

The Namoha Battle, Qwa-Qwa (1950): A case study of the significance of
oral history

by

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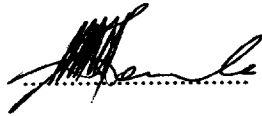
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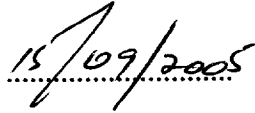
DECLARATION

I, **Mokena Stephen Semela** affirms that the Thesis, The Namoha Battle, Qwa-Qwa (1950): A case study of the significance of oral history, for the degree of PhD in the Department of History, at the University of the Free State, hereby submitted, had not previously been submitted by me for a degree at this or any other university, and that it is my own work in design and execution, and that all material contained herein is recognized.

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PREFACE

South Africa has a rich and vibrant written and oral history. The written history is well recognized, while the latter is, however, far less widely known and appreciated. History has traditionally been seen by many as the realm of written, published sources where the historian consults the accepted historical texts in order to recreate the events that took place in times past. However, this mainly leaves out a very important aspect of the events: the oral accounts by ordinary grassroots people who experienced those events. Using the Namoha Battle as a case study, this research attempts to point out the value and reliability of oral history in reconstructing the past. It argues that history is not only based on written documents, but also on oral accounts, and that the two complement and supplement each other.

The Namoha incident was about a peasant uprising against agrarian reform by the then Union government in Witsieshoek Native Reserve, found in the former Orange Free State province. Although the Namoha Battle was widely covered by South African newspapers very little has been documented about the event. Furthermore, the available documents neglect to account for the experiences, responses, impressions and memories the Basotho have with regard to the Namoha Battle. It is essential, therefore, that these considerations of people about the Battle are gathered, documented and preserved for future generations..

On the one hand, the research was based on qualitative research method because it is concerned with recording and documenting the experiences of the eyewitnesses. Thus, data collection was conducted through personal interviews. Oral history research methodology was employed because the study is about personal experiences of the contemporary event. Furthermore, because the study is about oral history, the interview technique employed differs from a normal interview in historical research, where the focus is mainly on factual details. The main focus is on the informants' stories, memories, experiences, impressions, emotional responses, and shared agonies of the Battle.

Oral testimonies were collected from many people who were directly involved in or were directly affected by this Battle. These respondents shared with the researcher the insightful and informative stories that in general did not exist in the documented evidence or existing literature. Many were willing to come forward to share their memories, stories, impressions and experiences of the Battle. The interviewees, drawn from different categories, were identified with the help of the chiefs and references from interviewees. All the interviews, seventy-four of them, were prearranged, tape recorded and transcribed immediately. The informants are all residents of Qwa-Qwa.

Every effort was made to locate and consult primary sources at both the National Archives Repository in Pretoria and the Free State Archives Repository in Bloemfontein. Secondary sources that focus on the usage, importance and reliability of oral history and other primary sources, as well as sources that had recorded the event, have been extensively consulted and were helpful in assisting the researcher in this research. The Universities of the Free State and Qwa-Qwa libraries have been of great help in this regard and unavailable materials were acquired through an interlibrary loan.

In conducting this study a range of challenges were encountered. Initially, some informants were uneasy to share their experiences with the researcher on the Namoha episode. They suspected the researcher of being a policeman disguised as a researcher. However, after carefully explaining who he was and where he come from and why he is conducting the research, they relented. In fact, it took several sessions of story sharing before the informants became gracious in sharing their memories and experiences with the researcher. This showed that membership of the same community does not necessarily ensure easy acceptance of a researcher by participants in a project.

Furthermore, in a society where poverty, and hunger form the essence of daily reality, the question of remuneration for interviewees can stand in the way of true information. Many respondents wanted monetary compensation for their

information. In most cases the researcher managed to patiently satisfy the claimants for payment that the information they were giving was priceless and that the researcher was not conducting the research for monetary gains. The researcher also assured them that they were contributing to history and they will be acknowledged accordingly in the final product. Moreover, some interviewees felt and acted as if they were directly addressing the government that would immediately come and rectify their cause. The researcher believe, for many of them, this was magnified by a foreign object: a tape recorder, and the sense that their words were going to be 'taken somewhere'. 'Are you going to help us get compensation for our losses during the Namoha Battle' was a frequent question from most interviewees that the researcher had to deal with. The informant desperately wanted somebody to lobby government on their behalf. The respondents also wanted that an annual commemoration of this battle takes place. Furthermore, they wanted to see a monument in the honour of those who lost their lives build at the battle site.

Furthermore, the issue of the Namoha Battle was too sensitive for some informants. They refused to speak to the researcher until the royal family has given them permission. One old informant protested, 'we do not want to involve ourselves in the matters of royalists.' The researcher had to respect their feelings and obliged. It was only after going with them to the village chiefs that they agreed. Other informants initially refused to talk about other aspects because they feared that this would land them in trouble, but relented after much explanation, however some just refused. One of the challenges was the request made by the informants that a book is written on their stories and this should be made available in their own language, Sesotho.

Efforts were also made to identify and speak to the policemen who were actually there during the Battle. However, all the policemen who were stationed in Witsieshoek were from outside the area and in the end they could not be located or contacted. Attempts were also made to speak to the relevant white community in the neighbouring towns and farms. However, most of the farms surrounding Qwa-Qwa now belong to black farmers. Some farms are occupied by young white farmers

who do not have any knowledge of such an event. In the neighbouring towns none of the white people, the researcher spoke to, had any knowledge of the event.

Many of the above challenges may appear overwhelming. Yet the negative could not outweigh the support the researcher received. After the initial suspicion towards the researcher had worn off, surprising openness manifested itself between him and the interviewees. The researcher discovered people who were looking forward to reminiscing about their experiences and memories of the Battle. Nonetheless, when interviewing the informants, the researcher realised that events, dates and names sometimes were forgotten or mixed up. To assure and verify the factual accuracy of certain testimonies the researcher had to extensively consult all available written sources.

