom. Thus, during Chief Jonathan’s rule, most official and party writings about him, and writings by his supporters,<sup>10</sup> made the most of the fact that he was a direct descendant of Moshoeshe I. Both Chief Jonathan and Mokhehle are credited with

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8 Shepstone, Theophilus. 1866. “Letter to the Colonial Secretary, Natal.” In *Basutoland Records*, vol. 3, by George McCall Theal. 1964: 724. Cape Town: Struik.

9 Mphanya, Ntsukunyane. 2010. *My Life in the Basutoland Congress Party*: 43. Maseru: Motjoli Publishers.

10 See, for example, Sixishe, Tšepo Desmond. 1984. *But Give Him an Army Too*: Chapter 1, especially pages 4 and 6. Maseru: Mokorotlo Publications,.



publications, *Moshoeshoism*<sup>11</sup> and *Se-Moshoeshoe*<sup>12</sup> respectively, in which they sought to articulate Moshoeshoe I's philosophy.

For his part, from the time of negotiations of Lesotho's independence, king Moshoeshoe II wanted power to be vested in the person holding the position of "king" created by the independence constitution; this, he maintained, would bring things to what they were "in the days of our illustrious ancestor" (i.e. Moshoeshoe I).<sup>13</sup> In a speech he made in the Legislative Council in 1961, he pleaded with the Council to write a constitution that would give him power, and promised to rule as Moshoeshoe I did, but "adapting [Moshoeshoe I's] method of rule to modern conditions."<sup>14</sup>

In all this, it can be argued, all who negotiated Lesotho's independence wanted the way they ruled, or the way they wished to rule, to be seen as being founded on Moshoeshoe I's wisdom. In this way, they wanted their endeavours to be seen as a continuation of Moshoeshoe I's endeavours.

According to one of the interviewees, in the view of BNP leaders, at the centre of Moshoeshoe I's rule was the struggle he waged against many odds that stood in his way; and which he overcame, eventually. The main one of these was colonisers and white settlers who sought to conquer Basotho land and subjugate Basotho in the nineteenth century. In the interviewee's view, Moshoeshoe I's rule consisted of resistance to these forces. Chief Jonathan's government saw itself, pretty much, as continuing in that struggle against conquest by old and new enemies; and those who masterminded and staged the 1986 coup committed an act of "capitulation":

white colonialists and settlers have tried over and over and over again to conquer Lesotho, including in the nineteen hundreds when they ... attempted to annex Lesotho to South Africa, and they failed. [...] [White people] thought that [if they conquered Lesotho, they have the strategic advantage of having control of] all this part [of Southern Africa], all of it. [Basotho] are the only ones [who have not been subjugated]. [T]his last vestige of resistance (i.e. Lesotho), it had always been an impediment [to white control of the whole of this part of Southern Africa].<sup>15</sup>

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11 Jonathan, Leabua. 1976. *Moshoeshoism*. Moshoeshoe I Memorial Lecture, March 12, 1976. Maseru: Government Printer.

12 The full title of Mokhehle's book is *Moshoeshoe I, Profile: Se-Moshoeshoe*, published in 1976 in Maseru by Mmoho Publications.

13 It is debatable whether, in fact, Moshoeshoe I held, and exercised, power in the manner Moshoeshoe II wanted to, and wanted members of the Legislative Council to believe, in his rejection of being a constitutional monarch. Veteran politician, G. M. Kolisang, insisted that, in his understanding, the phrase "constitutional monarchy" best describes Moshoeshoe I's relationship with power. Notes on an interview with G. M. Kolisang, September 22, 2015.

14 Basutoland National Council, "Legislative Council Debates", Third Meeting, First Session of Legislative Council, September 11–15, 1961.

15 Tape-recorded interview, July 11, 2017.

Essentially, Chief Jonathan's resistance against white domination, in emulation of Moshoeshe I's resistance against conquest in the nineteenth century, informed his policies in dealing, in particular, with South Africa. He steadfastly stuck to them against significant pressure and advice from within his government and his party, and from South Africa. They were policies in opposition to which the coup against his government was planned.

