

Church and Land in Basutoland: The Paris Evangelical Mission and its Implications

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Abstract

This paper investigates how the Paris Mission acquired land in Basutoland upon the arrival of its missionaries in 1833 and in subsequent years. It also looks at changing notions of land and the missionaries' utilisation of it throughout their tenure in Basutoland. It explores how the Basuto as a people understood the possession of land vis-à-vis the European notion of buying and selling land as a commodity. Particular focus is given to the extent of the misunderstanding that took place upon the initial allocation of land to the missionaries of the Paris Mission, as well as to the Methodist Wesleyan Mission missionaries who settled at ThabaNtšo (Nchu) in 1833. The missionaries gave Moshoeshoe some gifts—an act which was misconstrued by the two parties. The missionaries thought that the gifts were in exchange for the land granted to them and that they were actually buying it, while Moshoeshoe on the other hand thought that the gifts were a gesture of allegiance and goodwill to him as the king. To achieve the goal of the study, all old stations of the Paris Mission were looked into, as well as their founding missionaries to ascertain how land was granted to them by Moshoeshoe, and then how that land was utilised by the mission and the community. The study perused archival materials kept in the Morija Museum and archives. Some interviews were conducted among people well versed on the issue of land and the Paris Mission.

Keywords: Moshoeshoe; land; Basuto; Morija; Paris Mission; European



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Moshoeshoe¹ welcomed the Paris Evangelical missionaries² at Thaba-Bosiu³ in 1833 with the following words:

My heart is white with joy replied the chief; your words are great and good. It is enough for me to see your clothing, your arms, and the rolling houses in which you travel, to understand how much intelligence and strength you have. You see our desolation. This country was full of inhabitants. Wars have devastated it. Multitudes have perished; others are refugees in foreign lands; I remain almost alone on this rock. I have been told you can help us. You promise to do it. That is enough. It is all I want to know. Remain with us. You shall instruct us. We will do all you wish. The country is at your disposal. We can go through it together, and you shall choose the place which will best suit you.⁴

The undertone of his reception was jubilation, a sense of trust as well as the anticipation of a positive outcome for the Basuto⁵ nation. There was also a hint of cordiality.

The purpose of this paper is to portray the unique scenario of land tenure in Basutoland where the Paris Evangelical Mission and the Basuto co-existed with equal rights to land by examining the following subheadings with regard to church and land in Basutoland:

- The arrival of the Paris missionaries, their acquisition and utilisation of land.
- The different views on land occupation and ownership held by the missionaries and Moshoeshoe.
- Quarrels between the Paris missionaries and the Methodist Wesleyan missionaries over land.
- The introduction of alien land tenure in Basutoland.
- A brief narrative of Basutoland after the Seqiti War (1865–1868).

1 Moshoeshoe (1786–1770) was the founder of the Basuto nation. He skilfully brought together different clans to make the Basuto nation. L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho (1786–1870)* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press 1975); P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho* (London: Heinemann 1975).

2 The Paris Evangelical Mission Society was founded as an interdenominational society in Paris in 1822 to propagate the Gospel in heathen lands. It sent its first missionaries to southern Africa in 1829 by the invitation of the superintendent of the London Mission Society, John Phillip. The missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Mission came to Basutoland by the invitation of Moshoeshoe. S. J. Gill, “The Impact of the first Missionaries or the Reception of the Missionaries by Basotho or Evidence of the Work of the Spirit of God,” in *Mekolokotoane Kerekeng ea Evangeli Lesotho, Jubilee Highlights 1833–2008* (Moriya Museum and Archives 2009), 45–48; S. J. Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Moriya Museum and Archives 1993), 75–79; V. Ellenberger, *A Century of Mission Work in Basutoland 1833–1933* (Moriya Sesuto Book Depot 1938), 7–9.

3 Thaba-Bosiu (A mountain at night) was the mountain fortress of King Moshoeshoe. It was believed that it grew at night and enemies were unable to reach the top of it. It was untaken. In recent times it is used as a burial place of the descendants of Moshoeshoe. G. Tylden, *A History of Thaba-Bosiu: A Mountain at Night* (Maseru Basutoland 1945).

4 E. Casalis, *My Life in Basutoland, A History of Missionary Enterprise in South Africa*, translated from French by J. Brierley (Paternoster Row 1889), 183–184.

5 The “Basuto” was a colonial name for the people of Basutoland or nation, while the “Basotho” was a post-colonial name.

- Conclusion.