This thesis is organised into two parts. Part one deals with the nature, meaning, reliability, uses and methodology of oral history. Part two discusses the history of the Namoha Battle. Emphasis is placed on the causes, course, and aftermath of the Battle as told by the informants. Extra-ordinary stories and experiences of the ordinary people are also documented. The last chapter records the conclusions reached on the basis of the findings from the interviews and the comparison of the contents of the interviews and the contents from written documents.

Chapter one examines the nature of oral history. The chapter highlights the definition and the nature of oral history. The correlation between oral history and the other forms of historical inquiry, oral tradition and written evidence, is also examined. The distinguishing features of oral history are outlined. The chapter, furthermore, argues for the importance of combining all historical forms of inquiry in the reconstruction of the past.

The next topic discussed is the challenges facing the oral historian. Chapter two deals with this issue. The challenges discussed were mainly drawn from the researcher's own experiences in conducting this study. The challenges faced by the oral history practitioners, and the role of the researcher in minimising these

challenges are discussed. Secondly, the criticism levelled against oral history, and ways of ensuring authenticity of the oral evidence are examined. Chapter three pivots around the steps in collection and management of oral evidence. It starts with a brief definition of the oral history interview. This is followed by sketching the steps to be followed in successfully completing the oral history project. These include a preparatory phase, the interview process and managing the interview product.

Historical and geographical background of the Witsieshoek Reserve are discussed in chapter four. The chapter describes the location, origin, occupation by the Basotho and the administration of the Reserve. Historical background to the Namoha Battle of 1950, which is the focus of this study, is also discussed in this chapter. In chapter five the causes of the Namoha Battle as told by the Basotho interviewees are narrated. The chapter highlights why and how the introduction of the betterment measures by the Union government caused dissatisfaction amongst the Basotho of the Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

In chapter six the course and the aftermath of the Namoha Battle, as told by the informants, are discussed. The events that triggered the clash between the police and the Basotho at Namoha in 1950 are described. The outcome of the Battle and the mass arrests of the Basotho that followed are also discussed in this chapter. Chapter seven discusses the course of the trial and conviction of the Basotho who were arrested after the Namoha Battle. Chapter eight revolves around general conclusions drawn from the study.

Ten addendums are appended. These addendums have been added as an illustration of some of the issues discussed in the main body. Addendums A and B have been added as they are useful for researchers working on oral history projects. These would assist the interviewer to conduct a successful interview and to be able to identify each interview conducted. Addendums C to I are copies which support issues discussed in the content. These have been appended as they are valuable for scholars working on similar projects. Addendum J contains memories and

experiences of the researcher's informants. This is a valuable piece of information and will be useful for scholars working on a possible variety of themes. It can also be useful in an interdisciplinary way, that is, researchers from other disciplines can make use of this information.

CHAPTER 1

THE NATURE OF ORAL HISTORY

1.1 Introduction

Every family and every place has a history of its own, one that can contribute detailed knowledge to the study of wider historical themes. Every individual, in one way or the other, plays or has played a part in moulding a society. Many people lead ordinary lives no more or less so than informants in this study. Therefore, one cannot fully understand what really happened during the Namoha Battle (which is the focus of this study) if those people who witnessed that event and other related milestones are ignored. Oral history methodology provides the necessary tools to record the eyewitness accounts of a particular occurrence. This chapter aims to look closely at the nature of oral history, highlighting its definition, importance and how it relates to other forms of historical inquiry, such as the oral tradition and written evidence. Its value in the writing of history and what distinguishes it from other forms of historical enquiry are also dealt with.

1.2 The definition of oral history

Oral history is personal accounts of an individual who witnessed and was affected or played a part in an event that took place in the past.¹ This means that oral information can be about an individual's life story or about his or her participation in, and experience of, an historical episode. It enables even ordinary people to make contributions to history by giving them an opportunity to share their memories and experiences of past occurrences and processes. The primary concern of this study is the gathering of such individuals' oral information about an historical event, the Namoha Battle, that affected the community of Witsieshoek.

¹ Allen, B. and Montell, W.L., From Memory to History: Using Oral Sources in Local Historical Research, p. 23.

An aged informant, Harry Mothibi, a resident of Mabilela village, who took part in the 1950 Namoha Battle, had this to say in sharing his memories and experiences of the Battle:

“I was very much concerned about the government’s decision to cull our cattle. I had cattle myself and was very possessive about them. As a result I joined the group that opposed this decision. We could not understand this decision, as our Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli, had nothing to do with this decision. We felt that our monarchy and our rights had been undermined and as a nation we had to do something to protect ourselves and the institution. We tried everything possible to make the government aware of our concerns, but to no avail. At one of our gatherings the police came and wanted to disperse us. We refused to disperse and then there was confrontation that led to the loss of lives. After the first shot was fired, police horses galloped into the gathering and the police began shooting randomly at us. I was among the first to be hit by a bullet. It hit me on the thigh and I fell down. As I fell down, I thought this was the end of my life. To my amazement, as I was lying down, I did not feel much pain, but I could not move and lay there until the shooting had stopped. After the shooting, my friend, Buthelezi, came and carried me on horseback to my house. On arrival at home, I was feeling a terrible pain but was not prepared to go to the hospital. It was for the first time in my life that I saw and felt the brutality of the white people of that time towards black people. We did not expect such a brutal reaction from the police, considering that we were not armed nor provocative in any way. We posed no threat to anybody.”²

This was the experience of Harry Mothibi after his involvement in the Namoha Battle in 1950. It is obvious from this account that the Basotho’s opposition to the culling of their cattle ended in a disaster. This is one of the many personal encounters of the informants portrayed in their own words about the Namoha Battle. Memories such as these interest many people, though they are hardly the stuff of which history has traditionally been made. Oral history is based on the use of such personal reminiscences as a source on which to build history either as an alternative or as a complement to the documents on which historians normally rely.

² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

Through memories like those of Mothibi, groups of people who were previously considered unimportant to merit any attention since they were viewed as too common, are being widely written and read about. Such persons were seen as not feasible subjects for historical studies since they rarely left behind, if at all, the kind of documentation on which historians depend. Oral history offers a singular opportunity to capture and preserve such perspectives as source material.

