

Re-Examination of the Lekhotla La Bafo's Challenge to Imperialism in Lesotho, 1919-1966

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Introduction

Let us vindicate our cause and join hands shoulder to shoulder in our struggle for emancipation from helotry and collaborate with the international emancipation movement in our fight to rescue our country from clutches of her enemy, the South African robber imperialists.¹

This declaration by the Lekhotla la Bafo (Council of Commoners) in 1929 is perhaps the best illustration of the association's appointed mission in Lesotho, to challenge Great Britain's discriminatory imperial policies and, most importantly, to oppose the poignant issue of South Africa's territorial imperialism regarding Lesotho. In this endeavor, the Lekhotla la Bafo established itself as one of the foremost anti-imperialist movements ever to emerge in Lesotho in particular, and Southern Africa in general. Founded in 1919 by Josiel Lefela, this unrecognized and later proscribed association² continued to operate in the hostile colonial environment until Lesotho regained its independence in 1966. It is noteworthy that when Lesotho's Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan banned opposition political parties after he was defeated by Ntsu Mokhehle in the 1970 elections, he outlawed the Lekhotla la Bafo as well. Perhaps this was because of the earlier cordial relationship that existed between the association and Mokhehle's Basutoland Congress Party, and actually Josiel had been Mokhehle's mentor (see footnote 94). That the association lived for so long is particularly intriguing considering that Lekhotla la Bafo so openly and so defiantly challenged the British colonial regime in Lesotho. The association relentlessly and virulently attacked the British policies, especially regarding the erosion of the Basotho chiefs' powers and the threat of South Africa's peripheral imperialism.³

¹ Lesotho National Archives (LNA). S3/22/2/4, The Lekhotla la Bafo's Presidential Address, Oct. 13, 1929, pp.1-9.

² LNA. S3/22/2/1, Government Secretary to the Assistant Commissioner, Berea, Jan. 12, 1925. See also LNA. S3/22/2/3-6, H.M.D. Tsoene to the Earl of Athlone, June 27, 1925. High Commissioner Garraway denied the association recognition because "His Honour's opinion is that in the meantime a council of such kind is unnecessary, and that the National Council and Progressive Association are sufficient for the requirements of the nation." However, the real reason why the authorities denied the Lekhotla la Bafo's request might have been due to its radical approach to what it viewed as the colonial officials' isolation of the Basotho chiefs from the people. The chiefs themselves were interested parties and might have wrongly feared that the association would undermine their positions. See for instance, Public Record Office, London (PRO) CO646/3 (1920), Basutoland National Council Proceedings (BNC), p.17. The National Council was created in 1903 and promulgated in 1910 as the chiefs' Advisory Body to the colonial administration, while the Progressive Association was founded in early 1908 by the western educated elite (with the encouragement of the missionaries) to cater for their interests. And Josiel Lefela, Lekhotla la Bafo's founder, was himself a member of the National Council since 1916 representing his Berea chief until 1921, when he was forced to resign. See for example Robert Edgar, *Prophets with Honour, A Documentary History of Lekhotla la Bafo* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1988), pp.6-10. Also note that this association arose about the same time as the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa (ICU) in South Africa, although the latter was at least initially a purely workers' organization. Despite the fact that the specific factors responsible for the rise of these organizations were different, they both introduced an element of radicalism in their individual territories. For more about ICU see for example, Clements Kadalie, *My Life and the I. C. U.* (edited with an introduction by Stanley Trapido) (New York: The Humanities Press, 1970); and Jon Lewis, "The New Unionism: Industrialization and Industrial Unionism," *South Africa Labour Bulletin*, V.3, 5 (Mar – Apr. 1977), pp. 1-64.

³South African peripheral imperialism here refers to that country's continued demand to incorporate Lesotho, along with Botswana and Swaziland, as per the 1909 Schedule of the South African Act. Section 151 of the Schedule discussed the terms agreed between South Africa and the British governments, of the planned incorporation of all the above territories shortly before the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910. For details see for example, Edgar H. Walton, *The Inner History of the National Convention of South Africa* (London: Mashew Miller, 1912); and Great Britain, *Basutoland, The*

Nevertheless, the brief observations of Edward Roux⁴ and H.J. and R.E. Simons,⁵ as well as Richard Weisfelder's essay,⁶ about the significance of Lekhotla la Bafo's anti-imperialist activities, call for a re-examination of this topic. Moreover, as Robert Edgar has properly argued in the introduction to his collection of the Lekhotla la Bafo's records, the association's ideological appeal also played a significant role in the creation of the 1950s and 1960s Lesotho nationalism and therefore the regaining of independence by that country.⁷

This study utilizes various sources to expand on Edgar's conclusions about the Lekhotla la Bafo's crucial but much ignored role against imperialism, as well as the association's contribution to Lesotho nationalism and identity. Most importantly, my study offers a different approach regarding the Lekhotla la Bafo's challenge against imperialism by concentrating on the three specific issues around which the association built its opposition to imperialism and demonstrating how at least in the minds of the Lekhotla la Bafo's leadership these issues were interconnected. These issues were the future of Basotho chieftainship, the oppressive British colonial policies, and the territorial imperialism of South Africa. In analyzing these issues, I also discuss the specific strategies and tactics the association used to challenge imperialism as well as the response of the colonial authorities in Lesotho.

It must also be stressed here that the Lekhotla la Bafo viewed all the European activities in Lesotho -- whether by the missionaries, the traders, or the colonial officials -- as one huge conspiracy to destroy the country and incorporate it into the Union of South Africa. Therefore, the association's defense of the Basotho institutions, particularly chieftainship,⁸ was meant to thwart that destructive imperialist conspiracy and maintain Lesotho's autonomy. The issues of incorporation and chieftainship were extremely sensitive ones among the Basotho.⁹ Lekhotla la Bafo's outspokenness on these issues and the pacific strategies and tactics it employed may well explain why the colonial authorities did not crush the association at once. In so doing, the association gained the opportunity to write a lengthy chapter in the anti-imperialist history of Lesotho in particular, and Southern Africa as a whole.

It is equally significant that when the anti-oppression movements in neighboring South Africa, especially in the 1920s, exhibited much ethnic and racial disunity,¹⁰ the Lekhotla la Bafo was broadening its cause across race, ethnicity and gender.

Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland: History of Discussions with the Union of South Africa 1909-1939 [Cmd. 8707] (London: H.M.S.O., 1952).

⁴ Edward Roux, *Time Longer Than Rope: the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin, 1964), pp.307-8, also 212,217. Roux talks about the association's courage in establishing links with the Communist Party in South Africa, and enduring harassment by the colonial authorities throughout the Second World War period.

⁵ H.J. Simons and R.E. Simons, *Class and Color in South Africa 1850-1950* (Baltimore: Penguin, 1969), see pp.500-572. While blasting the African chiefs for being an obstacle to liberation by collaborating with the colonial and oppressive regimes in Southern Africa, the authors however praised the Lekhotla la Bafo's challenge to the chiefs and the colonial regime. Simons and Simons argue that the association's activities demonstrated that the peasants would play an important role in the liberation struggle if well led by a conscious leadership.

⁶ See Richard Weisfelder, "Early Voices of Protest in Basutoland: the Progressive Association and Lekhotla la Bafo," *African Studies Review*, 17,2 (1974)pp.397-409. Weisfelder argues that both of these associations, and especially the Lekhotla la Bafo, laid the basis for future political parties in Lesotho.

⁷ Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*. It is also my view that the Lekhotla la Bafo's legacy regarding its continued definition of Lesotho's identity through constant invocation of Moshoeshe I, the founder of Lesotho Kingdom, in its anti-imperialist crusade as well as the association's contribution to later nationalist politics in Lesotho, need further emphasis.

⁸ In Lesotho the institution of chieftainship symbolized Basotho nationhood and culture. Thus an attack of the institution was an attack against Lesotho's existence as an autonomous territory.

⁹ An interview with J. Thabiso Mohapeloa (89 years old first treasurer of Basotho National Treasury in 1964) in Lesotho, July 21, 1994. Mohapeloa recalled that particularly the issue of incorporation united all the Basotho against it as: "Incorporation was almost a swear word to the Basotho." See also footnote 8 above.