The Arrival of the Paris Missionaries, their Acquisition and Utilisation of Land

Aware of his vulnerability following the incessant attacks of the Korannas, Moshoeshoe, chief of the Basuto, started to enquire from all his visitors to Thaba-Bosiu how peace could be secured or how he could protect himself and his people. He learned from his European as well as African visitors about the work of the missionaries at Kuruman and of their work among the Griquas. He learnt that the missionaries were a great help to the people they lived amongst. Moshoeshoe asked Adam Krotz, the Griqua hunter based at Philippolis, when he visited Thaba-Bosiu, to procure some missionaries for his people. He sent a herd of 200 cattle to Philippolis for that purpose. However, the cattle were intercepted on the way by the Korannas.⁶

When three missionaries⁷ sent by the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society arrived at Philippolis to reinforce the first generation, which was already working alongside the London Missionary Society among the Tswana,⁸ Krotz remembered Moshoeshoe's request. Given the circumstances at Kuruman and the adjacent areas in the wake of the Mzilikazi wars, and hearing about Moshoeshoe and his eagerness to have missionaries, the three young missionaries deemed it prudent to go to Basutoland with Krotz. However, in their minds, their journey to Moshoeshoe's place was an exploratory visit. They had no definite plans to establish themselves among the Basuto (in fact they left one of their wagons at Philippolis); they just wanted to hear what Moshoeshoe had to offer.

The three missionaries had their interview with Moshoeshoe at Thaba-Bosiu on 28 June 1833.⁹ Moshoeshoe's offer was so compelling that the missionaries felt that if they rejected it they would be making a big mistake: "... the finger of God was clearly visible; it pointed out to [them] the road which [they] should take."

After a few days, Moshoeshoe took the missionaries south of Thaba-Bosiu to the mountain of Boleka in search of a suitable place to establish a mission. Moshoeshoe preferred Boleka, for security reasons; missionaries established at Boleka would help to stop the most feared of the Korannas from approaching from that direction. The

6 *Casalis, My Life in Basutoland*, 137–138; Sanders, *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho*, 46–47; C. W. Hincks, *Quest for Peace* (Christian Council of Lesotho 2009), 85, 87–88; T. Couzens, *Murder at Morija* (Johannesburg: Random House 2003), 65.

7 Thomas Arbousset, Eugene Casalis and Constant Gosselin. The former were ordained ministers while the latter was a mason. Ellenberger, *A Century of Missionary Work in Basutoland*, 8–9, 12; Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 77–78; Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 92.

8 The first missionary generation of the Paris Mission that was sent to southern Africa in 1829 were: Isaac Bisseux, Prosper Lemue and Samuel Rolland. Jean Pierre Pellissier was sent in 1831. Couzens, *Murder at Morija*, 77; Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 100, 101.

9 Ellenberger, *A Century of Mission Work in Basutoland*, 8, 9, 10.

missionaries, on the other hand, preferred the base of the Makhoarane plateau because of its plentiful water supply and abundance of firewood.¹⁰

Oral tradition has it that Moshoeshoe designated the whole valley of Makhoarane to the Paris Mission. The Paris missionaries were happy about this place that seemed to offer all the advantages they sought. They named it Moriah (Moriya, as it was later called) “in remembrance of the difficulties through which [they] had passed, and of the providential guidance which had brought them thus far.” The date was 9 July 1833.¹¹

After two or three days Moshoeshoe and Krotz left them. Moshoeshoe sent his sons and some young men to assist them in their work of establishing themselves. At first he sent his eldest son, Letsie, but the people protested that the heir’s safety was compromised so he recalled him and sent the younger brother Molapo. The people then complained that the younger brother had been given his own village before Letsie, the heir. Moshoeshoe then sent his two sons accompanied by their maternal uncle, Paulosi Matete, to make them secure. Matete became the guardian of the missionaries as well as of the soon-to-emerge Christian community at Morija.¹²

Casalis,¹³ Moshoeshoe’s secretary, fetched the other wagon from Philippolis and this convinced Moshoeshoe that the missionaries were there to stay.¹⁴

Around December 1833, Moshoeshoe made another appearance at Morija with a large group of men, women and children, with their cattle.¹⁵ Within a short time huts were erected near the mission and a school would also be erected for the education of the children. The new settlers would co-exist with the missionaries and share land equally

10 Sanders, *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho*, 49; Casalis, *My Life in Basutoland*, 188.

11 Casalis, *My Life in Basutoland*, 87, 88; R. C. Germond, *Chronicles of Basutoland, A Running Commentary on the Events of the Years 1830–1902 by the French Protestant Missionaries in Southern Africa* (Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Depot 1967), 52; Ellenberger, *A Century of Mission Work in Basutoland*, 15.