It is generally assumed that historical knowledge is based on documents and relics that survived the past such as books, letters and diaries, deeds and wills, church registers, and records of births, deaths, marriages and tax, houses, tools, gravestones, and other material artifacts.³ In many cases these documents and artifacts can provide as much information about the people who created them, as can oral traditions. This study is based on the argument that another way of finding out about the past is to, simply, talk to people, collecting memories and experiences of their own lives, of the people known to them, of the events they witnessed or in which they participated.⁴ Although the majority of oral history studies have concentrated on the ordinary persons, particularly the working classes and the underprivileged,⁵ it is important to note that other groups of people, such as leaders, can also be part of oral history.

Oral history is based on direct collection, usually electronically by means of, for example, a tape recorder, of someone's experiences (potentially of anyone's and everyone's experiences). These are then used like any other historical sources to recover a picture of the past, and of how and why things happened as they did. It is

³ Lewis, G., "The Ultimate Oral History" in Library Journal, Vol. 126, No. 14, 14.9.2001, p. 29.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Oosthuizen, S., "History of Personal Experience" in Adults Learning, Vol. 9, No. 4, 20 December 1997, p. 58.

thus, a *bona fide* form of historical research. It opens up the areas of human experience that conventional methods do not necessarily touch.⁶ Informants provided the researcher with personal experiences, memories of, and feelings about, an event, which are usually not available in history records, or which would have disappeared. Thus by working with living informants, oral history researchers help create lasting documents of the subject under study.

The method used for gathering such recollections (the collecting of any individual's *spoken memories* of his or her life, of people he or she has known, and events he or she has witnessed or in which they participated) is oral history.⁷ As such oral history is based on contemporary eyewitness accounts and perspectives of occurrences and situations. Unlike documentary research, oral history brings the researcher into direct contact with the people who have first-hand information.

One of the primary values of oral testimony is its usefulness in reconstructing the fabric of daily life and in documenting the smaller details of family and community survival, for which written evidence is often scarce. Oral history is spoken history, subject to all the biases and vagaries inherent in human recall. Yet it is not substantially different from other historical sources. Oscar Handlin claims that "its data must be subjected to the same tests of evidence as other sources and examined along with other contemporary sources for corroboration and authentication."⁸ This is true because for it to be accepted as reliable, truthful and authentic, it has to be exposed to all the tests that are used to evaluate any historical sources. The authenticity of oral history is discussed in the next chapter.

⁶ Allen and Montell, p. 23.

⁷ Ritchie, D., Doing Oral History, p. 1.

⁸ Handlin, O., Truth in History, p. 127.

Oral history research is more than simply tape-recording a conversation. It takes up lot of time and energy. To solidify the work in an oral history project, considerable effort has to be made before interviewers meet their interviewees. If the purpose of such a project is to complement or supplement a documentary record, the researcher, first, needs to be aware of what information is needed from the oral sources. Thus written sources covering the topic need to be consulted to determine the gaps and to provide the interviewer with the necessary information when formulating interview questions. Charles Morrissey rightly states: “the greater the amount of pre-interview preparation that takes place, the more useful the eventual oral testimony will prove to be”.⁹ The interviewing techniques are dealt with in detail in Chapter Four of this study.

John Tosh points out that “conventional background research using documentary sources is necessary and needs to be undertaken first by any researcher.”¹⁰ Certainly, this would enable an oral history researcher to recreate the historical, social, political, economic and cultural contexts necessary for interpretation of oral history. Such preparation would encourage historians to make wider use of oral testimony, relying as it does, on the supporting evidence found in other records.

In addition to establishing meaningful contexts for interpreting oral history, Tosh explains that “the researcher must also deal with the problem that memory is fallible.”¹¹ This is another reason why background research is important because the researcher would be in a position to assist the informant to recall more experiences with greater accuracy. Furthermore, the oral history researcher ought to cross-check oral

⁹ Morrissey, C., “Oral History reliability is under question” in Library Journal, Vol. 105, No. 12, 15 June 1980, p. 56.

¹⁰ Tosh, J., The Pursuit of History, p. 185.

¹¹ Ibid.

information with the written, validating the one or the other.¹² Background research is indeed necessary as it also aids the oral historian in formulating relevant questions.

Historians can create a document of great value to their generation and to posterity through oral history. One of the virtues of oral history, as pointed out by James E. Fogerty is that “it is useful for dealing with the history of ordinary people and groups, or events, lifestyles and movements, that did not leave written records.”¹³ The reasons for not leaving any written record could have been either because of illiteracy, or of being excluded from the written history due to economic, social, or political circumstances. It could, for others, have been because writing about their life experiences was just not something many ordinary people did, while others might have lacked the time or confidence or skills to write.

In this study much of the above applies. In addition, other informants were reluctant to even share their knowledge and experiences because they feared that their testimony could bring retribution on themselves. They simply wished to forget about the Namoha incident. Based on these reasons, had this study not been undertaken, many of the stories of these people would have disappeared with them as was the case with other combatants in the battle who passed away without sharing their memories and experiences.

The fact is that information is lost every day as people die, companies throw away records, and government files are destroyed. Oral history can facilitate reconstructing and preserving some of the lost historical information. However, oral history is not a

¹² Ritchie, p. 19.

¹³ Fogerty, J. E., “Filling in the gaps: oral history in the archives” in American Archivist, Vol. 46 No.2, Spring 1983, p. 156.

substitute for written records. As Fogerty puts it, “it complements them and is most useful when written records are available.”¹⁴ Written and oral history are, in fact, not at all in competition with each other. They heavily rely on each other. They have common as well as dissimilar characteristics and specific functions which only either one can fill. In fact, in the complete absence of written records, it can be difficult to place oral accounts into a meaningful historical, social and cultural context. This aspect of the relationship between written and oral accounts is explored later in this chapter.

1.3 The value of oral history

One of the foundations of oral history is that it is best suited for the recovery of local history and for that reason it is mostly practised by local historians. It is suited and relevant in that it can broaden the local history database and offer new perspectives on the events and forces that shaped local life and thought.¹⁵ The significance and the impact the Namoha Battle had on the ordinary Basotho can, for example, best be understood through the help of oral history. This can aid the present day generation to understand why the Namoha village no longer exists. The testimonies of the eyewitnesses might further enlighten the present-day generation of the feelings, emotions and different perspectives of the Namoha incident. The accounts would also shed light on later developments which shaped the present day social life among the Basotho of Qwa-Qwa.