Even though tensions between apartheid South Africa, on the one hand, and Chief Jonathan's regime, on the other, are dated to a period roughly between the late 1970s to mid-1980s, according to one interviewee, this is inaccurate. In her/his view, Chief Jonathan's resistance started where Moshoeshe I's ended, and ended at "capitulation," as the interviewee called the 1986 coup. In negotiations for independence, in King Moshoeshe II's opposition to Chief Jonathan's government, in the apartheid government's attempts to bully Chief Jonathan—in all that—the process to conquer Lesotho continued, and Chief Jonathan resisted:

So that *process* did not stop. It kept on going on but in *peaks and dips*, as it went on. Sometimes it would be *aspirated and* [at other times] *subdued* but it was still going on, that matter .... You understand, then. So, I start it way back; these matters even though it looks like [at times] they stopped, it was always going on.<sup>16</sup>

Similarly, it is implied that even Chief Jonathan's resistance did not stop, and, it could be argued, it was going on even at a time after independence when he was generally considered to maintain good relations with apartheid South Africa—as evidenced by the recruitment of white South Africans into Lesotho's civil service at the time; accepting food aid from South Africa; and agreeing to meet South Africa's Prime Minister, Hendrik Verwoerd—in defiance of the opinion of and the opposition by other African leaders and South African liberation movements.

## **What the Government Knew about the Coup D'état Plan**

Given that policies of Chief Jonathan's government were a source of dissatisfaction to a number of groups and individuals within and outside the country, the government expected that these groups engaged in activities aimed at removing the government or forcing change in government policies. Indeed, at the time, one of the interviewees for this study considered such activity inevitable. Thus, in the early 1980s, the interviewee had the following conversation with Major General Lekhanya:

I was actually saying to him directly, "It is apparent that *one possible solution* [to easing the pressure South Africa exerted on Lesotho] is that there should be a *coup*. And that can be carried out only by you, as Lekhanya. You would then have intervened ... [Y]ou may have to intervene and become the *shock absorber*, and prevent that there should not be an *eventuality* where the Boers conquer Lesotho; you will have to overthrow the government,

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16 Tape-recorded interview, July 11, 2017.

and intervene *as a buffer*. Now, I am asking as to, when that situation arrives, *how would you handle it?*”<sup>17</sup>

This was at a time when it seemed, to the interviewee,

that [things were] going in that direction [of the coup]. That is, *in short*, [when it seemed that] the Boers in collusion with ... er ... [BCP’s] LLA, were conquering—were overthrowing Lesotho government and conquering Lesotho.<sup>18</sup>

Actual activities of groups and individuals who sought to overthrow Chief Jonathan’s government or change his government’s policies became known to the government. Firstly, Chief Jonathan became aware that meetings were held at the palace, involving the king and his supporters among senior chief ranks, including relatives of the king within senior ranks of the army:

[In 19]79 there were meetings ... Chief Leabua had very good relations with Chief [David] Masupha (king Moshoeshe II’s younger brother) ... [Chief Jonathan] called [Masupha] son of Pulumo ... Now he joked with him, and said “The thing that you [and others] are planning in there [at the palace] ...” He could speak freely with [Masupha] because he regarded him as his child, and they were very fond of one another. And, *on the other hand*, [by saying this to Masupha] *he was sending a message* that “I can see what [the royal family and their supporters] are planning ... the thing that you are doing ...” [This was proof that Chief Jonathan] knew what was going on. I can give a number of *instances* [in which he spoke like that to Masupha and others]. *It was an open secret that* [the coup] was [being planned] *and was going to happen*.<sup>19</sup>

Secondly, the government and officials became aware that senior members of the LPF were entertained by South African Defence Force (SADF) officers in “hunting expeditions” organised by the SADF in South Africa:

South African army befriended senior officers of the LPF. A well-known strategy that was used was invitation of members of LPF by their South African counterparts to hunting expeditions in South Africa. These interactions between members of LPF and members of SADF were known to Chief Jonathan because one of the more loyal members of LPF had once reported to Chief Jonathan that one of his colleagues, who participated in hunting trips to South Africa, gave him a buck he had killed during one such hunting trip.<sup>20</sup>

“One of the more loyal members of the LPF” referred to above was probably Brigadier Matjota Ramotšekhoane, second-in-command to Lekhanya in the paramilitary force, and

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17 Tape-recorded interview, July 11, 2017.