12 Sanders, *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho*, 49; Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 104.

13 Eugène Casalis was one of the three missionaries (also Thomas Arbousset and Costant Gosselin) who arrived in Basutoland in 1833. He established the mission station of Thaba-Bosiu where Moshoeshoe lived. He became an advisor to Moshoeshoe in his relations with the white community; Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 92.

14 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 103.

15 Among families that Moshoeshoe brought to stay at Morija with the missionaries were: the Sekhesa, Selematsela, Nkherehanye, Talanyane, Moshabesha, Matiea, Lekonyana, Makotoane, Matšela, Makume and Hetsa. I am indebted to Chief Ranthomeng Matete (interviewed 26 June 2019) and Mathatela Segote (interviewed 28 June 2019), for this information.

as the need presented itself, be it for housing, agriculture or any other purpose.¹⁶ Edwin Smith¹⁷ wrote about land tenure in Basutoland:

The French Mission held mission sites on exactly the same tenure as the Basuto cultivators held their fields. They had, that is to say, no property in the soil, only the usufruct; the land remained, as it remains to this day, the inalienable property of the tribe.¹⁸

The designation of land to the Paris Mission at Morija set the precedent for the other PEMS stations that were established later. Moshoeshoe indubitably attended to all the allocations of land to the Paris Mission. He made expeditions and searched for suitable places for mission stations to be established. He was always the one confirming the places where the missionaries wanted to establish new stations as well as attaching the people to the mission station with a headman.¹⁹ This was another way of strengthening as well as extending his frontiers besides sending his sons or relatives or appointing headmen to rule on his behalf. For instance, he designated land for the stations of Bethesda in 1843,²⁰ Hebron²¹ and Hermon in 1847.²² The records are silent about allocations of land for other stations.

The land allotted to the Paris Mission was used to establish mission stations and schools. All mission stations had schools attached to them; the schools were the responsibility of the missionaries' wives. The school of the station of Beersheba was a model. Elizabeth Rolland, who was in charge of it, was a teacher by profession.²³ In later years as the work of the mission grew, more institutions were established, namely the printing press (1861), the book depot (1862), the normal school (1868), the Bible school for evangelists or deacons (1875), the theological school (1882), the industrial school (1838) and the girls' school (1871).²⁴ Some of these institutions were established within

16 For example, the old community cemeteries at Morija are located in what today we consider as the heart of the mission premises. Of these cemeteries, one is near the printing works, the second is below the girls' school. David Ambrose, *The Role of Missionary Wives and Daughters in the early French Mission in Lesotho* (House 9 Publications 2012), 16; E. W. Smith, *The Mabilles of Basutoland, Facsimile Reprint of the 1939 edition* (Morija Museum and Archives 1996), 351. Furthermore, the family of Sekhesa is also in the interior of the Paris Mission premises due to the co-existence of the mission and the community that happened in the early years of the formation of Morija.

17 Edwin W. Smith was an Englishman who entered Basutoland in 1898 to spend a year of novitiate to the missionary career. He served the Primitive Methodists in Zambia (Northern Rhodesia). He wrote the biography of the Mabilles. Edwin W. Smith, *The Mabilles of Basutoland*, 7–10.

18 Smith, *The Mabilles of Basutoland*, 103.

19 Cf. E. A. Eldredge, *South African Kingdom: The pursuit of Security in the Nineteenth-century Lesotho, African Studies series* (78) (Britain: Cambridge University Press 1993), 36–37.

20 Germond, *Chronicles of Basutoland*, 332.

21 Germond, *Chronicles of Basutoland*, 46–47.

22 Germond, *Chronicles of Basutoland*, 47.

23 Ellenberger, *A Century of Mission Work in Basutoland*, 188–189; Ambrose, “The Role of Missionary Wives and Daughters.”

24 Ambrose, “The Role of Missionary Wives and Daughters,” 126, 190, 192, 193, 219.

existing sites, while some of them needed a new arrangement with the chief concerned. For example, when the mission established the normal school and the theological school as well as the industrial school, it had to make new arrangements for the sites of these institutions. Matete at Morija ceded his field to the Paris Mission in order that a theological school could be built on it. Letsie refused to allocate a site for the industrial school at Mazenod, a place the mission deemed suitable for such a school and not far from the capital. The Cape colonial government ceded its administrative offices at Quthing Camp to the Paris Mission when it moved to upper Moyeni, where new offices were erected. The mission was then able to establish the industrial school at Quthing Camp, later known as Leloaleng (mill) because of the watermill that was run near that institution.²⁵