¹⁰ Among these movements were the African National Congress, the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), the South African Communist Party, and the South African Indian Congress. There was little cooperation among these organizations and where there was one, it was short lived. For example the communists were expelled from the ICU in the latter 1920s because they were mainly Europeans. See for example, Clements Kadalie, *My Life and the I.C.U.*; and Philip Bonner, "The Decline and Fall of the I.C.U. -- A Case of Self-Destruction?" in Eddie Webster, ed. *Essays in Southern African Labor History* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1978), pp.114-20.

Thus, Indians and women, albeit small in number, became members as well.¹¹ Outside Lesotho, Lekhotla la Bafo sought to create a common front with the peoples of Botswana and Swaziland,¹² as well as to establish an alliance with radical anti-imperialist world organizations,¹³ against British colonial policies and South African peripheral imperialism. As we shall see, this campaign irritated and frustrated the colonial authorities in Lesotho forcing them to threaten and harass the association's leadership.

In its anti-imperialist campaign regarding the institution of Basotho chieftainship and culture, the conduct and policies of Europeans in Lesotho, and the contemplated incorporation of Lesotho into South Africa the Lekhotla la Bafo adopted several strategies and tactics. The association employed among others the strategies and tactics of critical presidential speeches at its public meetings, threats of boycotts and civil disobedience, and petitions and delegations to the colonial officials. It should be emphasized (with some justification) that all these individual issues, at least in the mind of the Lekhotla la Bafo were related to the feared inclusion of Lesotho in the Union of South Africa. And the association was keenly aware that in South Africa, colonialism occurred contemporaneously with the destruction of the powers of the chiefs. Chieftainship and land represented African autonomy.

The Institution of Chieftainship

Chieftainship in Lesotho was the basis of the Basotho nation ever since the time of Moshoeshoe I. The chiefs were the caretakers of the land and the nation on behalf of the people. And, the chiefs were worthy of their positions only if they remained responsive to the people's needs, hence the saying that *morena ke morena ka batho* (a chief is a chief by the people).¹⁴ Thus one major reason for the Basotho rebellion in 1880/83, was the Cape Colony's assault on chieftainship by turning them into tax-collectors and tools of oppression and exploitation for the colonial regime.¹⁵ But from 1903 onward, when the all male Basotho assembly or *Pitso* was replaced by the Basutoland National Council, Basotho chieftainship was never the same again. Under constant attack from the British colonial policies, the institution of chieftainship became corrupt, unresponsive to the people, and its power gradually eroded to the advantage of that of the colonial authority.¹⁶

It was these issues affecting chieftainship and the danger they posed to the well-being of the country, particularly its autonomy *vis-a-vis* South African peripheral imperialism, that the Lekhotla la Bafo arose to address. As Josiel Lefela informed the National Council in 1920 regarding the formation of his association:

There are many complaints throughout the nation. There is no mouth-piece to voice the grievances of the people. If the Council of Commons be authorized anybody will be able to voice their complaints to it, and such complaints could be sent to the Secretary of the Council of Commons. The reason why there are so many complaints is that we do not meet with our chiefs.¹⁷

In other words, the chiefs were no longer in touch with the people, rather they now worked for their own interests as well as those of the colonial government.

¹¹ See for instance, L.B.B.J. Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions* (London: The MacMillian Press, Ltd. 1990), p.181.

¹² LNA. S3/22/2/4, H.M.D. Tsoene to Chief Tshekedi Khama, April 22, 1930; and LNA. S3/22/2/5, "Lekhotla" (council) for the purpose of looking after the Rights of the Protectorates," in *South African Worker*, July 31, 1929. The aim of the front by the peoples of Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland was to fight against the dreaded issue of incorporation of their respective territories into the Union of South Africa.

¹³ Among the anti-imperialist organizations the Lekhotla la Bafo forged an alliance with were the South African Communist Party and the League Against Imperialism. See for example, LNA. S3/22/2/4, H.M.D. Tsoene to Lord Passfield, May 5, 1930; *Ibid.*, Lekhotla la Bafo's Presidential Address at Mapoteng, Jan.1, 1930; and *Ibid.*, Farmers and the Peasants of the World Unite to Maphutseng Lefela, Feb.2, 1930.

¹⁴ See Stimela J. Jingoos, *A Chief is a Chief by the People: The Autobiography of Stimela Jason Jingoos*, Cape Town, 1975.

¹⁵ George M. Theal, *A Fragment of Basuto History, 1845-1871* (Cape Town: Saul Solomon & Co. 1970), pp.172-75; and S.B. Burman, *The Justice of the Queen's Government: The Cape's Administration of Basutoland 1871-1884* (Cambridge African Studies Center, 1976). This position made the chiefs very unpopular among the people as some of the chiefs chose to defy the government.

¹⁶ Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, pp.ix-xiii.

¹⁷ PRO CO646/3(1920), Basutoland National Council Proceedings (1920),p.17.

Josiel's indictment of the chiefs for their apparent alliance or collaboration with British imperialism so infuriated them that the Paramount Chief, Griffith, wanted to expel him from the National Council.¹⁸ Undaunted by the threat, Josiel wrote an article in *Naledi_ea Lesotho* (Star of Lesotho) accusing the Europeans of a conspiracy to annihilate "the whole black race in South Africa."¹⁹ An enraged Resident Commissioner who had earlier restrained Chief Griffith, did not hesitate this time to expel Josiel from the Council for cultivating racial hatred.²⁰

The Lekhotla la Bafo's attack on both the chiefs and the colonial regime, although for different reasons, did not amuse the authorities who refused it recognition and treated it with hostility.²¹ However, the association re-emphasized the need for its existence because of the difficulties imposed by the colonial rule when it told the High Commissioner that: "Since 1903 this nation was left without being given a way by which it could lay its complaints before the authorities."²² About three years later, in July 1927, the Lekhotla la Bafo once again accused the colonial administration of robbing the chiefs of their "rights and powers" since 1903. It also charged that the authorities were destroying Basotho livestock through dipping and imposing burdensome taxes upon the people under the urging of the missionaries.²³ The adverse mentioning of the missionaries here was in line with the association's belief of a European conspiracy to weaken the chiefs (in part by decimating livestock and introducing taxes) to render the country incapable of with-standing South Africa's territorial ambitions.

Although the Basotho chiefs unjustifiably feared that the Lekhotla la Bafo was attempting to undermine their powers and hated its confrontational attitude toward the colonial authorities,²⁴ the chiefs and the association did agree on some issues. One of these issues revolved around the chiefs' powers particularly when they appeared to be in real danger. This is best illustrated by the colonial regime's introduction of the "New Regulations," in 1927, which clearly sought to further undermine the chiefs' powers. The proposed laws defined the powers and duties of the chiefs, and junior chiefs and headmen who the Resident Commissioner would recognize, and streamlined and set rules for the chiefs' courts.²⁵ Before the new laws reached the National Council for discussion, the Lekhotla la Bafo launched a campaign to defeat them. Ignoring the government²⁶ warning that the association was "unrecognized," and should therefore stop its campaign, the Lekhotla la Bafo held public meetings around the country to denounce the laws. It alleged that Moshoeshoe's request to the British that the Basotho be ruled through their own chiefs was being threatened by the new laws. The association described the laws as "the death knell" against the institution of chieftainship in Lesotho. Accusing the missionaries in the country of colluding with the administration to craft these laws, the Lekhotla la Bafo also linked them to the incorporation of Lesotho into the Union of South Africa. In the association's words, the new measures were for the chiefs'

final political ruin under the pacific methods to bring about the inclusion of Basutoland into the Union Government and this matter is much analogous with the matter of abolition of chieftainship of the [African] chiefs in the Cape Province in 1855 by Sir George Grey.²⁷

¹⁸ PRO CO417/646, Basutoland. Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner, Oct.7, 1920.

¹⁹ LNA. S3/29/7/2, see Josiel Lefela, "How Shall we do Away with Black Race," *Naledi*, Sept.3, 1920.

²⁰ PRO CO417/646, Resident Commissioner to Prince Arthur, Nov.2, 1921.

²¹ LNA. S3/22/2/1, Government Secretary to Assistant Commissioner Berea, Jan.12 1925; and LNA. S3/22/2/3-6, H.M.D Tsoene to the Earl of Athlone, June 27,1925. The Paramount Chief agreed with colonial authorities to deny Lekhotla la Bafo recognition in the mistaken belief that the association aimed at undermining chieftainship. LNA. S3/22/2/2, No. 77/20/7, Paramount Chief Griffith L. Moshoeshoe to the Resident Commissioner, Dec.12, 1924.