18 Tape-recorded interview, July 11, 2017.

19 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

20 Notes on interview, June 19, 2017.

fervently loyal to Chief Jonathan. When Lekhanya found it difficult to bear South African pressure, he approached Ramotšekhoane with news of a coup plan. Without hesitation, Ramotšekhoane replied, flatly: “We cannot do that!”<sup>21</sup>

Thirdly, from within the government and the BNP, it came to light that Chief Retšelisitsoe Sekhonyana—Minister of Foreign Affairs and easily the most influential member of the BNP among individuals and internal groups opposed to Chief Jonathan’s policies—had completed an agreement with South Africa’s foreign affairs officials; all that remained to be done was obtain Chief Jonathan’s signature. In that agreement, Lesotho was agreeing to terms such as those Mozambique had agreed to in the Nkomati Accord of 1984:

In 1984, it became known that South Africa had written a Nkomati-type security agreement, and had worked with Lesotho’s Foreign Ministry in doing so. South African government informed Lesotho government that all arrangements had been made for the signing ceremony at Jan Smuts Airport, including overnight hotel accommodation for Chief Jonathan, if he wanted to spend a night in South Africa. Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time was Chief E. R. Sekhonyana. When this news reached Chief Jonathan, he asked to see Chief Sekhonyana. Chief Sekhonyana was nowhere to be found. Chief Jonathan was, instead, briefed by the Legal Department of Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>22</sup>

This exposed the fact that, without Chief Jonathan’s authorisation, Chief Sekhonyana was holding talks with South African government officials. As matters stood, secret talks with South Africa, kept away from Chief Jonathan, could not have been in support of the government.

The following year, 1985, Chief Sekhonyana showed a number of officials a copy of a speech—it was the same speech that Major General Lekhanya read when he announced the coup on January 20, 1986:

On the 15th of August 1985, Selala (Bereng Sekhonyana, Chief E. R. Sekhonyana’s brother) had come home from his posting as High Commissioner in Nairobi. We were at a party at Chief [E. R.] Sekhonyana’s house, and then [Chief E. R. Sekhonyana] called me and two others, and then, he opened a *briefcase* and he read the same statement that Lekhanya read on 20 January, 1986.<sup>23</sup>

Whatever purpose Chief Sekhonyana’s action was intended to serve, it made his audience aware that a plan to overthrow the government was in the offing.

## **Counterplans and Activity to Oppose the Coup**

Of plans to counter the activities of those who sought to overthrow Chief Jonathan’s government, or force a change of its policies, the clearest and simplest plan was with regard

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21 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

22 Notes on interview, June 19, 2017.

23 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

to external pressure from South Africa. On the one hand, Chief Jonathan's government made concessions on some of these policies, even though these were deemed insufficient by South Africa. Among such concessions were the "right noises" on refugees, and movement in negotiations on Lesotho's highlands water. Every now and then, the Lesotho government made public statements about refugees being obliged not to use Lesotho territory as a base for attacks against South Africa, and periodically asked refugees to find asylum in other countries.

Movement in negotiations on Lesotho's highlands water took place only after consultations with the ANC—an act that must have angered South Africa:

When [in 1984], in negotiations for Lesotho highlands water, it seemed that, now, it looks like *technically and otherwise*, agreement was close, that such a thing should be there, and World Bank will come in; we travelled with Chief Retšelisitsoe [Sekhonyana] ... carrying a letter to *deliver* to [Oliver] Tambo in Zambia .... We gave him a letter in which Chief Leabua was saying that "It seems like we might reach agreement with the Boers on the matter of highlands water. However, because *you are the future government* as the ANC, I am not able to finalise matters on these issues *without your consent*." That letter said that. Then, Tambo made *consultations* of his [structures] and they ended up agreeing that "It is okay, there is no matter, go ahead with what can be done at present because we are already on the way [to victory]. So, we cannot say [reaching agreement on] highlands water should wait for us."<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, however, the government rejected calls for the disestablishment of relations with eastern bloc countries, and refused to sign a Nkomati-type treaty. Indeed, to say that Lesotho was willing to compromise on some issues is not to suggest that it was willing to do so on all fronts. Chief Jonathan stuck to his guns on his refusal to endorse apartheid and oppose sanctions; on his verbal attacks against apartheid at international forums; and on establishment and maintenance of relations with socialist countries. At the height of South Africa's economic blockade on Lesotho, on being asked whether he would back down on granting refugees asylum and refusing to hand them over to the South African government, "Chief Jonathan replied: 'Never in my life. I would rather die'."<sup>25</sup>