It is important to state here that the Paris Mission gave birth to the Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC) or Lesotho Evangelical Church in Southern Africa (LECSA). This took place during a big ceremony at Morija in 1964, when LEC received autonomy from the Paris Mission.²⁶

The Different Views on Land Occupation and Ownership Held by the Missionaries and Moshoeshoe

Moshoeshoe and the Paris missionaries had diametrically opposed views with regard to land occupation and ownership. After the missionaries had been allocated the land at Morija, they wanted to make sure that the land belonged to them. They presented Moshoeshoe with a European dress (suit); thus, in their minds, completing a deed of sale for the designated land. They believed that they had bought the land and rightly occupied it.

Moshoeshoe, on the other hand, understood the gift as a token of appreciation, good will and allegiance to him as the king. This was not, in his experience, an anomalous action; he was used to receiving gifts for the benefits he proffered to his subjects as well as his visitors.²⁷ He actually did not fully understand what the present of the missionaries entailed. There was no competent interpreter to make him understand this. After all, the buying and selling of land was a novelty to him.

Moshoeshoe was clear that, according to Basuto tradition, land was inalienable. It belonged to the Basuto as communal property. He was a custodian of it as the king. He granted it to the missionaries under usufruct terms. This is why he took some of his

25 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 304.

26 *Mekolokotoane Kerekeng ea Evangeli Lesotho, Jubilee Highlights 1833–2008* (Morija Museum and Archives 2009), 3; J. M. Mohapeloa, *From Mission to Church, Fifty Years of the Work of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society and the Lesotho Evangelical Church 1933–1983* (Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Depot 1985), preface.

27 G. M. Theal, "Letter from Moshoeshoe to the Secretary to Government, 15 May 1845," in *Basutoland Records vol. I, 1833–1852* (hereafter *BR*), (Cape Town: W.A. Richards and Sons, Government Printers 1883), 2, 85–86.

people to live with the missionaries.²⁸ The missionaries were to enjoy the benefits that the land proffered together with his people. The right of occupation of land did not have ownership connotations for the Basuto or the missionaries according to Basuto tradition. Such rights were not transferable to others or heritable.²⁹

In the mid-1860s, Moshoeshoe came into conflict with Adolphe Mabile³⁰ at Morija. Mabile made an enclosure of a stone wall for his gardens and orchards perhaps to prevent animals from entering. Moshoeshoe thought that Mabile, by that action, claimed rights to that enclosed land other than the mission. In 1859, he proclaimed a law that stipulated that traders could be allocated sites for their shops and that land allocated to the whites should not be “construed as property granted on title or to be sold from one to another.”³¹

On the other hand the missionaries, being Europeans, came from a background where land was private property and could be bought or sold. They saw the tribute they had paid to Moshoeshoe as the purchase price of the land he had granted them.³² Moreover, the missionaries did not have a theology of land and this is the basis of the problem.

A similar incident happened when the missionaries of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, as well as some chiefs who accompanied them, sought refuge under Moshoeshoe.³³ When he wanted to be their feudal overlord they claimed that they had bought the land, which they occupied by the gifts that they had presented to him. They argued that they had found that land unoccupied, the former owners having been swept away by war. “The purchase had been concluded as a friendly arrangement to prevent either the Basuto or the Batlokoa to interfere.”³⁴

Elizabeth Eldredge notes that:

In the early 1820s people inhabiting the region of Lesotho and its vicinity were grouped together in highly concentrated population inhabiting isolated hills and mountain tops

28 Theal, *BR*, vol. I (1883).

29 S. B. Burman, *Chieftdom, Politics and Alien Law: Basutoland under Cape Rule 1871–1884* (Oxford: MacMillan 1981), 26.

30 Adolphe Mabile (1836–1894) was a Swiss born missionary who came to Basutoland in 1859. He was placed at Morija, the main station of the Paris Mission. He established a number of important institutions for the Paris Mission, namely the book depot (1861), the printing press (1862), the *Leselinyana la Lesotho* newspaper (1863), and the normal school as well as the Bible school (1868). Germond, *Chronocles of Basutoland*, 566.

31 Smith, *The Mabilles of Basutoland*, 103.

32 Theal, *BR*, vol. I, (1883), 85–86.

33 Chief Mroko with the Barolong at Thaba-Ntso, Peter Davids with the Griquas at Leshuane, Carolus Baatje with the “Bastards” or Coloureds or Newlanders at Platberg, Gert Taaibosch with the Korannas at Merumetsu. Theal, *BR*, vol. I (1883), 84; Sanders, *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho*, 50–51; Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 135–136.