²² Ibid., Eleazare W.L.D. Masupha to the Earl of Athlone, Nov.22,1924.

²³ Ibid., E.W.L.D. Masupha Moshoeshoe to Anglican Church of Basutoland, July 2, 1927

²⁴ The unwritten policy of Lesotho chiefs was to avoid antagonizing the Imperial government to give it an excuse to abandon its responsibility of protecting Lesotho, particularly from the South African colonists' attempts to incorporate the territory. Unless troubling issues were brought before the National Council for debate, the Basotho chiefs were content with quiet diplomacy. See for example, Jacottet's revealing letter: Morija Archives, Lesotho (MA). Morija, Eduardo Jacottet to Sir Charles Dilke, House of Commons, Mar.6, 1909.

²⁵ Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, p.180. These measures were supported by the elite missionary backed and arch-rival of the Lekhotla la Bafo, the Basutoland Progressive Association.

²⁶ LNA. S3/22/2/2, E.W.L.D. Masupha to Assistant Commissioner of Berea forwarded to Government Secretary, suggesting that the Lekhotla la Bafo be charged with an attempt to "overthrow the State;" and Ibid., *South African Worker*, Nov.30, 1928. The colonial authorities finally backed down having read the mood of the Basotho in general. See Ibid., Government Secretary's circulars to all Assistant Commissioners, Sept.28 and Dec.24, 1928.

²⁷ Ibid., Lekhotla la Bafo's Presidential Address at Matsieng, Dec.26, 1928, p.14.

It was not uncommon for the Lekhotla la Bafo to link all the problems of colonial overrule in Lesotho to the issue of incorporation. Thus as part of its campaign strategy against the proposed laws, the association also accused the colonial officials of introducing the “poisonous dip” to deplete Basotho livestock, and of imposing various taxes (which as tax collectors corrupted the chiefs), with the intention of weakening the country to incorporate it into the Union.²⁸ Therefore, the Lekhotla la Bafo appealed to all Basotho to unite and defend their chieftainship by rejecting the laws.²⁹

Then early in 1929, in its crusade against the planned laws, the Lekhotla la Bafo invited the radical or so-called “communist” Josiah Gumede of South Africa’s African National Congress to its meetings. As it was, Gumede never made it to Lesotho; the colonial authorities there were ready to serve him with an expulsion order “immediately” when he arrived.³⁰ Moreover, as Albert Nzula of the South African Communist Party told the Lekhotla la Bafo meeting, Gumede would not allow himself to be arrested in a foreign territory, including Lesotho. On the other hand, to avoid taking any chances the association had already sent their petitions to Gumede to present before the imperial officials upon his planned visit to England. The Gumede affair so frightened the colonial officials that the High Commissioner asked to be fully informed about the association’s contacts “with agitators outside the territory who have advocated ‘communistic’ or other undesirable political activities;”³¹ indeed the Resident Commissioner desperately tried to discourage Chief Griffith from the “idea of entrusting a man from the Union who is not Mosuto, the task of representing the nation,”³² as Lekhotla la Bafo was advocating.

The Lekhotla la Bafo’s opposition to the new laws was relentless. Time and again the association revisited the abolition of the *Pitso* in 1903 by the colonial regime to distance the chiefs from the people, and destroy the nation which violated Moshoeshoe’s request for protection, and accused the authorities of “treachery and betrayal.”³³ By linking the impending laws to the existence of chieftainship as well as to the dreaded issue of incorporation, and going around the country challenging the chiefs’ silence on these important national issues, the Lekhotla la Bafo put the chiefs on the spot. Thus in October 1929, when the new laws came up to the National Council for deliberation, they were overwhelmingly rejected.³⁴ It was a remarkable achievement for the association, although these laws were modified and reintroduced in 1938.

²⁸ Ibid., pp.17-19.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.20-31. The Association also pledged to inform among other organizations, the League Against Imperialism, United Negro Improvement Association of Marcus Garvey, and the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society, about the oppressive policies of the colonial administration in Lesotho.

³⁰ LNA. S3/22/2/3, circular No. 3/1929 by Staff Officer to All Police Officers, “Gumede and the Lekhotla la Bafo,” Feb.23, 1929; and Ibid. Cpl. Malahleha No. 274 of Basutoland Mounted Police, Report of th Lekhotla la Bafo Meetings May 24-26, 1929. Gumede was scheduled to travel to England to lobby against South Africa’s racial policies and so the Lekhotla la Bafo wanted him to represent the association’s grievances as well, including the revival of incorporation issue. Curiously, according to the report Nzula disapproved of the association’s tactics as disrespectful to the authorities and advised them to find better ways of putting their grievances forward. In effect he was prescribing the same strategies and tactics he and his colleagues were utilizing in South Africa. And more like the colonial officials in Lesotho had done earlier (see footnote 32), although for different reasons, Nzula advised the Lekhotla la Bafo that Gumede was not the right person to represent Basotho grievances to the British government as there was no knowing whether he himself might advocate for the incorporation of Lesotho.

³¹ Ibid., Confidential No.463, The Earl of Athlone to Resident Commissioner, Mar.15,

³² Ibid., Resident Commissioner to Paramount Chief Griffith, April 19, 1929

³³ LNA. S3/22/2/4, The Lekhotla la Bafo’s Presidential Address, Oct.13, 1929, pp.1-9. Also see Scott Rosengerg, “Monuments, Holidays, and Remembering Moshoeshoe: The Emergence of National Identity in Lesotho, 1902-1966,” *Africa Today* V. 46, No. 1 (Winter 1999), pp.53-70. Passim. Rosenberg discusses that in its opposition to incorporation the Lekhotla la Bafo also used Basotho historical symbols such as Lesotho’s founder, Moshoeshoe I, and Thaba Bosiu at which the nation was born, thereby contributing to the creation of Lesotho identity and nationalism.

³⁴ Ibid., H.M.D Tsoene to Paramount Chief Griffith, Jan.7, 1930. These laws were reintroduced by the colonial authorities in 1938 which reduced the number of chiefs in Lesotho, and gave the Resident Commissioner powers to determine the appointment of the chiefs. See for example, Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, p.128. It is evident that around this period the colonial officials and Paramount Chief Griffith were jointly working to destroy the Lekhotla la Bafo by disrupting its meetings and threatening to arrest its members. See for example, PRO DO119/1108, Rabase M. Sekike to the High Commissioner, Nov.28, 1938. Sekike was the acting President of the association.

By defeating these planned laws, one can also argue that the chiefs were in agreement with the Lekhotla la Bafo concerning their powers. However, they did not wish to be in the forefront in denouncing these laws lest they fall out of favor with the colonial authorities. The chiefs' approach had always been that Lesotho's interests of autonomy would be secured through cooperation rather than confrontation with the authorities. This is why when the association sent its delegates to Paramount Chief Griffith soon after the rejection of the laws, the chief was quick to distance himself. As he wrote to the Resident Commissioner early in 1930, the Lekhotla la Bafo was trying "to implicate" him in the fate of the new laws, that he had no knowledge of the administration curtailing his powers, or "I would have put forward my complaint to you."³⁵

Since they shared the same fears, the Lekhotla la Bafo was in a sense the chiefs' point man on the future of chieftainship in Lesotho, as well as on the issue of the incorporation of the country into the Union of South Africa. Indeed it is possible that the Lekhotla la Bafo enjoyed the chiefs' tacit support on these two issues so long as the association did not appear to openly criticize them. Unfortunately for the association, the chiefs overreacted to its criticism of their conduct as the Lekhotla la Bafo was interested in a strong responsive chieftainship that would ensure Lesotho's autonomy. The association's attack on the chiefs was also an indirect indictment of colonial rule in Lesotho. It was the colonial policies that threatened the chiefs' powers and therefore the entire nation.