As seen above, Chief Jonathan's view was that the enemy of his government was South Africa in its desire to kill all resistance against apartheid in the region; and Lesotho's conquest remained an unfinished assignment in a bid "to cover all southern Africa in South African colours." This being the view, Chief Jonathan's anti-coup strategy, according to one interviewee, was a lofty one, and involved the establishment of a network of relations with governments of countries such as Algeria, Cuba, the USSR, and others. The coup took place at a time when the pieces were beginning to fall into place:

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24 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

25 Cowell, Alan. 1986. "Military Coup Reported in Lesotho after Crisis." *New York Times*, January 20, 1986.

Now, [when the coup happened] ... *resistance* had been *consolidated*, and, if you recall, at the time of the *coup of [19]86*, it was the time when Cubans were causing problems to the Boers in Angola *and, in fact*, it was at a time that they were present in Lesotho, the Cubans. *And that was what angered the Boers even more ...* because they could see that the *machinations* of protecting Lesotho *were getting so consolidated*, it became difficult for them because they thought that [if they conquered Lesotho, they have the strategic advantage of having control of] all this part [of southern Africa], all of it. [Basotho] are the only ones [who have not been subjugated]. *But then this last vestige of resistance* (i.e. Lesotho), it had always been a devil. The Cubans arrive by this route; Algerians arrive by this route; they all do these things that angered and fought against this matter of *apartheid*.<sup>26</sup>

Like Mozambique,<sup>27</sup> Algeria had also provided training for a group of members of the paramilitary but it had gone farther than any of the other countries by sending an army general to study the Lesotho Liberation Army's (LLA's) movements. Thus, "after it became apparent [to Chief Jonathan's government] that this matter of LLA was not alone, [the matter] now had this *element* of the Boers," Algeria sent

one of the *generals* who was widely known, we came with him [to Lesotho], and got onto an aeroplane with him and Lekhanya. We had been asked to show him where the LLA was. We flew in a *helicopter* to go and show him where it (LLA) lived, the routes they used. We flew until we could see an area above Phofung, Qwa Qwa. We could see in Natal .... [We] show[ed] him where [LLA] routes were; the routes they took until they got to Liqhobong, and other places. [He was to see these things] so that he could see how Lesotho could be assisted to *resist and survive this aggression*.<sup>28</sup>

From testimonies of persons interviewed for this study, it remains unclear quite what plans Chief Jonathan's government devised to counter activities of those within the country who sought the overthrow of his government. What is clear is that groups and individuals known to be active in plans to overthrow the government remained in their positions. Thus, beyond Chief Jonathan's avuncular reprimands to Chief Masupha and others, government took no action against those who met at the palace to plan the coup. Despite his subversive activities that came to light against his party and the state, Chief Retšelisitsoe Sekhonyana retained his senior positions in cabinet and in the party. No action was taken against senior officers of the paramilitary who were known to take part in coup-planning meetings at the palace and SADF-sponsored hunting expeditions—these soldiers were allowed to remain in their positions in the paramilitary, even after they had led coup manoeuvres that failed or were aborted.<sup>29</sup>

It is observable that the BNP government invested very little or no effort in mobilising popular support for its brave and principled stance against apartheid South Africa. Instead

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26 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

27 Notes on interview, June 19, 2017.

28 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

29 Notes on interview, June 19, 2017. See also Machobane. 2001. *King's Knights*: 61–68.

of mass mobilisation of the population against machinations of apartheid South Africa to conquer Lesotho, much of the “sense of a plan” against the coup centred on the army, and aimed to counter activities of internal coup plotters. Thus, while it left known plotters in place, the government made efforts to bring, closest to itself, its known supporters, especially those within the paramilitary. It is likely that it was from among members of the paramilitary that a group was identified who received political education on

that thing that I explained to you—*this* dynamic which I explained to you very clearly, what was being resisted and how it was being resisted (i.e. resistance against white colonisers which began with Moshoeshe I, and continued under Chief Jonathan).<sup>30</sup>

At a date that is not yet clear, Chief Jonathan is said to have ordered “an immersion” of a group of LYS<sup>31</sup> members into the paramilitary; the group included one Sehlabo Sehlabo.<sup>32</sup> Among others, LYS trainees were made to sing, not party songs, but songs that praised Chief Jonathan and “elevated him as the one person who could take the country” out of all the problems that faced it.<sup>33</sup>

Sehlabo’s group from LYS was sent to Mozambique for training under his leadership. It is arguable that, together with sending some of the paramilitary for training in Algeria, these were attempts by government to create highly trained sections within the paramilitary, which would be loyal to the government and serve as a counter to forces within the paramilitary that were involved in plans to overthrow the government.