34 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 136; *The Wesleyan Missionaries in the O.F.S. 1833–1954*, edited by Karel Schoeman (Cape Town, Johannesburg: Human & Rousseau 1991), 26; Theal, *BR*, vol. I (1883), 2–3.

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for defensive purposes, and the plains which they had previously inhabited lay apparently vacant. This temporary concentration of peoples, which left wide areas uninhabited, led the first European observers in the area to believe that the land was open for settlement.³⁵

In the same way, the Boer settlers who sought permission to occupy certain lands of Moshoeshoe, later claimed that the land was not granted temporarily and that it was theirs forever. In their case Moshoeshoe refused all forms of gifts from them. They took advantage of the lenient terms of customary land tenure.³⁶

Quarrels between the Missionaries of the Paris Mission and the Methodist Wesleyan Mission over Land

The Paris Mission did not take long to understand the Basuto view of land occupation and ownership. Eugène Casalis, in his capacity as Moshoeshoe's secretary, tried to correct the misconception of the Methodist missionaries with regard to the purchase of land. That eventually led to the two missionary societies backing the chiefs where their missions were established. The Paris missionaries, through Casalis, backed Moshoeshoe and worked hard to convince the British officials in the Cape that Moshoeshoe owned the land and never sold it. On the other hand, the Methodist missionaries, through William Shaw, backed Moroke, Peter Davids and other chiefs stating that they were independent of Moshoeshoe and insisted that they had bought the land that they were occupying. There was a deed of purchase, which Moshoeshoe had signed with his cross as proof of the purchase of his land. The Paris missionaries and the Basuto as a whole refuted that claim. It was thought to be a scam since there was no witness from amongst them. Moshoeshoe would not have left the missionaries as well as his counsellors in the dark on an issue of importance like that one.³⁷

35 Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security*, 40.

36 Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security*, 49; Burman, *Chieftdom, Politics and Alien Law*, 14.

37 Burman, *Chieftdom, Politics and Alien Law*, 136; *The Wesleyan Missionaries in the O.F.S. 1833–1954*, 22; W. C. Holden, *A Brief History of Methodism and Methodist Mission in South Africa* (London: William Nichols 1877), 367; Theal, *BR*, vol. 1, (1883). 87–88; Germond, *Chronicles of Basutoland*, 168–171.

This discord between Moshoeshoe, the Wesleyan Methodist missionaries and their chiefs was triggered by the treaty that Moshoeshoe signed with Britain in 1843,³⁸ where he endeavoured to forestall Boer encroachment on his land by initiating a diplomatic relationship with Britain. This action caused jealousy and gave rise to malcontent among the chiefs whom he had received into his land. They also sought to be received by Britain and claimed to be independent of him.³⁹

The Boers, who had always sought permission from Moshoeshoe to graze their flocks, seeing the Barolong and the coloureds' chiefs (the Griquas⁴⁰ as well as the Methodist missionaries rebelling against Moshoeshoe), did the same.⁴¹ This led to a number of boundary lines being drawn by the British colonial government between Moshoeshoe and the Free State in its attempt at arbitration. Moshoeshoe eventually lost a large part of his land to the Free State in 1869, including some stations of the Paris Mission. Of the Paris Mission stations, which were in the land taken by the Free State government, two of them were sold as farms (Mabolela and Beersheba) and some were later ceded to the other mission societies.⁴²

The Introduction of Alien Land Tenure in Basutoland

The paradigm of land tenure in Basutoland was generally customary from the time of the arrival of the early missionaries up to the 1940s, when the British colonial government introduced the new land tenure. This was an internal administrative

38 This treaty was known as the Napier treaty. It was named after the governor of the Cape Colony government George Napier (1751–1804) who signed it on behalf of the colonial government. The treaty was a mockery to Moshoeshoe as it satisfied British agenda and held nothing for him. Moshoeshoe was to guard the frontier for Britain, maintain peace and stability, and arrest colonial criminals who came to his territory. He was annually awarded 75 pounds, “either in money or in arms and ammunition as he may desire by the colonial government for that.” Germond, *Chronicles of Basutoland*, 168, 569; Sanders, *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho*, 89; Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds*, 120–123; T. Mothibe and M. Ntabeni, “The Role of the Missionaries, Boers and British in Social and Territorial Changes, 1833–1868,” in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500–200* (Department of History, National University of Lesotho: Morija Printing Works 2002), 44–45; Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom*, 50; J. M. Orpen, *History of the Basuto of South Africa* (Mazenod: Mazenod Book Centre 1979), 36.