The Conduct and Policies of the Europeans

The creation of the Lekhotla la Bafo was the direct consequence of the oppressive conditions resulting from the Europeans' presence in Lesotho. As an antithesis of the existing colonial situation, the association devoted much energy to criticizing the British colonial policies and the conduct of Europeans in Lesotho in general. Broadly speaking, the Europeans fell into three categories namely, the administrators or government officials, the missionaries, and the traders, all of whom the Lekhotla la Bafo treated as non-antagonistic conspirators. As the association's leader Josiel Lefela cautioned the Basotho: "The missionaries are the thin end of the wedge, the traders are the body of the wedge and the Government is the head of the wedge that splits the tribes."³⁶ This was a valid observation as many parts of Africa including East and Central Africa were colonized in that order. Having correctly identified the enemy, Lefela and his comrades began to attack the conduct and policies of the individual European groups. This brunt fell heaviest on the government officials particularly those based in Lesotho. For strategic reasons the Lekhotla la Bafo was careful not to antagonize the imperial officials in the metropole because they served an important purpose -- that of protecting Basotho from the more dreadful South African peripheral imperialism.³⁷ Thus, the association assailed the colonial administration's discriminatory policy which favored European over Basotho traders regarding issuance of trade licenses. It also called for reduction of the various taxes in Lesotho which discriminated and placed an undue burden on the Basotho. The Lekhotla la Bafo was to revisit these two issues of trade licenses and taxes time and again for they represented the continued oppression and exploitation of the Basotho for the benefit of the Europeans.

Thus in 1927, the association touched on the sensitive issue of land in Lesotho³⁸ by alleging that European traders were colluding with certain chiefs to lease large areas of Basotho land to graze their cattle. The colonial regime reacted swiftly in its investigation and the allegation was disapproved.³⁹

³⁵ LNA. S3/22/2/4, Paramount Chief Griffith L. Moshoeshe to Resident Commissioner, Jan.11, 1930

³⁶ PRO CO417/665 (1921), Confidential, "Objectionable Articles and Letters in Native Newspaper 'Naledi,' " Dec. 1921 (see Josiel Lefela's letter of December).

³⁷ This was the general attitude among the Basotho in their attempt to avoid incorporation. But readers must also be reminded of the fact that the struggle against South African colonialism was the responsibility of the Basotho themselves, who constantly reminded Great Britain to honor its long-term pledges of protecting Lesotho. More about this argument, see Reuben O. Mekenye, "The African Struggle Against South African Periphery Imperialism, 1902-1966: The Case of Lesotho," Ph.D Thesis, UCLA (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Company, 1996).

³⁸ Land had always been a sensitive issue in Lesotho since the 1860s wars when the Basotho lost much of their territory to the Boers of the Orange Free State in South Africa. Thus because of African objections the framers of the Schedule of the South Africa Act were careful to clearly indicate that land in Lesotho was for the exclusive use of Basotho alone. See Schedule of the Act in *Ibid.*, p.637.

³⁹ LNA. S3/22/2/2, The Earl of Athlone to Resident Commissioner J.C.R. Sturrock, Nov.26, 1927.

It is not at all clear why the Lekhotla la Bafo raised this issue if it was untrue. Leasing large tracts of land by the traders would have clearly contravened the section of the Schedule of the South Africa Act which limited land-use in Lesotho to the Basotho only. Yet, it is possible that there was some sort of unwritten arrangement between chiefs and traders which allowed the latter to pasture their cattle.

In an attack aimed at both the imperial officials and the missionaries, the Lekhotla la_Bafo also raised the important issue of education. The association accused Great Britain and by extension, the missionaries who dominated the education system in Lesotho, of offering the Basotho an inferior education. It was an education, charged the Lekhotla la_Bafo, which “simply aims at making them the brewers of wood and drawers of water for the European people”⁴⁰ Often functional education, one that prevented competition between Europeans and Africans, was the reality of the colonial set-up-in much of Africa. But the association did a good job of publicizing this problem in Lesotho, thereby elevating people’s consciousness on the issue.

Racial discrimination in Lesotho, in all forms, remained uppermost in the Lekhotla_la Bafo’s anti-imperialist stance. The association’s leaders rarely feared to take the colonial officials head on. For example, in 1929, M.D. Tsoene opposed the high-handedness of J.H. Sims who had imprisoned and fined many Basotho, including chiefs. In his letter to the Resident Commissioner of Lesotho, Tsoene likened the Leribe Assistant Commissioner to “a blood thirsty hound without no parallel in cruelty wishing to lick up the blood of the poor Basuto”⁴¹ Tsoene also appealed to the British High Commissioner to South Africa for the release of Reverend Coillard Monathi, a Mosotho who had been jailed for selling medications, when in fact the European missionaries were freely allowed to sell such medications.⁴² And late that year, at “The League of African Rights” meeting in Johannesburg, a Lekhotla la Bafo representative reportedly told the audience that the treatment of Africans in Lesotho was similar to that in South Africa.⁴³

The Lekhotla la Bafo’s indictment of the agents of imperialism in Lesotho persisted throughout the 1930s. To the alarm of the authorities, the association became extremely defiant in its activities. For instance in 1930, it threatened civil disobedience to protest “all dipping regulations”⁴⁴ (see footnote 75) and against the increasing European presence in Lesotho, because both events threatened the country’s existence.⁴⁵ The point was that through dipping the country would be impoverished and weakened by wiping out Basotho livestock, while a large European settlement in Lesotho would strengthen their position against the Basotho. Consequently, Lesotho would be rendered vulnerable to incorporation into South Africa. Obviously the association was wrong on the dipping issue from the health standpoint, but was right regarding increased European presence in Lesotho.

At the same time, the association also decried the increasing and often arbitrary colonial policies in Lesotho. In challenging these policies, the Lekhotla la Bafo pointed out the imprisonment of Chief Hlajoane S. Lesaoana for selling his own gun without a permit. The association properly wondered why such a measure was not applied to the Boers who had fought the British in both the South African War and in the First World War.⁴⁶ It also rejected the hearing of Chief Hlajoane’s case by Patrick Duncan because, he “. . . belongs to the Union Government which aims at breaking down the conditions under which Basutoland came under the British protection and will therefore not be fair with the chief.”⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Ibid., E.W.L.D. Masupha to J.C.R. Sturrock, July 2, 1927

⁴¹ LNA. S3/22/2/4, H.M.D Tsoene to Resident Commissioner, Nov.7, 1929

⁴² Ibid., H.M.D Tsoene to High Commissioner, Nov.10, 1929

⁴³ Ibid., Confidential, R.S. Mitchell, Senior Inspector for Divisional C.I. Officer, Witwatersrand Division to Deputy Commissioner of South African Police, Witwatersrand Division, Dec.17, 1929. This report would only have benefitted the South African officials who often felt that the British Administration of Lesotho was far too liberal. It is therefore fairly objective. The statement attributed to Lekhotla la Bafo’s representative only tried to underline the association’s resentment of British colonialism in Lesotho rather than equating the British with South African policies regarding Africans. After all there were very few Europeans living in Lesotho.

⁴⁴ LNA. S3/22/2/4, Maphutseng Lefela, “South African Imperialism: A Menace to Basutoland,” *South African Worker*, Sept.30,1929.

⁴⁵ LNA. S3/20/1/1, Proceedings of the Basutoland National Council, Sept.13, 1922, pp.-17.

⁴⁶ LNA. S3/22/2/5, H.M.D Tsoene to Principal Secretary of State for Colonies, June, 24 1930; and Ibid., Notes of the proceedings of the Lekhotla la Bafo meeting, Sept.7, 1930.

⁴⁷ Ibid., H.M.D Tsoene to the Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies July 17, 1930; and Ibid., H.M.D Tsoene to Paramount Chief Griffith, July 15, 1930.

That suspicion against South African born Europeans in Lesotho was common among the Basotho, including the chiefs, given past experiences and the incorporation issue.

The Lekhotla la Bafo also challenged proclamations Nos. 31 and 32 of 1929 by which J.H. Sims (with the permission of the Resident Commissioner) made Basotho residing within five miles of the border obey the laws of the Union government. In particular, by those laws the Leribe Assistant Commissioner prevented the Basotho from preparing traditional beer, because they were “making noise” and bothering the Europeans across the border in South Africa after drinking. The Lekhotla la Bafo warned that these actions violated the rights of the Basotho and could result in a “national trouble” unless Sims was recalled. The association linked Sims’ policies to those of Major Warden in the 1850s, which policies caused the Basotho-Boer wars and the eventual loss of much land by Lesotho.⁴⁸ The implication here was that Sims was colluding with South African officials to incorporate Lesotho. Whichever way one looks at it, this kind of accusations presented a real dilemma for the colonial officials exactly on how to handle them given the sensitivity involved.