Sehlabo was fiercely loyal to Chief Jonathan; and, related or unrelated to this, he rose rapidly through the ranks. Chief Jonathan put him in charge of security of all installations around Maseru city. Whether in training he received, in his rise to the top, and in responsibilities he was given, he was being prepared for future leadership of the army to replace the coup plotters, is not clear from interviews. What is certain is that the paramilitary group he led came to be viewed by coup planners as a stumbling block to the success of their plan.<sup>34</sup> Thus, on January 17, 1986, Sehlabo’s men were attacked at Makoanyane Barracks by a main rump of the army, led by those who emerged as coup leaders, three days later.

Sections of the BNP Youth League who began to carry out functions of the paramilitary, in the period immediately preceding the coup, tended to be the most loyal to Chief Jonathan and the government. Significantly, this development followed after groups who remained loyal to Chief Jonathan, including sections of the Youth League, had expressed impatience with the paramilitary’s inability to defeat LLA decisively, accusing the paramilitary of dragging its feet, in line with its leaders’ involvement in coup plots. In response to that

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30 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

31 Recruitment of youths from LYS into the army was a common practice and this group was not the first.

32 Notes on interview, September 9, 2017.

33 Transcript of tape-recorded interview with ABS, February, 2004: 7–8.

34 Notes on interview, September 9, 2017.

accusation, paramilitary command had complained of inadequate resources and manpower. Participation of the Youth League in paramilitary security activities was seen as one answer.<sup>35</sup> Again, it may be that inclusion of loyal sections of the Youth League in paramilitary activity was part of a plan to counter the strength of the pro-coup element in the paramilitary.

### **Skirmish at Makoanyane Barracks**

The skirmish at Makoanyane Barracks on January 17, 1986 can be taken as one of the clearest indications that Chief Jonathan and those closest to him had built up, in the paramilitary, a counter to groups that wanted the overthrow of his government. The men who were attacked at Makoanyane Barracks were composed of some of the men from B and F Companies of the LPF. They were made up of individuals who had been marginalised after a dispute over pay. Perhaps as some way of resolving the impasse, they were organised into a distinct group, and put under command of Colonel Sehlabo who, himself, had fallen out with the command structure of the paramilitary, precisely on suspicions that Chief Jonathan was grooming him for the position of commander, bypassing his seniors. Sehlabo's group was the first to be issued with AK47s.

As the former member of this group said, given the loyalty of this group and their leader to Chief Jonathan, coup plotters knew that the coup would not succeed unless the group was disarmed. The skirmish took place, precisely in pursuit of that objective. For some reason, Sehlabo was not among the men at the time of the attack. He was arrested at the police headquarters during the course of that day. The skirmish took the whole day, and ended when coup-makers tricked Sehlabo's men into handing over their guns at the palace. After that, they were arrested, charged, and handed prison sentences of up to 10 years.<sup>36</sup>

### **The 1986 Military Coup D'état**

In December 1985, South Africa imposed an economic blockade on Lesotho as a way of punishing the Lesotho government for its insistence on harbouring ANC refugees and refusing to sign a security accord. In the middle of that blockade, and following a number of coup-like military manoeuvres led by, in particular, Colonel Sekhobe Letsie, on the morning of January 20, 1986, the head of LPF, Major General Justin Metsing Lekhanya, announced, on the government-owned Radio Lesotho, that the paramilitary had overthrown the government and had seized power. Thus, Chief Jonathan's 21-year rule came to an end. This made Lesotho one of the military dictatorships in sub-Saharan Africa, and the second in the Southern African region after Zaire.

Like Chief Jonathan, in 1970, and other coup-makers before him, Lekhanya blamed politics and political parties for Lesotho's woes and divisions within society. The "step" to

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<sup>35</sup> Notes on interview, June 19, 2017.