Oral history can create intimate portraits of people, places and communities in a way that other historical methods cannot. It allows the lives of ordinary people and groups who are under-represented in the records of the community their proper place in the history of their communities. Oral history can achieve this because it does considers

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Caunce, S., Oral History and the Local historian, p. 220.

everybody, particularly ordinary grassroots people, as a possible source of information and as an equal role-player in the reconstruction of the past.¹⁶ Moreover, according to Willa K. Baum, “what is too mundane to be recorded by one generation could have disappeared altogether in the next, and oral history offers a means of preserving not just individual lives, but also many different ways of life, from vanishing into obscurity.”¹⁷

At the time of this study, many of the leaders who had been in the forefront of the resistance against the cattle culling that led to the Namoha Battle had passed away without having documented their memories and experiences of their struggle. Some of the informants, who took part in the study, also have since passed away. Had this study not been undertaken they would also have died with their knowledge, information and experiences.

Furthermore, oral history offers a unique view of the past in that it takes into consideration the source’s emotions, feelings, memories, experiences as well as possible factual knowledge of any event under study. What makes it distinct is that a *personal* story from a *personal* point of view is told about a particular event or events experienced *personally*.¹⁸ These *personal* stories are important to people as their lives are made up of stories stored in their minds as memories and images of the past. As with anything that people do, sharing and giving is important to all. People have a need to tell and share personal stories, as this reminds them of where they have been. As people think of where they have been through their stories, they can begin to understand the patterns of their past that have had an influence on the way they behave in the present.¹⁹ Such stories of individual experiences and perceptions on an event such as the

¹⁶ Lummis, T., Listening to History: The authenticity of oral evidence, p. 156.

¹⁷ Caunce, p. 220.

¹⁸ Baum, W.K., Oral History for the Local Historical Society, p. 8.

¹⁹ Allen and Montell, p. 25.

Namoha incident are attached as an addendum J.

Once a story is told, oral history takes the experiences of the individuals and opens them up to a new world of shared encounters and events in which they have participated. Personal stories are not alive until they are told. A story comes to life when it is told, for all of the teller's background cultures, personal experiences, values, thoughts and beliefs combine with his or her facial nuances, gestures and body tensions to bring the story to its fullest living state.²⁰ These stories, having been verified and analysed, are placed into an accurate historical context, are turned into credible historical sources and are stored for use by current and future scholars. Thus people who were not aware of such experiences have a chance to know them and those interested in related research could consult and use them for background study.

Personal experience narratives of historical events told by the individuals directly involved in the action described in the story are often fascinating *human documents*.²¹ A survivor of the Battle of Namoha, Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, for example, described his initial experience at the front this way:

“I was present at Namoha on that fateful day. When the first shot was fired we all lay down. Immediately thereafter we arose once and began hopping like a group of ants. As I was running I felt like I was flying. I hid in a nearby river where I found two old men hiding. However, we were chased out by the bullets that were falling near us. Unfortunately the two old men were hit and fell. I took cover behind a big rock and immediately turned and faced the direction where I had come from so as to see if I was being followed. As I moved back I bumped into

²⁰ Hoopes, J., Oral History: An Introduction for students, p. 8.

²¹ Allen and Montell, p. 15.

another person's back and I felt coldness all over me because I thought I had been caught. For a moment we both remained motionless. After some time I glanced back and discovered that it was someone I knew and felt relieved."²²

Furthermore, orally communicated history can reveal the human side of the past by also showing how historical events can dramatically change the course of an individual's life. One such account comes from Bakubung Mpheteng, an ordinary Mosotho from Kudumane village, who recalled that his father was very active in the movement opposing the culling of cattle:

"As a child, I never had a chance to spend time with him. He was always in and out of the house. I did not have a father-figure. I also struggled to look after myself as I had no role-model. When he was imprisoned and exiled, life became even more difficult. My mother was selling traditional beer and fat cakes to feed us, and we would sometimes eat this *moroko*²³. Because of all these problems I dropped out of school to look for work. I could not find any decent job and I always did temporary jobs. For the past fifteen years I have not been working. I believe that had my father not suffered the way he did, I would have been somebody today. Today I am still suffering the consequences. I am not educated and I am unemployed and cannot provide for my family. I feel sad about the whole thing. Even the people on whose behalf my father suffered never bothered to help us during his absence. When he came back, many pretended to be taking care of us because they wanted something from him as he was a very intelligent man."²⁴

²² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002.

²³ "Traditional beer dreg or refuse." Freely Translated.

²⁴ Personal collection, transcript of interview with Mr. Bakubung Mpheteng, an ordinary Mosotho from Kudumane village, 04/04/2002.

The information of an individual's interpretations or recollections of the past events, provided through interviews, is normally preserved in archives. The final product, whether it is a tape recording of an interview or transcript, reflects the combined efforts of the interviewer and interviewee in the creation of a unique historical account. An interview is also subject to the same scholarly analysis and standards that a historian applies to other evidentiary sources. It is, therefore, the responsibility of the historian to sift and weigh all the evidence, and to use sources wisely in the preparation of historical accounts.²⁵ Carefully constructed, oral evidence has the potential to be very valuable in enhancing the reconstruction of the history of any event.

As pointed out earlier, oral history is a unique way to learn about past events and experiences. Even when a subject is well documented oral sources can be useful. Many oral history projects are designed to elicit information that would supplement what is already available in written materials.²⁶ Certain kinds of specific information, such as the circumstantial detail surrounding a memorable event in the community's past may be garnered from first hand eyewitness accounts, as is the case with the Namoha Battle. Eyewitness accounts can be used not only to supply factual details about an event, but also to provide information about a community's reactions to that event. The following eyewitness narrative of the 1950 Battle of Namoha in Qwa-Qwa not only describes the occurrence, but reports on the community's interpretation of it:

“I was present at Namoha on the day of the battle. What led to that battle was the Union government's intransigency to listen to our concerns. We were not happy about the preferential treatment given to the white traders in Witsieshoek and the imposed cattle culling process. We wanted fair and equal treatment. When our plea to the government to halt its cattle culling process failed and our call for a commission of

²⁵ Gordon, M. and Jones, L.A., “Oral History” in Journal of American History, vol. 87, No. 2, September 2000, p. 580.