By August 1930, when Josiel Lefela delivered a blistering presidential address against the colonial authorities,⁴⁹ the officials were ready to silence the Lekhotla la Bafo. The High Commissioner personally sought the permission of the Secretary of State to emasculate the association. He observed that:

. . . failure to take action against agitators whose unchecked utterances tend to bring officers of the government into contempt has harmful effect on the authority of the government and its officials.⁵⁰

Although the Secretary of State obliged, he was concerned that the law might infringe upon the “freedom of speech” and therefore asked to be informed about every step of its enforcement. The law became the Basutoland Public Gatherings Regulation Proclamation 19 of 1930 and effectively made it seditious any action that would cause “hatred or contempt” for the government, cause “disaffection,” or seek to cause change unlawfully in Lesotho. Any violators risked up to a six-month prison sentence.⁵¹ Aware of this consequence, the Lekhotla la Bafo cautioned its members to be “peaceful” and not “to preach sedition” at its gatherings. But in a show of defiance the association also asked the people to castigate the chiefs for surrendering their powers to the colonial regime “without consulting” the nation, and for being inaccessible. Finally, it asked the people to institute legal action against the unjust colonial laws. Unfortunately for the Lekhotla la Bafo, the colonial authorities never permitted it to collect funds which would have clearly given the association more teeth.⁵²

It is evident that the Lekhotla la Bafo was not cowed by the colonial law against it. Its leaders continued to criticize the colonial officials in Lesotho, and the authorities were clearly threatened by the association’s rising popularity. Thus in 1931 when Josiel Lefela openly clashed with the Berea Assistant Commissioner, Captain How, in the latter’s office, it was just a matter of time before the authorities would take further measures against the association’s leaders. Josiel had accused How of bias against the Basotho in seeking justice, because he refused to advise him of the Notice for Prevention of Scab No.18 of 1932 to enable Josiel to sue the Dip Inspector for wrongful death of his flock.⁵³ Again, Josiel angered the authorities when he called for the expulsion of Europeans from Lesotho because he feared that the continued allocation of sites to the missionaries and traders would lead to the Basotho’s loss of their land. In his words: “We must therefore do all in our power to expel these thieves of our rights, or die and go to gaol in the attempt.”⁵⁴

⁴⁸ Ibid., H.M.D Tsoene to the Principal Secretary of State for the Colonies July 5, 1930; and Ibid., H.M.D Tsoene to Paramount Chief Griffith, July 15, 1930.

⁴⁹ Ibid., Josiel Lefela’s Presidential Address of the Lekhotla la Bafo, Leribe, Aug.2, 1930

⁵⁰ Ibid., Confidential No.418, The Earl Of Athlone to J.H. Thomas, Secretary of State to the Dominions, Aug.13, 1930.

⁵¹ Ibid., see copy of Proclamation 19 of 1930

⁵² LNA. S3/22/2/6, Lekhotla la Bafo. A letter of instruction to Delegates, Dec.22, 1930; LNA S3/22/2/3, Resident Commissioner to Hon. B.E.H. Clifford Sept. 28, 1928; and Ibid, H.M.D. Tsoene to Secretary of State for Colonies, Oct. 13, 1928. Finances were a real handicap for the association and the colonial administration ensured that by asking the chiefs to discourage their people from giving any donations to Lekhotla la Bafo.

⁵³ Ibid., Josiel Lefela to Resident Commissioner, Feb.12, 1931.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Report of Lekhotla la Bafo’s meeting at Hlotse on Feb.22 (prepared by Leribe police officer, P.K. Khrehloa on February 23, 1931, pp.7-8.

The response of the embattled Leribe Assistant Commissioner Sims, was to recommend that these “Seditious and alarmist statements made by Josiel Lefela and others should in my opinion be put a stop as there is no knowing what effect they may ultimately have on the younger generation.”⁵⁵

Sims’ observation was not without merit. By February 1931 there was evidence of the Lekhotla la Bafo’s increasing support across the border in South Africa. Thomas R. Lerotha, a self-declared secretary of the association in Johannesburg, and seventy-five other signatories, sought governmental permission to protect from police harassment the Lekhotla la Bafo delegates when they arrived to open a branch in the city.⁵⁶ But the real purpose of traveling to Johannesburg by the delegates who included Josiel, was to meet representatives of Botswana and Swaziland with a view to forming an Association of the Protectorates to oppose incorporation.⁵⁷

The Lekhotla la Bafo’s growing visibility was also demonstrated by its April meeting at which between 200-300 people (including some chiefs) attended. This meeting recognized the need for unity, particularly with Independent Basotho Churches, to fight “European domination” and mounting Basotho debts owed to European traders. According to Josiel, those debts were a government ploy to firmly occupy Lesotho should the people fail to pay them. He recalled that when the heavily indebted Paramount Chief Letsie II died, a tax was imposed to pay his debts.⁵⁸ Although the reality here was that Lesotho was already under colonial rule, it was the firm belief of the Lekhotla la Bafo’s leaders based on the history, that Lesotho was a protected and not a colonized country.⁵⁹

In spite of the fact that Josiel had been threatened with deportation,⁶⁰ the association appears to have ignored the sedition law altogether. Once more J.H. Sims warned:

The speeches appeared to be taking on a more revolutionary character and it will be necessary in my opinion to take steps to deal with this organization before it becomes a menace to the Territory.⁶¹

Sims’ advice was taken as now the colonial authorities described the association as comprising of “malcontents” of “no standing” whose secret aim was the “overthrow of the chiefs.”⁶² Obviously that was a deliberate lie to use the chiefs to destroy the association. It is already clear that the Lekhotla la Bafo had a strong record of defending chieftainship. Now, the authorities started charging the association’s members with various violations, including violation of the Scab Regulations, and incarcerating them for months.⁶³

The colonial administration’s harassment of the Lekhotla la Bafo’s leadership, including advising the Paramount Chief to impose restrictions on it, did not deter its surging popularity in the late 1930s. Thus in February 1940, the Resident Commissioner, E.C. Richards, directed that the association’s activities be carefully watched with a view to providing information to ban it. That opportunity arose in 1941 when the Lekhotla la Bafo encouraged resistance to war recruitment unless the Basotho soldiers were trained and armed.⁶⁴ Then Josiel Lefela alleged that Basotho soldiers would be tortured and brutalized by their Afrikaner commanders while abroad, whose eventual plans was to turn Lesotho into European “farms.” Under war-time emergency regulations, Josiel and two others were charged with sedition in September 1942 and jailed for two months, with Josiel serving at least one year. The association’s activities were banned for the entire war period.⁶⁵

⁵⁵ Ibid., No.24/30/3, J.H. Sims to Government Secretary, Mar. 21, 1931. Sims was accused of applying the laws arbitrarily and without consulting the National Council. See for example H.M.D Tsoene to the Principal Secretary of State of Colonies, Mar.4, 1931.

⁵⁶ Ibid., Thomas A. Lerotha (Secretary of the Lekhotla la Bafo in Johannesburg) to Director of Native Labor, Feb.5, 1931.

⁵⁷ Ibid., H.M.D Tsoene to High Commissioner, July 4, 1931

⁵⁸ Ibid., report of the Lekhotla la Bafo’s meeting at Chief Matoli Khethisa’s on April 3-4, 1931. The report was prepared by Private Robert Khrehloa on April 7.

⁵⁹ Ibid., H.M.D Tsoene to Sir Herbert Stanley, May 7, 1931

⁶⁰ Ibid., H.M.D Tsoene to Sir Herbert Stanley, April 18, 1931

⁶¹ Ibid., see No.24/30/3, J.H. Sims to the Government Secretary, April 14, 1931

⁶² Ibid., Confidential, Report by L. Clement, Inspector, Basutoland Mounted Police, July 1931.

⁶³ Ibid., J.H. Sims to Government Secretary Sept.1, 1931 explaining Lebina Hlakane’s imprisonment. In fact by the Late 1930s, it was clear that the Paramount Chief himself was colluding with colonial authorities to destroy the Lekhotla la Bafo. See for example PRO DO119/1108, Rebase M. Sekike to High Commissioner, Nov.28, 1938 alleging that indeed that was the case.

⁶⁴ Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, pp. 174-76.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp.30-32.