39 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 175; Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 89; Sanders, *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho*, 88, 89; Burman, *Chieftdom, Politics and Alien Law*, 14.

40 The Griquas were people of mixed descent sometimes designated as coloured people, Bakhothu or by the colonial name “bastards.” However, coloureds, Bakhothu as well as bastards, became offshoots of the Griqua. They were raiders and pillagers. They accompanied the Wesleyan missionaries when they migrated from Vaal-Harts area to the basin of the Caledon River valley. Barend Barends was their leader and he was succeeded by his son in law, Peter Davids, when he left. Martin C. Legassick, “The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana and the Missionaries, 1780–1840: The Politics of a Frontier Zone,” University of California 1970, Chapter 3 (PhD thesis); Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 20; Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds*, 106–111; Sanders, *Moshoeshoe Chief of the Sotho*, 50,66.

41 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 187–188.

42 Germond, *Chronicles of Basutoland*, 309–310; Orpen, *History of the Basuto of South Africa*, 40–51, 79–82.

arrangement where the missions were bound to register their land. This involved the surveying and demarcation of land. This resulted in quarrels and law suits between the mission, the chiefs and the community. No amicable solutions were found in some places and the Paris Mission in particular lost large tracts of land to the chiefs and some members of the community, who served it as teachers and evangelists. All the stations of the Paris Mission established between 1833 and 1870 had acquired land from Moshoeshe. That was before the colonial government was established. The mission co-existed with the community with equal rights to land occupation. There were no demarcation lines; therefore, this new arrangement of registering and demarcating land posed a big problem for both the mission and for the community.

A Brief Narrative of Basutoland after the Seqiti War (1865–1868)⁴³

Broadly speaking, the Seqiti⁴⁴ war forms the basis of what took place in Basutoland after 1868. It was this war that put Moshoeshe, the founder of the Basuto nation, in a tight corner so that he was willing to relinquish power and become a British subject, so that Britain could protect Basutoland from the Boer invasion. He had, for several years, wanted and even proposed that there be indirect rule from Britain; the chief yearned for British protection but did not want to give up the authority he exercised over his people. In his view, British protection would chiefly guarantee the safety of Basutoland as well as the Basuto's inalienable right to the land.⁴⁵

This war marked the apex as well as the end of the ongoing political disturbances and the wars between the Basuto under Chief Moshoeshe and the Boers. The bone of contention was the land, which the Boers believed belonged to them as a chosen people as soon as they arrived on the frontier along the Caledon River valley in the mid-1830s. The policy of England, the new colonial power in the Cape, had favoured the emancipation of slaves but promoted violent forms of conquest in other ways. The Boers found the situation intolerable and they resolved to leave the Cape for a country where they could establish themselves and be free and independent. This mass movement was called the Great Trek.⁴⁶

43 I have used some of the information in this part in chapter 2 of my PhD thesis ("Mission and Colonialism in Basutoland: A Critical Examination of Hermann Dieterlen (1850–1933)," Sesotho literary materials as found in the Morija Museum and Archives), where I wrote about the background of Basutoland before and during the time of Herman Dieterlen (1850–1933).

44 The Seqiti War was a result of lengthy hostilities between the Basuto and the Boers over the land which the Boers were occupying. This war was named after the noise that the cannon balls made as they hit the ground-*qiti!* Hence the Seqiti War. Sanders, *Moshoeshe Chief of the Sotho*, 284.

45 M. Thabane, "Reconsidering the Motives of Colonialism, 1868–1871," in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500–2000*, edited by Neville W. Pule and Motlatsi Thabane (Department of History, National University of Lesotho 2002), 79.

46 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 89.

Moshoeshoe, when realising that the annihilation of his country was inevitable, wrote to Wodehouse⁴⁷ surrendering to any terms that could be agreed upon between himself and Britain with the proviso that his country was annexed. Moshoeshoe wrote: “I am therefore giving myself up and my country to her Majesty’s Government ...”⁴⁸

Though Wodehouse was sympathetic to the plight of the Basuto, the policy of England stipulated that “colonial expenditure should be kept low, and that conventions and treaties should be used to exert British influence among Southern African chiefdoms.”⁴⁹ This was a serious hurdle. Nonetheless, he never gave up. He persistently pleaded for the annexation of Basutoland. Eventually, Britain allowed him to annex Basutoland and that was proclaimed on 12 March 1868.⁵⁰