²⁶ Fogerty, p. 154.

enquiry rejected, we interpreted the culling as the conquering of our cattle, something that required us to act against. Again, we saw that as the government's ploy to impoverish us so that we would go and work for the white people. Furthermore, the arrival of more police in the area confirmed our suspicions that the government was determined to force us to submit. We were killed at Namoha because we were protecting our rights, our cattle and the monarchy which was undermined by the union government. The attack on us was nothing else but an attempt to force us to submit."²⁷

Orally communicated history, as Tosh describes it, "is a method which probes memory, evokes emotions and feelings which have long been dormant, and creates a relationship between narrator and interviewer which is often a very special one."²⁸ Thus it is a means of obtaining historical evidence by enabling people to reach into their memories and recall elements of the past, that affected them somehow and which are of historical value to the present. This was evident in the interviews in which the informants provided the insightful information into what happened in 1950, and some even cried hysterically as they recalled how the 1950 Battle affected them:

"I had just had a small baby when my husband was brutally killed by the police. When I got back to the house after the shooting, I found my husband lying in a pool of blood in the house Just imagine what I was going through seeing my husband in that position. I was devastated. I became a widow and my children became orphans. As a single parent, it became very difficult for me to raise my children accordingly. The reason why I am still staying in a dilapidated mud-house is simply

²⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

²⁸ Tosh, p. 189.

because of the Namoha Battle.”²⁹

Andor Skotnes sees oral history as an investigative tool for examining and documenting whole areas of social development in a particular community, for which written records are missing or incomplete.³⁰ The lack of written and the existence of incomplete records about the Namoha village, once the centre of resistance for the Basotho, essentially necessitated the undertaking of this oral history research project. The creation and demolition of the Namoha village left behind no written traces of its origin and dissolution. Yet the people who were involved in building the village, the former residents, and individuals familiar with Namoha history, have provided a richly detailed oral description of life in that village and have indicated the extent to which the entire community was affected. Mantshepeng Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village said:

“Namoha village was situated between Monontsha and Poelong villages. It came into existence in the early 1940s. This piece of land was handed to a sub-chief, Morena Moreneng Mopeli, after he was ordered to move away from a place called Boiketlo, a very fertile piece land on top of the mountains above Monontsha village. This place, Namoha village, was given this name because two sub-chiefs, *Morena* Pikoko Mopeli of Monontsha village and *Morena* Libe Mopeli of Ha-Libe, were ordered to reduce their areas and give Morena Moreneng a place to stay. As the Basotho put it, Moreneng said: *Pikoko namoha le nna ke dule*.³¹ The Namoha village became the centre for resistance and the battle that was fought in 1950 took place at this village. Immediately after the battle,

²⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Makhanya Motolo, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 19/09/01.

³⁰ Skotnes, A., “People’s archives and oral history in South Africa: A traveller’s Account” in South African Archives Journal, Vol. 37, 1995, p. 63.

³¹ “Pikoko fold your legs so that I can get a place.” Freely Translated.

the residents were forced to move to other areas. In the process, people got hurt as they were mishandled by the police and lost a number of valuables and left behind gardens and fields with growing crops.”³²

The sense of community is heightened when local narratives, some old and some recent, are recounted about a variety of subjects. The origin of the Namoha village and the rest of the Qwa-Qwa community is described in Chapter Six. The accounts of the way the community acquired its name, for example, are considered part of local history. How the name came about and the succeeding local events all contributed to the development of the community. An investigation into the community’s past can shed a great deal of light on how a community during difficult times organised itself; how they dealt with the challenges of raising families, making a living or building a community.³³

Oral history captures the life, information, bits and pieces of the data that would otherwise be lost to posterity. It serves to fill in the gaps in formal learning, often providing the rest of the story. In some of the records of the Namoha Battle, for example, it is stated that “the police had no choice but to shoot the Basotho as they were under threat.”³⁴ But this was disputed by almost all the informants who claimed that the police, as much as they were doing their job, shot at the Basotho first even though they were under no threat. Their position can help clarify how the shooting actually occurred and provide a perspective of the ordinary people.

The recordings of people’s memories and experiences are used for various purposes.

³² Personal collection, transcript of interview with Mrs. Mantshepeng Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 28/03/2002.

³³ Allen and Montell, pp. 50-51.

³⁴ Rand Daily Mail, 5 December 1950.

They could be collected to complement, supplement or disprove written sources or just as a contribution to historical knowledge. Thus it is, as Kris D. Conti describes it, “the living history of everyone’s unique life experiences which can be recorded on sound and video tape or written down.”³⁵ Oral history is a vital tool for the understanding of the recent past and it can preserve everyone’s past for the future. It enables people who have been hidden from history to be considered; those interested in their past to record their personal experiences and those of their families and communities.

Oral history also enriches the understanding of an historical event. It offers another point of view, and can, for instance, elicit empathy on the part of the interviewer and engages the interviewer and the interviewee in constructing a historical record. Oral history can promote the value of considering multiple interpretations of historical events.³⁶

If written records were not available or were incomplete many studies could not have been written at all without oral history evidence. Biographers frequently find great lacunae in documentary evidence for certain areas of their subjects’s lives. Michael Holroyd is one: he says “on the life of my subjects I needed information and, often, information that was not in written form.”³⁷ Researchers of contemporary history would often find they have few documentary sources to guide them. Without oral evidence, their work would consist largely of the regurgitation of secondary evidence such as books, newspaper accounts and so on, which might well be incomplete. To be confronted by a vast mass of documentary evidence can be as bewildering as having to

³⁵ Conti, K.D., “Oral Histories: The most overlooked public relations tool” in Communication World, Vol. 12, No. 2, June/July 1995, p. 52.