Yet, Josiel was not intimidated by his confinement. In May 1945, he was urging the Basotho to unite and demand a reinstatement of their rights through the newly established United Nations. He counseled unity with Africans in South Africa and also the Indians who had demonstrated action in demanding their rights in India. The Lekhotla la_Bafo also saluted the South African communists for pressing for the release of its leaders.⁶⁶ And in June 1946, the Association's Vice-President, Rabase Sekike, appealed to the United Nations for its unbanning.⁶⁷ Britain promptly lifted the ban to avoid censorship from the other United Nations members.⁶⁸

Therefore after the Second World War, the Lekhotla la Bafo returned to its long time claim of the British restoration of Basotho rights. Its leaders were also aware that there must be guarantees from Great Britain and the world assembly against South Africa's territorial ambitions regarding Lesotho. By making such a claim, clearly the association was far ahead of the other reformist and gradualist organizations in Lesotho namely, the National Council and the Progressive Association. The latter two organizations, although at loggerheads over the chiefs' cautious position regarding reforms within the political system and the economy, were both opposed to the radicalism of Lekhotla la Bafo (see footnote 2). The Lekhotla la Bafo's demand was more in tune with the emerging new nationalism against imperialism around the world.

Aware of that surging nationalism by the oppressed around the world and the need to manage it, the Labor government in Britain expanded communication avenues in its colonies which in Lesotho resulted in the creation of district councils in 1946. The councils were to elect two representatives each and this allowed greater commoner participation in the National Council. The Lekhotla la Bafo performed impressively with Josiel rejoining the National Council for the first time since 1921.⁶⁹ But he again fell afoul of the colonial administration's machinations to silence him during a mysterious fire at Roma's Catholic College on August 30, 1947. Josiel and other association members were implicated and arrested, but released in August 1948, for lack of evidence.⁷⁰

Nonetheless, the Lekhotla la Bafo persisted in its battle against the oppressive conduct and the policies of the colonial regime in Lesotho. For example, in April 1948, Sekike wrote the Soviet representative to the United Nations, to represent the Basotho's case against the various colonial laws aimed at colonizing the entire country by allowing the Europeans to take over the land.⁷¹ He insisted that Lesotho was a Protectorate and not a Crown Colony for a colony was one that was open to permanent European settlement.⁷²

It should be recalled that increased and permanent European settlement in Lesotho was generally interpreted by the Basotho as a means of opening up the country for its inclusion in South Africa. Occupation of the Basotho land weakened the authority of the chiefs as keepers of the land and Basotho nationhood. The issue of incorporation was particularly an emotional thing in Lesotho and the Lekhotla la Bafo vehemently opposed any attempt by the colonial authorities that suggested otherwise. Perhaps it was this particular issue, one to which Lekhotla la Bafo linked both the eroding powers of the chiefs and the harmful colonial policies, which established the association as the leading opponent of imperialism in Lesotho.

The Issue of Incorporation

The Basotho fear of the incorporation of their territory into the Union of South Africa was well founded. From the 1902 Vereeniging (Union) Treaty between the Dutch and British colonists ending the South African War to the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, the Basotho strongly opposed their inclusion in the Union.⁷³

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp.176-78.

⁶⁷ PRO DO35/1177/Y832/3, Rabase Sekike to Trygve Lie, U.N.O. Secretary General, June 2, 1946.

⁶⁸ Ibid., B.B.S Telegram No.226, High Commissioner to Dominions Office, Oct.26, 1946.

⁶⁹ Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, pp.32-34.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.36; and document 48, July 25, 1948, appealing to U.N.O. Secretary General that the Case was a frame-up to destroy the Lekhotla la Bafo. The general attitude of the colonial officials towards the association since its inception clearly confirms Lekhotla la Bafo's allegations.

⁷¹ Ibid., pp.173-4.

⁷² Ibid., pp.184-86.

⁷³ See for example, PRO CO417/455, Confidential, No.897, Lord Selborne to The Earl of Crewe, June 1, 1908 (see Enclosure 1, Paramount Chief Letsie L. Moshoeshe to the Resident Commissioner, May 12, 1908); and PRO CO417/468, Petition by the Paramount Chief of Basutoland with the other chiefs and people of the Basuto nation to His Majesty King Edward, etc.,

Consequently the incorporation of Lesotho, along with Botswana and Swaziland, was indefinitely postponed. However, because of the frequent broaching of the issue by the South African government officials, various discussions were held between the British and the South African officials as to when and how Lesotho and the other territories would be incorporated.⁷⁴ Thus, incorporation became a central issue in Lesotho national politics until 1966.

If the Basotho chiefs employed quiet diplomacy and sent delegations and petitions to England to avoid incorporation, the Lekhotla la Bafo was the most outspoken, passionate and fiercest critic of the colonial officials on this issue. The association linked almost all the colonial policies and actions to incorporation. We have seen that it interpreted the 1929 abortive laws and dipping of Basotho livestock as an attempt to weaken Lesotho and incorporate it. Dipping was part of the colonial administration's campaign (since 1923) to eliminate the scab disease.⁷⁵ The Lekhotla la Bafo's interpretation of these events might seem farfetched, but because the scab campaign also involved zoning of areas, even the Basotho chiefs questioned whether this was not a ploy to incorporate them.⁷⁶

Further, whether for strategic and tactical reasons or because it was so convinced, the Lekhotla la Bafo treated the imposition of taxes, missionary activities, colonial laws and the appointment of South African-born European officials in Lesotho as an attempt to incorporate the Basotho territory. For example, in October 1929, the association opposed (although unsuccessfully) the appointment of the South African, Patrick Duncan, as the Judicial Commissioner to preside over appeal cases in Lesotho. As the association proclaimed:

. . . we cannot say anything but declare and announce in an [sic] mistakable terms that we like Mr. Duncan as our enemy in the Union Government, whose efforts are to dispossess us our country and enslave us to incorporate our country in the Union government, but we do not like him to have any official connection with us in our country . . .⁷⁷

Again, this view regarding the presence of South African-born officials in Lesotho was not limited to the Lekhotla la Bafo; the Basotho chiefs were equally opposed to the idea for similar reasons. A case in point is when Paramount Chieftainess Mantsebo Seeiso, in September 1944, petitioned the British King against the appointment of South African nationals in Lesotho. In her words, "we are afraid of them . . . and all those already stationed in our country be transferred to the other territories."⁷⁸

Perhaps what distinguished the Lekhotla la Bafo in its opposition to South Africa's peripheral imperialism was its strategies of broadening the struggle beyond Lesotho's borders. Regionally, the association adopted a Pan-Southern African stance by calling for a united front among the peoples of Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland (jointly known as the protectorates), as well as involving the Africans of South Africa, against incorporation. Thus in 1926 the association saluted chief Sobhuza of Swaziland's courage to sue Allister Miller,⁷⁹ and urged him and his counterpart chiefs of Lesotho and Botswana to convene a conference.

etc. (Dec. 1908), an enclosure. Lord Selborne and the Swazi, as well as the oppressed in South Africa, too, opposed incorporation. See Mkenye, "The African Struggle Against South African Periphery Imperialism."

⁷⁴ For example, see Great Britain, *Basutoland, The Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland* [Cmd. 8707].

⁷⁵ South Africa. Department of Agriculture, *Handbook for Farmers in South Africa*, 2nd edn. (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1929), pp.250-52. Scab is a contagious disease caused by a mite of the *acarus* genus which causes dryness of the skin particularly in sheep, leading to loss of wool, emaciation, or even death of the animal.

⁷⁶ PRO CO417/696 (1923) Basutoland. No.15, Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner, June 19, 1923, p.1. The Resident Commissioner indicated that Paramount Chief Griffith himself had "shown considerable hostility to the demarcation of a zone" to carry out the campaign.

⁷⁷ LNA. S3/22/2/4, the Lekhotla la Bafo Presidential Address, Oct.13, 1929, p.11.

⁷⁸ PRO DO 35/411/Y3455/1, Secret. Paramount 'Mantsebo Seeiso to the King of England, Sept.5,1949. The Basotho fear resulted from the British government's stated policy of approximation i.e., close collaboration between South Africa and Lesotho, including Botswana and Swaziland, in various fields to pave way for incorporation. See Great Britain, *H.C.T. in South Africa: Aide Memoire Handed to the P.M. of the Union by the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs on 15 May 1935*. [Cmd. 4948] (London: H.M.S.O., 1935).

⁷⁹ The case involved land Miller acquired in 1921 from the Swaziland Corporation Ltd. This Swazi land originally belonged to Miller's father-in-law which the latter gained through a concession in 1889 in the reign of Swaziland's King Mbandzeni. The conflict is that Miller had also been the counselor to the ailing Mbandzeni. See Hilda Kuper, *Sobhuza II: Ngwenyama and King of Swaziland* (London: Gerald Duckworth and Co. 1978), pp.85-88.