However, the nature of this annexation was rather vague as it was unclear as to whether Basutoland should become a protectorate or a colony of Britain. To the British officials it was a colony, but to the Basuto, and some British administrators, it was a protectorate since Moshoeshoe gave the country over to Britain to rule. The Basuto anticipated that Britain would protect their country, not control it. But as time went on, the Commissioner’s Agent (also called Resident Commissioner) and the Paramount Chief governed as equals. This created confusion as there was no consistency in the application of the rule of law.⁵¹

When Britain took over Basutoland, it fell directly under the High Commissioner of Southern Africa who was represented in Basutoland by a Commissioner’s Agent. It took Britain almost four years to decide how Basutoland was to be ruled. However, Moshoeshoe ruled the Basuto during the interregnum. He was devastated, decrepit and enfeebled by the Seqiti war and he passed the reigns of leadership to his heir, Letsie, at the *pitso* on 18 January 1870; shortly after, on 11 March 1870, he passed on.⁵²

The death of Moshoeshoe led to rivalry among his sons and his younger brother, Masupha. None of them was willing to recognise his successor, Letsie. Perhaps this was what impelled Britain to hand over Basutoland to the Cape Government in 1871, to “keep an eye on it.” However, this was done without consulting the Basuto and it

47 Sir Philip Edmond Wodehouse (26 February 1811–25 October 1887) was appointed governor of the Cape in 1861 and later promoted to the position of High Commissioner of Southern Africa in 1862. He succeeded Sir George Grey. Thabane, “Reconsidering the Motives of Colonialism,” 81–82.

48 Moshoeshoe to Wodehouse, 20. August 1865, *BR*, Vol. iii, 1868, 457–458.

49 Thabane, “Reconsidering the Motives of Colonialism,” 84.

50 Thabane, “Reconsidering the Motives of Colonialism.” See, also, J. M. Mohapeloa, *Government by Proxy* (Moriya: Morija Sesuto Book Depot 1971), 2.

51 L. B. B. J. Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800–1966: A study of Political Institutions* (London: Macmillan 1990), preface, ix–x.

52 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 216, 217, 218.

became a sore point in the ensuing years, when the Basuto learnt about it.⁵³ J. M. Mohapeloa terms the period of Cape Rule in Basutoland “Government by Proxy.”⁵⁴

Henry Barkly, the High Commissioner, appointed magistrates to work in Basutoland: Mr C. D. Griffith had been the Chief Magistrate or Commissioner’s Agent, and Emile Rolland, who was the Paris Mission missionary, became one of the magistrates.⁵⁵

It was a strange development, a Christian missionary becoming a magistrate! The Paris missionaries were presumably disappointed. Ironically, no reference is made to this issue by any of them in their records, excepting their correspondence with friends and family members in Europe.⁵⁶

Emile Rolland advised the British officials how to break the power of the chiefs and curb certain Basuto customs deemed not in line with Christianity.⁵⁷ The Cape Colony government adopted his advice when it ruled Basutoland from 1872 to 1884. Britain took Basutoland back in 1884 and ruled it directly from that time up to 1966, when Basutoland got its independence.

British rule empowered chiefs and the Paramount Chief worked with the Commissioner’s Agent.⁵⁸ However, by the close of the 19th century the chieftainship had become corrupt and was involved in a number of reprehensive actions negatively impacting on the people, for instance excessive fines, unfair trials and judgements.⁵⁹ As

53 J. M. Mohapeloa, *Tentative British Imperialism in Lesotho 1884–1910, A Study in Basotho-Colonial Office Interaction and South Africa’s Influence on it* (Moriya Museum and Archives 2002), 16.

54 Mohapeloa, *Government by Proxy*.

55 Emile Rolland (1836–1915) was the son of Samuel Rolland (1801–1873), the first team of PEMS missionaries to Southern Africa. His father was in charge of the Station of Beersheba where he was born. He was the first missionary child born in Basutoland. He trained in Paris and came back to Basutoland in 1861 to become a missionary. He helped his father in Beersheba, Poortje and Hermon. He was appointed the magistrate of Mafeteng in 1872. *The Recollections of Elizabeth Rolland 1803–1901*, edited by Karel Schoeman (Cape Town: Human & Rousseau 1987), 8, 10, 81; Stephen Gill, “Thomas Mofolo: the Man, the Writer and his Context,” in *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*, a journal for African literature, translated by Mofolo, fourth series, 53 (2) (2016): 21; Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 199, 216.

56 The Morija Museum and Archives have five books of the proceedings of the missionary conference and letters, written in French, of the following periods: 1860–1872, 1873–1877, 1871–1889, 1863–1877, 1866–1870.