<sup>36</sup> This section is based on oral evidence of a former member of the paramilitary. Notes on interview, September 9, 2017.



overthrow Chief Jonathan, Lekhanya said, had “been taken to install peace and national reconciliation, which has been a problem of politicians in Lesotho,”<sup>37</sup> and “[the] Military intervened to restore sanity amidst the confusion that politicians had created.”<sup>38</sup> In an event to mark the first anniversary of the coup, he boasted that, instead of stoking tensions between South Africa and Lesotho, by hurling abuses over Radio Lesotho aimed at South Africa, as Chief Jonathan’s government had done, his government had moved to establish good neighbourly relations; in that way, he said, within a matter of months, his government had managed to break a thirty-year-old deadlock in negotiations on Lesotho’s highlands water.<sup>39</sup>

One of the interviewees for this study described the coup as “capitulation” because, up to 1986, the Basotho people had withstood pressure, from pre-colonial times, under Moshoeshoe I, right up to the post-independence era, under Chief Jonathan:

It was “capitulation” because all of the black nations in [different] parts [of Africa] ... were all conquered in the aggression of the European settlers. Basotho were never [conquered] ... that attempt by [Pik] Botha to persuade Lekhanya to see whether he could not emulate the situation in South Africa and see to it that the *military must call the shots* ... and [initially] Lekhanya was refusing, and pointed out that, in Lesotho, the *dispensation* we have *inherit[ed] from the Commonwealth, subjects the military [under] civilian [control]*; we cannot [overthrow a civilian government]. *It cannot happen; it cannot be accepted*. But things continued until matters arrived where, now, people *capitulated* ... Lekhanya and others agreed that it was better that this person, Leabua, should be overthrown.<sup>40</sup>

According to the interviewee, people who planned and staged the coup d’état had “capitulated” to the pressure South Africa exerted on the Lesotho government in South Africa’s interests, in this case, securing an agreement on the Lesotho Highlands Water Treaty:

Lekhanya and others agreed that it was better that this person, Leabua [Jonathan], should be overthrown *and pave way, give way to signature of the treaty of highlands water*.<sup>41</sup>

Given Chief Jonathan’s government’s view that it was ruling a country whose control white colonisers coveted, and given government’s perception of itself as protecting the country—*as Moshoeshoe I had done*—from white colonisers and their Basotho collaborators, Chief Jonathan was in no doubt that South Africa was behind the coup against his government. He told a journalist that it was the South African government that had “infiltrated all the echelons of administration in this country ... the chiefs, civil servants, security forces,

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37 Amnesty International. 1992. “Lesotho: Torture, Political Killings and Abuses against Trade Unionists.”: 2. AI Index: AFR 33/01/92, May.

38 Lekhanya, J. M. 1987. Speech delivered on Military Day: 2. Pitso Ground, Maseru, January 20, 1987.

39 Lekhanya, J. M. 1987. Speech delivered on Military Day: 6. Pitso Ground, Maseru, January 20, 1987.

40 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

41 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

people in the village, with the sole purpose of trying to get me out of power.” Accordingly, his reaction to the coup was to appeal to American and British governments for help,<sup>42</sup> unaware that the governments of both these countries “supported South Africa[’s] demands [on Chief Jonathan] for a non-aggression pact after Nkomati.”<sup>43</sup>

## **Consequences of the Coup: Rewards for South Africa, and the Fate of ANC Refugees**

Five soldiers died as a consequence of activity connected to the coup. All of them were killed on January 17, 1986 during the skirmish at Makoanyane Barracks between two groups of the paramilitary, one opposed to the coup, and the other in support of it. Further,

[s]enior army officers who opposed the military takeover were arrested and two [Brigadier Ramotšekhoane and Colonel Sehlabo]<sup>44</sup> died in custody. Soldiers were tried before a court martial without proper guarantees of a fair trial and sentenced to terms of imprisonment [months later]; [t]wo former ministers in the Leabua Jonathan government were abducted by soldiers and killed.<sup>45</sup>

South Africa did not benefit only from the fact that the military government moved quickly to reach agreement on Lesotho’s highlands water and to sign the treaty in October 1986, but the military government also moved to meet other demands that the South African government had made on Chief Jonathan’s government. The North Korean embassy and advisors were the first to go, followed immediately by closure of the USSR, Chinese and Cuban embassies. The Chinese embassy was replaced by the Taiwanese embassy.