At this conference, wrote the Lekhotla la Bafo, “the Protectorates would consider together the matter which affected them in common so that these protectorates may be able to voice their views before the Imperial government . . .” This conference should form a body styled “the Joint Association of the Protectorates” that would handle the territories’ common problems.⁸⁰

Of course, the common problem of the three territories was the prospect of incorporation that they all faced. It should be noted that the Lekhotla la Bafo made this proposition about one year after the South African Prime Minister, James Herzog, called for the incorporation of the territories.⁸¹ Such South African demands usually elicited strong reactions from the affected Africans.

Certainly the colonial authorities would not entertain the idea of an association of the protectorates, but the Lekhotla la Bafo revisited the issue in 1929, when the association decided that it would publicize its case to all the newspapers throughout the world “and to the societies which are fighting for freedom and rights of down-trodden people who live in slavery.”⁸² The association continued to discuss this idea of a joint association at many of its meetings and contacted the Batswana and Swazi chiefs. For example in April 1930, the association urged Chief Tshekedi Khama of the Bamangwato (in Botswana) to support such an association of the protectorates because:

. . . it would be our folly to let our countries slip out of our control while England has given us sound pledges for the protection and it is up to us to stand up and organize our people . . . to voice our protest against the incorporation of our respective countries into the Union Government so that we may remain under the permanent protection of England.⁸³

Internationally, the association wrote lengthy petitions and letters to the various foreign governments and organizations to expose Britain’s misrule of Lesotho, particularly regarding incorporation. Besides England itself, the Lekhotla la Bafo wrote to among other governments, France, Japan and the United States. For example in the letter to French Prime Minister, Mr. Tardien, the association accused England of attempting to flout its own pledges against the incorporation of Lesotho as embodied in the Schedule of the Act. As H.M.D. Tsoene penned for the association:

We wish to learn whether it is compatible with the civilized international laws of civilized Christian nations to violate pledges accorded by powerful nations for the protections of small and weak nations to hand them to the mercy of the crushing hands of those very Governments against whom protection was sought and secured under conditions and pledges.⁸⁴

We have also seen that the Lekhotla la Bafo also informed various world organizations about the British colonial policies and South African territorial ambitions regarding Lesotho. These organizations included the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society of England, missionary groups throughout Europe, the Non-Cooperation Movement of India, the United Negro Improvement Association of Marcus Garvey, the Communist Party International, and the League Against Imperialism (see footnote 66) . Indeed by the late 1920s the association had formally joined the League Against Imperialism.⁸⁵

⁸⁰LNA. S3/22/2/2, E.W.L.D. Masupha to Paramount Chief Sobhuza saying that the Lekhotla la Bafo had similarly written to chief Khama of Botswana and the Paramount Chief of Lesotho regarding the proposal.

⁸¹See PRO CO417/713, South Africa. The Earl of Athlone to L.S. Amery, Feb.3,1925.

⁸²LNA. S3/22/2/5, “Lekhotla la Bafo has planned that there should be established a ‘Lekhotla’(council) for the purpose of looking after the Rights of the Protectorates,” *South African Worker*, July 31,1929; also LNA. S3/22/2/3, E.W.L.D. Masupha to The Earl of Athlone, April 9, 1929.

⁸³LNA. S3/22/2/4, H.M.D. Tsoene to Chief Tshekedi Khama, April 22,1930, it is significant that Khama himself had recently traveled to England to oppose the mineral prospectors whose increasing activities in Botswana threatened the territory’s autonomy. See Mary Benson, *Tshekedi Khama* (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), pp.66-80. Lekhotla_la Bafo was probably seeking to exploit the tension in Botswana to realize its proposed joint association.

⁸⁴LNA. S3/22/2/4, H.M.D. Tsoene to Prime Minister of France, Mr Tardien, April 1, 1930.

⁸⁵Ibid., Lekhotla la Bafo’s Presidential Address at Maphutseng, Jan.1, 1930. As Maphutseng Lefela explained: “by this affiliation we shall be able to entrust to our members who are in the Union Government to such organizations as the Communist Party which looks after the interests of the worker so that with its help we may be able to disseminate the truth throughout the world and cooperate in our defense measures.” See Ibid., Maphutseng Lefela, “South African Imperialism: A Menace to Basutoland,” *South Africa Worker*, Sept.30, 1929.

This, together with the association's collaboration with the Communist Party of South Africa and radical individuals across the border, caused a lot of concern among the colonial officials in Lesotho. One official went as far as calling for the "recognition" of the Lekhotla la Bafo in order to tame it because as he acknowledged:

it is true that the Society actually represents a small portion of native opinion but, at the same time, it is actually causing a good deal of trouble and it is in touch with undesirable elements outside of our borders and if we do nothing, it is possible it may grow.⁸⁶

Locally and internationally, the association also appealed for the separation of the offices of the British Governor-General and that of the High Commissioner to South Africa, who was also responsible for the affairs of Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland. The Lekhotla la Bafo's basic argument was that by holding both positions and by staying in South Africa, the High Commissioner would be influenced by the South African government to enact "repressive and oppressive" laws and agree to incorporation.⁸⁷ But for the lack of records, it would be useful to know how the association responded to the uncertainty which faced Lesotho and the other two territories in the 1930s. This period did not only see the elimination of the limited black franchise in South Africa, but also concerted imperial and South African negotiations affecting incorporation.⁸⁸ Yet, one cannot doubt the association's stand on both British imperial policies and South Africa's territorial claims. The Lekhotla la Bafo was a distinguished enemy of both. And, in spite of the restrictions imposed upon it and constant harassment by the colonial authorities, the association continued to oppose imperialism in Lesotho which in effect significantly contributed to the country's nationalist politics and independence. In fact, the issue of incorporation and the future status of Lesotho were inextricably linked. In this regard, the association's continued opposition to incorporation represented nationalist sentiments in Lesotho which would galvanize into a bid for independence in post-Second World War period.

As I already discussed, the Lekhotla la Bafo's activities were banned for the entire duration of the Second World War. Then after the war in 1945, the association began to press for the restoration of the Basotho rights, which actually meant the independence of Lesotho. By so doing, and in the light of its earlier activities, the association elaborated on the powerful argument against incorporation and for independence. Adding the newly formed United Nations Organization to its list of the many contacts around the world, the Lekhotla la Bafo demanded not the granting, but the "restoration" of Lesotho's independence.⁸⁹ Rightly so, the association's position had always been that Lesotho was a protectorate and not a Crown Colony because it voluntarily sought England's protection against the South African colonists.

The colonial government's attempts to democratize the National Council by creating district councils in 1946, provided the elected Lekhotla la Bafo members with a platform from which to make a case for Lesotho's autonomy and independence. Since the early 1920s, Josiel Lefela now rejoined the National Council where he was once again to distinguish himself as a master debater and defender of Basotho interests. For example in September 1949, he greatly angered the Resident Commissioner of Lesotho when his contribution in the council killed a motion seeking to tax Europeans in the territory on the lands they occupied. Josiel argued that if the Europeans were taxed it would allow them a say in the country in issues such as incorporation. He protested to the Resident Commissioner that: "We had asked you to protect us from the colonies, but you have now embarked upon a legislation which would prepare room for the colonists to come and occupy the country."⁹⁰ It is probable that the outcome of this motion was partly influenced by the events in South Africa where apartheid was being implemented.

⁸⁶LNA. S3/22/2/5, J.B. Kennan to the Government Secretary, June 3, 1930. Clearly this is the reason why the authorities decided that for the time being they should not disrupt the association's meetings. The colonial attitude towards the Lekhotla la Bafo was beginning to backfire.

⁸⁷LNA. S3/22/2/6, "Requests to be submitted before the British Government in Regard to establishment of New Post of High Commissioner," Dec. 14, 1930; and LNA. S3/22/2/4, Government report of the Lekhotla la Bafo meetings, Leribe, May 24-27, 1930. It must be noted that the colonial authorities tried to downplay the strength and activities of the association, thus its reports were fairly revealing.

⁸⁸See for example, Great Britain, *H.C.T. in South Africa: Aide Memoire* [Cmd.4948]. What is clear is that because of its unrelenting criticism of the colonial officials and the alleged complicity of the chiefs in enacting oppressive rules, the two had teamed up to crack down on the Lekhotla la Bafo. See footnote 41.

⁸⁹See Edgar, *Prophets With Honour*, pp. 176-78.

⁹⁰BNC., Session 45 (1949), See Sept. 22, p.323.