³⁶ Olmedo, I.M., “Family oral histories for multi-cultural curriculum perspectives” in Urban Education, Vol.32, No.1, p. 331.

³⁷ Holroyd, M., “What is Oral History?”, as quoted by A. Seldon and J. Pappworth, By Word of Mouth, p. 36.

reconstruct the story from secondary sources alone. Oral history evidence can give a researcher synoptic accounts of whole areas for which no overall survey exists.³⁸

Oral history provides at least one dimension that is missing from written documents, namely, sound. Even if every fact of conceivable historical interest was recorded on paper, there would still be a role for oral history because of its unique advantage of providing historical material that can be reproduced in sound and image. Oral history interviews can thus be used in a variety of ways: on television, radio, pre-recorded educational cassettes in museums and exhibitions. It deploys the voices of the past to bring history in a vivid form to a wide audience, some of whom might never have been introduced to the same material, if presented only in writing.³⁹

David Irving has also found that the most illuminating value of oral history evidence is “clarification of factual confusions. Frequently, documents appear to contradict one another, or one cannot trace the whereabouts of a key document. In such cases interviewing can save time and help clear the blockage.”⁴⁰ Furthermore, secondary sources may not be enlightening sufficiently, and many, like newspapers, disguise sources. If, for example, researchers do not know on whose evidence a newspaper report is based, they will not always know how much weight to attach to it.⁴¹ Oral history interviews allow the researcher to penetrate below the surface and to discover for oneself what is vital and what is secondary.

Oral history evidence can furthermore augment the existing official documentary

³⁸ Seldon, A. and Pappworth, J., By Word of Mouth: An Elite Oral History, p. 43.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 52.

⁴⁰ Irving, D., Oral History Questionnaire, p. 121.

⁴¹ Seldon and Pappworth, p. 43.

sources whilst documenting the activities and feelings of many minority groups in society. It has the potential, also, of bringing a community together. While investigating the history of a local area, the past is quite literally brought to life for its people.⁴² This study, for example, has given rise to the joint annual commemoration of the Namoha Battle, between the Basotho who were opposed to the Battle and those who took part in it. The coming together to reminisce about the Battle opened up communications, and people can now freely talk about the Battle. The annual commemoration will help keep the memories of the Battle alive to the people affected and will hopefully serve to foster good relations.

As the years separate people further and further from an historical event, a good tape-recording of experiences will, in the future, be listened to with fascination.⁴³ This would be comparable only to the wonder that people would experience today if someone were to present them with the voices of men and women who fought during the Anglo-Boer South African War. It would affirm that the picture of the 'commando/agterryer' in that War would be incomplete without his or her voice and his or her memories.

Oral history modifies and enriches a people's understanding of the historical process. It foments empathy by encouraging learners to see the world through the eyes of other people. Presenting the *personal* dimension, oral history connects real people to the past. Students of history may even come to see themselves as historical actors in the making who may later also appear on the stage of history.⁴⁴ As one writer, Michael

⁴² Swain, D.C., "Problems for Practitioners of Oral History" in American Archivist, Vol.28, No. 1, January 1965, p. 68.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 73.

⁴⁴ Grocco, M.S., "Putting the Actors back on Stage: Oral History in the Secondary School Classroom" in Social Studies, Vol. 89, No. 1. January/February 1988, p. 19.

Galt, puts it: "the past exists only as people exist to bring it alive."⁴⁵

In tape-recording an interview there is an opportunity to reach into the experience of an event through answers to questions not asked at the time of the event. Researchers may wish to know something that was not recorded in any contemporary sense and, then, they may, by oral evidence, be given personal perspectives on matters of great interest, for which there can never be a superabundance of evidence (for example, life in the front line in 1916, in the First World War).⁴⁶ Oral history provides information about the narrators and their experiences beyond the mere statement of dates and events.

Oral history testimony is the kind of information that makes other public documents understandable. Researchers may know, for example, from the records what happened during the Namoha Battle and how many people were wounded or killed. But oral history reveals activities of ordinary people, their understanding and interpretation of what happened and why and how they were affected by the Battle. It is through oral history that the dimension of life within a community is illuminated. Miroslav Volf points out that "there is no doubt that the strength of having the accounts of various dimensions of life put together in one lived experience gives all the data a particular strength in virtually any other source of evidence, and certainly lacking in any other widespread documentary proof."⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Galt, M., The Story in History: Writing your way into the American Experience, p. 238.

⁴⁶ Liddle, P.H. and Richardson, M.J., "Voices from the Past: An evaluation of oral history as a source for research into Western Front experience of the British soldier, 1914- 1918" in Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 31, No. 4, 1996, p. 653.

⁴⁷ Volf, M., "Redeeming the Past?" in Christian Century, Vol. 119, No. 4, 13 February 2002, p. 44.

Furthermore, the oral history interview process totally differs from a journalistic interview⁴⁸ it affords participants in historical events an opportunity to address the historical record directly. It also clarifies what they see as misconceptions in a third person's accounts. It provides an opportunity to discuss the participants own motives and those of other participants and to provide their own personal assessment of the significance of the events in which they took part. This approach makes possible a clearer understanding of the intent of the participants than could be inferred from a record of the events alone.⁴⁹ When viewed from this perspective, oral history is one of the most important analytical tools available to researchers today and its importance is very likely to grow.

Oral history is also important to both families and society. Traditional information about a variety of episodes in a family's history is often passed from one generation to another in oral form. Such traditional knowledge often constitutes a family saga. The sagas, while varying from one family to the other, are stories that frequently deal with similar themes, such as hardships, family misfortunes, why and when that happened and the family's experiences during trying times. The following account by Mantsane Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, exemplifies that:

"I was suffering, even though I was the only child at home. We had one blanket that we shared with my mother. My father was always away from home to attend to the needs of our Chief in exile. We could not even plough for ourselves and we had to rely on our neighbours for help. We struggled to make ends meet. Worse, we even lost, through theft, almost all my father's livestock I could not understand why we had to suffer the way we suffered. Despite all these, we understood

⁴⁸ The oral history interview is not a quick journalistic style of interviewing. Instead, it requires a patient and slow style that is sensitive and respectful to the interviewee's Circumstances.