Slow progress in negotiations on the signing of the Lesotho Highlands Water Treaty was one of the major points of tensions between South Africa and Lesotho. The matter was so important that some observers saw the coup in Lesotho in 1986 as an instance of “a water coup” engineered by water-thirsty South Africa. Essentially, this way of looking at the coup puts water at the forefront among causes behind the coup.<sup>46</sup> The publicity that the signing of the treaty in October 1986 received, added to factors that made the water issue seem to be the most important among issues whose resolution benefited directly from the overthrow of Chief Jonathan.

At the very least, the presence of South African refugees in Lesotho probably had an equal status to that of water for both the South African government, on the one hand, and South

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42 Cowell, A. 1986. “Military Coup Reported in Lesotho after Crisis.” *New York Times*, January 20, 1986.

43 Hanlon, Joseph. 1986. *Beggar Your Neighbours: Apartheid Power in Southern Africa*: 128. Pretoria: Catholic Institute for International Relations; Indiana: Indiana University Press; Oxford: James Currey.

44 An inquest ordered by the military government into the deaths of two men established that Ramotšekhoane had died of respiratory failure, and Sehlabo had died of burns. The magistrate who led the inquest recommended a further investigation to identify persons responsible. This was never done.

45 Amnesty International. 1992. “Lesotho: Torture, Political Killings and Abuses against Trade Unionists.”: 2. AI Index: AFR 33/01/92, May 1992.

46 <https://library.ecc-platform.org/conflicts/water-coup-lesotho>

Africa's liberation movement, on the other. How important the matter was to South Africa can, perhaps, be illustrated in two ways; first, by the fact that the South African military had launched at least two raids against South African refugees living in Lesotho; second, by the fact that, in retaliation to Lesotho providing sanctuary to South African refugees, the South African government had adopted a policy to support the BCP's LLA, in a strategy that suggested the logic of: stop harbouring my terrorists, and I'll stop harbouring yours.

Indeed, it is arguable that, to South Africa, the presence of refugees in Lesotho was more important than the water issue because, once in Lesotho, members of liberation movements assisted in different ways in the prosecution of the struggle. As Chief Jonathan saw it, the South African government had engineered a coup against his government "because of his refusal to accept ... Pretoria's demands that he hand over African National Congress activists." He pointed out that the question of refugees was so important to the South African government that no amount of pleasing South Africa would suffice, as long as such appeasement did not include the expulsion of ANC refugees from Lesotho: "They won't relax the situation unless [the Lesotho government] send the ANC refugees back to South Africa."<sup>47</sup>

Thus, in the new spirit of co-operation between coup-makers and the South African government, immediately after the coup, the Lesotho Police Headquarters became infested with senior officials of the South African Police, who gave orders to the Lesotho police:

While in police cells [with Charles Ngqakula, Desmond Tšepo Sixishe, Vincent Montši Makhele, and others] immediately after the coup, I witnessed a large number of very senior South African police personnel very busy at the Lesotho police headquarters. I surmised they must be discussing, with Lesotho police, names of ANC people to be arrested and forced out of the country. Lesotho police must have been receiving instructions from new rulers to co-operate [by carrying out South African police's orders].<sup>48</sup>

For its part, the ANC had become worried about its cadres in Lesotho, in the wake of the coup. According to one interviewee, the "embodiment" of the relationship between Lesotho and the ANC was "in two people, Tambo and Jonathan":

[T]his very important matter *ntate ... embodiment of the relationship—it was embodied in two people, namely, Tambo and Leabua ... Tambo and Leabua ... they had reached a meeting of minds that they would work in a similar manner (i.e. co-ordinate their actions).*<sup>49</sup>

Evidence of this must include consultations that Chief Jonathan conducted with Tambo when the signing of the highlands water agreement seemed imminent.

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47 Cowell, A. 1986. "Military Coup Reported in Lesotho after Crisis." *New York Times*, January 20, 1986.

48 Notes on interview, June 19, 2017.

49 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

For Chief Jonathan, it was Oliver Tambo who had opened doors and made it possible for him—leader of a small and insignificant country—to meet leaders of superpowers, China and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: “Tambo opened avenues so that he [Chief Jonathan] was able to arrive there (i.e. where he was able to meet leaders of China and USSR).”<sup>50</sup>

It followed, then, that, when Chief Jonathan was overthrown, the ANC lost an important ally in Lesotho:

It happened, then, [because] this big thing (i.e. relationship between Lesotho and the ANC) *was embodied in [these] two people*, you see, then ..., one could just say, *in hindsight ... [after the coup], institutionalization of that [relationship] was inadequate*.<sup>51</sup>

Accordingly, ANC leadership became concerned about the fate of the organisation’s members in Lesotho, and about the loss of benefits that its members’ ability to enter, and stay in, Lesotho afforded prosecution of the struggle in general.