Josiel was also in the forefront in the defeat of the 1954 Moore Report's recommendations by the National Council. The report, which proposed various administrative reforms including the reduction of the number of chiefs in the country was interpreted as a subtle way to undermine chieftainship so as to entrench colonialism in Lesotho. Moreover, argued Josiel, the report misrepresented the actual status of the country.⁹¹ This was because it contradicted the Lekhotla la Bafo's position that Lesotho was not a conquered territory since it requested protection from England on its own volition. Therefore, unlike the other colonies Lesotho was a protectorate and autonomous and needed to be treated as such.

Outside the National Council, Josiel's brother Maphutseng, and fellow Lekhotla la Bafo members continued to attack both British imperialism and South Africa's peripheral imperialism. Thus in 1950, Maphutseng asked South Africa's Prime Minister, Dr. Daniel F. Malan, to delay his demand for the incorporation of Lesotho until the Basotho had been able to petition Britain and others, including the International Court. He accused Great Britain of attempting to incorporate Lesotho ". . . to cover up her own crimes and misdeeds of her political blunders and misrule on the Boer people in the past, . . .".⁹² By evoking these old memories, Maphutseng probably hoped to shift the thinking of the South African Boer-led government from incorporation to, so to say, the real enemy, the British imperialists.

It is significant that these bold attacks against British colonialism were happening in the climate of heightened anti-colonial struggles around the world. Britain had already lost India and several other Asian countries were on the verge of achieving their freedom. The Chinese communist revolution had also occurred, further increasing pressure against colonialism. Together with India, and several of the Latin American countries in the United Nations Assembly, they added to the growing voices against colonialism in the Assembly. In Africa, in Ghana, Kenya, Algeria and elsewhere around the continent, colonialism was under attack. In Southern Africa too, particularly in South Africa, African nationalism was intensifying and the apartheid regime was coming under enormous pressure.

Thus in Lesotho, this climate of nationalism saw the formation of Basutoland African Congress (BAC) in 1952 by Ntsu Mokhehle. The party's stated mission was to fight against incorporation, racial discrimination, and to demand the independence of Lesotho.⁹³ In its petitions and statements attacking incorporation and colonialism in the country, the BAC adopted a language that was very characteristic of the Lekhotla la Bafo. Similarly, like the association the BAC also agreed that Lesotho was a protectorate and not a Crown colony. This was no mere coincidence. As Edgar has written, Josiel was Mokhehle's mentor and both of their organizations enjoyed a very cordial relationship throughout the 1950's.⁹⁴ Many of the other members of the BAC had been equally influenced by the historical activism of Lekhotla la Bafo against both British and South African imperialism regarding Lesotho. Ever a defender of chieftainship, Josiel lost his council seat in 1955 when he told a meeting at Mafeting that the star witness in the 1948 chiefs Gabashane and Bereng murder trial was coerced to testify falsely.⁹⁵ He further alleged that the 1940s and early 1950s medicine murders that rocked Lesotho were government "frame-ups" to destroy chieftainship.⁹⁶

⁹¹BNC., Special Session (1955), pp42-72, 182-87. See also Appendices A and B of the session for the Resident Commissioner's and the Paramount Chief's addresses, respectively. About the report itself, see LNA., *The Moore Report of Administrative Reforms Committee, 1945*.

⁹²Edgar, *Prophets With Honour*, p.187; Also see pp.188-91. This was an apparent reference to the cruel British treatment of the Boers, including during the South African War (popularly known as the Boer War) when thousands of them died in concentration camps. For more about the war, see for example, J.A. Hobson, *The War in South Africa* (London: MacMillan company, 1900); and Peter Warwick and S.B. Spies, eds., *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902* (Burnt Mill: Longman Group Ltd., 1980)

⁹³ See reproduction of the Basutoland African Congress' Manifesto in *Mohlabani*, v.4 (Oct.1958), pp.7-9; and *Mohlabani* (Dec.1958), pp.2-4.

⁹⁴ Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, pp.37-39, 202-03; and *Mohlabani*, v.3, No.6 (June 1957), pp.3-6. For sometime in the 1950s both the Lekhotla la Bafo and the African Congress worked together. The division which later emerged between them was secondary one, with the association's approach being the actual restoration of Lesotho's independence without preconditions, while the congress was more pragmatic or perhaps realistic in its approach.

⁹⁵Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, p.37.

⁹⁶ Rhodes House Library, Oxford (RHL) Mss. Brit. Emp. S.22, ASS E4, Maseru. Patrick Duncan to Commander Fox-Pitt, Feb.20, 1956.

Josiel was convicted of sedition in June 1955 and remained in jail until March 1956.⁹⁷ Until his expiration in 1965, one year before Lesotho's independence, Josiel and his colleagues remained ardent critics of incorporation and British imperialism in Lesotho. However, his association was by now overshadowed by the BAC which had renamed itself Basutoland Congress Party since 1959 (which the majority of the Lekhotla la_Bafo members joined). The Congress resoundingly won the 1960 legislative elections that by the 1959 constitution replaced the National Council, putting Lesotho on the road to self-government and eventual independence in 1966.⁹⁸

The coming of Lesotho's independence also marked an end to South Africa's incorporation demands. Evidently, the Lekhotla la Bafo played a crucial role in the defeat of incorporation and consequently the regaining of independence. By constantly reminding the imperial officials about their past pledges, particularly the promise to Moshoeshoe I about the preservation of Lesotho and its people, the association ensured that the officials would not deliberately ignore the issue. Incorporation was an emotional issue among the Basotho and the association understood the significance of discussing the subject at every opportunity to keep everyone in the country on their toes.

There can be no doubt that privately the chiefs supported the Lekhotla la Bafo's constant appeals against incorporation and even its attacks of the colonial policies. As T.N.D. Molefe remembered, the chiefs admired Josiel "for being against incorporation but hated him because he spoke for the commoners."⁹⁹ Yet regarding their positions, the chiefs were overly sensitive as the Lekhotla la Bafo did not attack them per se, but rather blamed their actions and status on the colonial policies.

In conclusion, the frequent indictment of the colonial policies in Lesotho by Lekhotla la Bafo and the association's attempts to forge a Pan-Southern African front against incorporation, as well as its increased international contacts, did not go unnoticed.

The mere fact that the association was unrecognized and its leaders were constantly harassed is a demonstration of how much psychological impact it inflicted upon the colonial authorities. The association widely publicized Lesotho's plight and threatened to embarrass Great Britain.¹⁰⁰ It also made its mark by successfully campaigning against the new laws in 1929. Moreover, the association's constant reference to Moshoeshoe and the nature of the relationship entered between him and the British contributed to the redefinition and entrenchment of Basotho identity and autonomy. Further, the Lekhotla la Bafo created the necessary subjective conditions in Lesotho which were to prove useful in the 1950s' and 1960s' push for independence.

The objective conditions of the oppressive colonial rule and the increasing poverty and suffering among the Basotho were all too clear; what remained to be explained however, was why the people were suffering and how their condition would possibly be ameliorated. Lekhotla la Bafo argued that it was the discriminatory and exploitive colonial policies, especially regarding the imposition of the many burdensome taxes, the poor education for the Basotho, lack of economic progress, in addition to the continued erosion of the powers of the chiefs, which were responsible for people's suffering. Thus far, the association identified the causes of people's problems and suggested ways to alleviate them such as by defying the offensive laws and pressing for the restoration of Basotho rights. The younger generation, including Mokhehle tremendously benefitted from these earlier activities of Lekhotla la Bafo in their demand for independence.

⁹⁷ Mohlabani (Aug. 1956), pp.9-11; and BNC. Session 52, part 2 (1956), see Oct.2, pp.1-3.

⁹⁸ See Bennet M. Khaketla, *Lesotho 1970. An African Coup Under the Microscope* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1972), pp.26-27; and Basutoland Congress Party, *Summary of B.C.P. Struggle for Independence, 1952-1967* (Cairo: Dar El-Hana Printing House, 1967), pp.6-7.

⁹⁹ Interview with T.N.D. Molefe (80 year-old former police officer) in Lesotho on July 15, 1994.

¹⁰⁰ See footnotes 44 and 46; PRO DO35/1177/Y832/3, Rabase Sekike to Trygve Lie, UNO Secretary General, June 2, 1946; and Ibid., BBS. No:226, High Commissioner to Dominions Office, Oct.26, 1946 Britain unbanned the Lekhotla la Bafo to avoid UNO censorship.