⁴⁹ Volf, p. 9.

my father's loyalty to the Chief."⁵⁰

The family stories of this nature function to illustrate the family's role in the community's social structure and the events that shaped it and how the family was affected by those changes. Oral history can be used for various reasons and it depends upon the spirit in which it is used. Nevertheless, it certainly can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history. It can be used to change the focus of history itself and open up new areas of enquiry. It can break down the barriers between teachers and students, between generations, between educational institutions and the world outside and in the writing of history, whether in books or museums. It can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place.⁵¹

Furthermore, through oral history interviewing respondents could also experience benefits. Oral history can help them link and understand fragmented memories. It can also help them to locate their memories in the context of their life stories. Oral history interview can further help respondents to review and re-value their memories, reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of the past decision making. This could lead to a possible release of burdensome feelings from the past. All these could be attained when people reminisce about the past events either individually or collectively with the help of the interviewer.

Furthermore, through the dissemination of stories, various possibilities could open up for the interviewees. First, people could re-define themselves by seeing and hearing their stories in the public realm and see that they are not alone and that they have shared

⁵⁰ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mantsane Mopeli an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 01/04/02.

⁵¹ Liddle and Richardson, p. 2.

memories, which connect them to others. Second, people could learn more about the stories and heritage of their community. Third, they could rebuild a sense of collectivity and community pride through participating in, and witnessing the sounds and images of their community heritage.

Oral history is also useful in the classroom. Teachers who want to include multicultural perspectives in their curriculum can explore the funds of knowledge of the parents of their students and members of the community by using oral history projects in the classrooms. Such projects can be an authentic way of making the curriculum multicultural.⁵² Teachers will also find maintaining student interest in academic content an ever-present challenge. If they were to guide their students by means of oral history research, they would likely find them highly keen in documenting history. By promoting creative use of oral history projects, history teachers can help their students design oral history research programmes for use in their classrooms. Given time constraints and the demands of transcription, oral history projects could be a productive strategy for Social Studies teachers.⁵³

By presenting oral history research as a systematic process, teachers can motivate students by the collaborative and empirical approach to historical study. According to Tina Sitton, student-generated oral history research is “a powerful antidote to students’ frequent apathy to textbook studies of history”.⁵⁴ The inclusion of oral history projects does not replace textbooks and other secondary sources. Undoubtedly, textbooks and other sources serve an important function, presenting facts and ordering specific events. One quality that textbooks often lack, however, is the human element, as Grace Huerta,

⁵² Banks, J., Integrating the curriculum with ethnic content: Approaches and guidelines, p. 189.

⁵³ K`Meyer, T.K., “It’s not just common sense: a blueprint for teaching oral history” in Oral History Review, Vol.25, No.1-2, 1998, p. 56.

⁵⁴ Sitton, T., Oral History. A guide for teachers, p. 3.

observes: “They say that it comes as no surprise to social studies teachers to hear their students lament “ This book is so boring!” or “Why do we always have to read about dead people?””⁵⁵ Given oral history’s emotional appeal, teachers could find that oral history as a supplementary teaching tool can bring dry facts and information to life.

The primary objective of oral history projects is to broaden the students’ understanding of events, periods and themes by offering them the perspectives of those who lived them. When students go beyond the role of passive learner to active researcher, they become active participants in the learning process. According to Sitton, oral history research is an effective learning tool because it “teaches academic and interpersonal life skills in a real-world, experiential context.”⁵⁶ An oral history project does not necessarily require students to study in isolation but in groups. By encouraging students to work on their projects in small groups, teachers can hold the students accountable for their contributions.⁵⁷ The cooperative learning approach also makes a seemingly insurmountable task achievable and when all students are involved in the the design of the oral history project they become even more active.

When gathering oral history, students gain valuable skills that can improve their reading skills. They tend to become more active listeners and acquire better inquiry skills. As students collect oral history, their interest in the study of the past often increases. That method of gathering information often provides a sense of immediacy about history that cannot be gained from reading.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Huerta, C.H. and Flemmer, L.A., “Using Student Generated Oral History Research in the Secondary Classroom” in Clearing House, Vol. 74, No.2, November/December 2000, p. 106.

⁵⁶ Sitton, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Heppner, P.P. and Thomas, T.R., “Using oral history in teaching the history of counselling” in Counsellor Education and Supervision, Vol. 34, No. 1, September 1994, p. 68.

⁵⁸ Oosthuizen, p. 16.

Paul Thompson highlights how inquiry, language, social and technical skills develop through the use of oral history.⁵⁹ Students actively listen to the individuals they are interviewing so that they can better probe the respondents. They usually become more adept at raising and articulating ideas, and communicating with the people from different generations and backgrounds. Because conducting an interview requires sound experience on the part of the interviewer, students need to be carefully guided and made to feel comfortable with the process, especially when interviews are taped.⁶⁰ The key to conducting a good interview is the ability to ask stimulating questions. A good listener then prompts the person to provide more details.

Once students understand that written testimony is shaped and understood in the same manner as oral evidence, they are less anxious about engaging in challenging reading assignments. Because students interview people in their own community, they need to place their findings in a larger, more general context. Research projects based on varied types of sources encourage students to compare, contrast and place their interviews in the larger context they have developed by reading and viewing films.⁶¹

As teachers validate the life experiences of families, they also enhance the self-concept of students and broaden their own knowledge about the cultures from which the students come. Students and teachers discover that families have something worth sharing. They are able to recognize both the common characteristics that they share with other ethnic groups and the uniqueness of their own family and ethnic group.⁶²

⁵⁹ Thompson, P., The Voice of the Past, p. 103.

⁶⁰ Neuenschwander, J.A., Oral History as a teaching approach, p. 152.

⁶¹ Wilson, W.J. and Memory, D.M., "Accommodating Weak Readers in History Research Projects: Using varied types of sources" in Social Studies, Vol. 92, No.4, July/August 2001, p. 163.

⁶² Banks, J., Integrating the curriculum with ethnic content: Approaches and guidelines. Multicultural education: Issues and Perspectives, p. 206.