To be sure, initially, Oliver Tambo did not lose hope completely: “Although ANC President deplored [the fact] that the movement had ‘lost a good friend in [Leabua] Jonathan’,” Tambo seems to have drawn a little comfort from the fact that some of the members of the post-coup cabinet were known to ANC leadership. Thus, he cautioned: “we know most of [the members of cabinet] well”; and: “[W]e have many friends there.” His biggest source of hope, however, was the fact that king Moshoeshoe II was one of the coup-makers, and was part of the regime—the king was known for his progressive views and *active* opposition to apartheid. In conversation with Swedish Prime Minister, Olof Palme, shortly after the coup, Tambo “expressed confidence in King Moshoeshoe [II], who he described as ‘a supporter of ANC’s Programme, the Freedom Charter’.”<sup>52</sup>

In the end, however, none of this came to much, and whatever discomforts king Moshoeshoe II might have harboured, the military government succumbed to South Africa’s pressure, and expelled South African refugees from Lesotho. Within days of the coup, negotiations began in Cape Town and Maseru between new Lesotho rulers, on the one hand, and South African officials, on the other; these were

intended to mend relations .... Agreement was reached between the delegates; and on 25 January, Pretoria decided to lift the border restrictions. On the same day, Radio [Lesotho]

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50 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

51 Tape-recorded interview, June 11, 2017.

52 Sellström, Tor. 1999. Sweden and National Liberation in Southern Africa: Solidarity and Assistance, 1970–1994: 663. Uppsala: Nordic Afrika Institute.

announced that the first group of 60 African National Congress (ANC) refugees to be airlifted out of Lesotho by the new military rulers, had left that morning.<sup>53</sup>

It was, perhaps, mainly because the eyes of the world watched how the regime would treat the refugees that they were not handed over to South Africa.

It is difficult to assess the extent to which the Lesotho military government's expulsion of ANC refugees undermined the liberation movement's resistance against, and delayed the eventual overthrow of, apartheid. At the time, a commentator observed that the coup did not solve South Africa's problem of ANC's presence and activity in Lesotho: "Trying to keep the ANC out of Lesotho is like trying to bail out a leaking boat—refugees will come in as fast as they are flown out, and this will provide a channel for the ANC."<sup>54</sup>

What is certain is that, in Lesotho, popular sympathy for the liberation movement's resistance against apartheid did not disappear with the overthrow of Chief Jonathan's government. Where necessary, the liberation movement continued to be able to count on material and other support of individuals and organisations in Lesotho in its resistance against apartheid. As one interviewee pointed out:

We must start by recognising that, even before the coup, although they were quite welcome in Lesotho, officially ANC refugees were not allowed to carry out activities against South Africa from Lesotho, but of course it was known in government circles that they were, and some in government actually assisted when asked to do so. What might have happened after the coup was that ANC activity from Lesotho became more covert. It is to be remembered that the military government was able to expel only those refugees whose names they were given by South African government. There were many more refugees who adopted Lesotho/Sesotho names not known to both the South African and military government. There were many refugees in Lesotho who were not known to the soldiers. I think some of these remained and continued their activity against South Africa, but did so more covertly.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this essay is to present views and experiences of three individuals, each of whom saw, understood, interpreted and experienced opposition to the 1986 coup in her/his own way. Thus, personal testimonies presented here cannot be taken as "representative" of all views, experiences and interpretations of opposition to the coup. Were a study that served such a purpose to be achieved, it would obviously involve interviews with a lot more than two middle-class individuals and one low-ranking paramilitary officer. The value of interpretations, views and experiences contained in testimonies presented here, therefore, lies not in their being representative but rather in their being personal and peculiar to individuals who held them. In exercises of knowledge creation, they constitute the very

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53 Baynham, Simon, and Greg Mills. 1987. "Lesotho: Between Dependence and Destabilisation." *The World Today* 43 (3): 52.

54 Hanlon, Joseph. 1986. *Beggar Your Neighbours: Apartheid Power in Southern Africa*: 128.

building blocks on which knowledge and understanding of human, personal and individuals' experiences and interpretations of opposition to the 1986 coup d'état can be built.

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