57 These customs were *bohali* (reversed dowry); circumcision (passage of an initiation for young men and young women into adulthood). See, Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 216, 979.

58 Couzens, *Murder at Morija*, 139; Ellenberger, *A Century of Mission Work in Basutoland*, 225; Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 312–313.

59 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 470.

a result, the Basuto educated elites formed the Basutoland Progressive Association (BPA) in 1907 to redress the situation.⁶⁰

The work of the Paris Mission advanced during the colonial governments.⁶¹ In them it had governments which generally shared its vision, which was civilising as well as Christianising the Basuto. However, the ascendancy of Griffith Lerotholi (1871–1939) to the position of the Paramount Chief in 1913 changed things drastically for the Paris Mission. Griffith had converted to the Roman Catholic Mission (RCM) in 1912.⁶² In his reign⁶³ he supported RCM by allocating large tracts of land to them and denied the Paris Mission that privilege.⁶⁴

A new association was formed in 1919, called the Commoners League or Lekhotla la Bafo. Its founder was Josiel Lefela. This league saw Christian missionaries as tools of the colonial government, destroying Basuto culture and promoting Western values by their schools as well as European political hegemony.⁶⁵ It was critical of the Paramount Chief Lerotholi. It considered him the puppet of the colonial government and Roman Catholics for whom he secured “large parcels of land.”⁶⁶

In the 1930s, there was a great drought in Basutoland; no rain fell from 1927 to the first half of the 1930s. This caused *lerole le lefubelu* (the red dust), economic depression as well as typhoid fever which killed many people.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, in the midst of this trying time the Paris Mission celebrated a centenary.⁶⁸

In 1938, the Chieftainship Reforms were implemented. They were based on the Pim Report of 1935. The reforms “limited and clarified the power of the chiefs as well as reducing the number of recognised chiefs.” This created many problems, as chiefs tried to secure their positions. They reverted to medicine murders.⁶⁹

60 Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 148, 164; P. P. Mapetla, “The Role of the Basutoland Progressive Association in the Formation of the Modern Political Parties in Lesotho” (History Department, National University of Lesotho, 1985), 43. (BA dissertation).

61 The Cape Colony Government (1871–1884) and British Government (1884–1966).

62 The Roman Catholic Mission arrived in Basutoland in 1862. RCM missionaries came from Natal under the names of Bishop Jean-François Allard and Father Joseph Gérard. Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 222, 231, 440.

63 1913–1939.

64 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 440–441.

65 Cf. M. Mohale, “The Role of Primary Health Care in the Prevention of Disability in Lesotho” (London: University of Bristol 1992), 22 (Master’s dissertation).

66 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 440–441.

67 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 440–441, 469.

68 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 440–441, 473; Mohapeloa, *From Mission to Church*, 16.

69 Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 518, 520; Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 188; G. Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder: A Report of on the Recent Outbreak of “Diretlo” Murders in Basutoland* (London 1951).

The 1940s witnessed the escalation of the medicine murders and people lived in great fear.

Conclusion

The colonial governments that ruled Basutoland, viz. the Cape colonial government (1871–1884) and the British Government (1884–1966), disrupted and undermined the Basuto's view of land tenure, thereby creating confusion, rivalry and enmity between the Basuto and the Paris Mission. The inability of Moshoeshoe and the Paris missionaries to understand each other's view with regard to land tenure led to a serious misunderstanding. The missionaries, to validate their right to the land they occupied, used their European way of acquiring land. They tried to buy it. This method of acquisition of land was unknown to Moshoeshoe, chief of the Basuto.

A theology of land is long overdue and there is a crying need for the Lesotho Evangelical Church to develop a theology that will revive, strengthen and confirm the Basuto's view of land. Land as part of nature is a gift of God to all humanity.⁷⁰ It is communal and all people must have a right to it. It must be shared justly. Chiefs and governments, as the custodians, should have in place safeguards to prevent all forms of land abuse such as the unjust designation of it as well as its pollution.⁷¹

Lastly, Morija, as it is today, remains the home, park and place of the Paris Mission or the Lesotho Evangelical Church in Southern Africa, as it is now called. No other churches may be planted there. Chief Ranthomeng Matete is unrelenting in reminding the descendants of the first settlers of Morija and newcomers of the history of Morija, how it was established as well as the role and responsibilities of the chief of Morija, which were entrusted to his fathers by Moshoeshoe. It is the responsibility of the chief of Morija to protect the mission and to maintain peace and stability between the mission and the people.

Autobiography

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70 Genesis 1. 9–10, Psalm 24.

71 Romans 13.

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