Students learn to analyse raw data, extract what is important or relevant for developing a narrative, begin to understand patterns, compare and contrast their experiences with those of others and carry out research with reference materials to broaden their understanding of events referred to in the interviews. Their self-concept is enhanced as they understand that the experiences of their families and ethnic groups are a part of history and have a legitimate place in the school curriculum.⁶³ Thus, by using oral history, students are able both to experience some of the issues in qualitative research as well as to carry out a piece of practical work.⁶⁴

1.4 Oral history and other forms of history

The significance of oral history as discussed above is realised partly when it is used in conjunction with other forms of history. Orally communicated history is a valid and valuable information, as oral tradition and written history complement one another. Each body of knowledge possesses qualities that, taken together, form a comprehensive historical record. Alone, each one is incomplete, but together they form an harmonious union, with the one offering objective interpretation based upon sound evidence, and the other giving a personalised immediacy, a sense of being there and of participation. By accumulating sources of information and comparing them, we can arrive at an approximate understanding of what happened or what is happening and hold this information with some certainty. But there is never absolute certainty about any event, about any fact, no matter what sources are used. No single source or combination of them can ever give a complete picture of the total complexity of the reality.⁶⁵ Valerie Yow attests to this when she says: “we cannot reconstruct a past or present event in its

⁶³ Neuenschwander, p. 153.

⁶⁴ Pile, S., “Oral History and teaching qualitative methods” in Journal of Geography in Higher Education, Vol. 16, No. 2, 1992, p. 135.

⁶⁵ Oluwole, S.B., Philosophy and Oral Tradition, p. 10.

entirety, because the evidence is fragmentary.”⁶⁶

The specialists of orality distinguish two approaches and methodologies of orally communicated history. These are oral history and oral tradition. Oral history, as defined earlier, is based on eyewitnesses’ accounts about the events and situations which are contemporary. It differs from oral traditions in that oral traditions are no longer contemporary. Oral traditions have been transmitted orally for a period beyond the lifetime of the informants.⁶⁷ The two methodologies typically are very different with regard to the collection of sources as well as with regard to their analysis.

Oral historians typically interview participants about events experienced, often of a dramatic nature, when the historical consciousness in the communities involved is still in flux. For this reason Jan Vansina calls oral history “immediate history”.⁶⁸ Interviews of this nature are always compared to available written or printed information. The goal is to save sources from oblivion, to come to a first hand assessment of the events/situations studied and to promote consciousness among the actors of the happenings themselves.

Oral tradition, unlike oral history, focuses mainly on the past beyond the recall of one’s lifespan. The term is normally applied to the practice of those historians working on the history of non-literate societies. This is a very difficult area of historical work where the oral traditions of a people are used to reconstruct their chronology, migrations, political and cultural history. It is difficult because often there is no written evidence available to support or cross-check the oral evidence against. Oral tradition changes constantly

⁶⁶ Yow, V., A Practical guide for Social Scientists, p. 22.

⁶⁷ Vansina, J., Oral Tradition as History, pp. 12-13.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

from generation to generation. It changes as the interests, opinions, fears and needs of each generation change. Thus the process of transmission from generation to generation presents problems of validity, which do not apply to memories of direct experiences. This aspect of oral tradition is the central subject-matter of oral history.⁶⁹ Furthermore, what is distinctive about the information passed from one generation to another is that it is what someone has been told and not about their personal experiences.

As information is transmitted beyond the generation that gave rise to it, it becomes oral tradition. It is the most traditional way of re-telling and learning history, and it is the oldest form of recorded history.⁷⁰ The Sesotho oral tradition, for example, was and is still, though to a lesser degree, central to the Sesotho way of life. Children's stories were the way in which history, customs, beliefs and values were passed on from generation to generation. Stories were told usually in the evening around the fire, often by grandmothers. Most of these stories had a moral lesson and were used to teach the importance of certain values in an interesting and entertaining way. All the traditional stories had songs that were sung at intervals while the story was being told.⁷¹

Oral traditions include not only oral history but also poems, songs, legends and stories. Judging from the definition of oral tradition, folktales and folksongs clearly played an important and unifying function in society. As Patrick Mbunwe-Samba observes, some tales were meant to warn against disobedience and disrespect towards elders, while songs like lullabies played a role in the care of babies. He adds that, in contrast, scientific theories and explanations are still speculative because myths and legends will

⁶⁹ Lummis, p. 26.

⁷⁰ Mbunwe-Samba, P., Oral traditions and the African past, p. 64.

⁷¹ Oluwole, p. 6.

continue to be created even today.⁷²

Thompson, in trying to create a simpler and more vivid picture of oral tradition, refers to it as a “national tradition which everybody, peasants, townsfolk, old men and women, even children said and repeated.”⁷³ This definition suggests that the spoken word of a people about their past constitutes oral tradition when it is passed down from one generation to another. It only becomes history when it has been recorded by historians. The historian’s recording will consist of oral testimony, which is described by Leslie Whitz as an interviewee’s ‘personal life history’ revealing what happened and also providing the feeling or mood for an event.⁷⁴

Both oral and written histories serve as existing histories, and also as historical sources from which historians obtain evidence. They are also used together to balance out the accounts of events given by either one. That is to say that they are compared to one another so as to try and gain a clearer picture of the events to which they are referring.⁷⁵ A historian, for example, studying the life of T.K. Mopeli⁷⁶ would read the written accounts of his life and interview people who knew him very well. The historian would then compare and contrast the written and oral information, so as to see where they corroborate or conflict and why. Thus, it is important that historians use not only oral sources but also written sources as not one method of recounting history is flawless.⁷⁷

⁷² Allen and Montell, p. 33.

⁷³ Thompson, p. 22.

⁷⁴ Whitz, L., Write your own History, p. 40.

⁷⁵ Lummis, p. 160.

⁷⁶ The former Prime Minister of the then Qwa-Qwa homeland.

⁷⁷ Oluwole, p. 10.

As indicated earlier, while written documents supply factual information about the whys and wherefores of historical events, orally communicated history often expresses how people felt about those events, how they reacted to them and how the events affected their lives.⁷⁸ Eyewitness accounts of historical occurrences often provide the human dimension by reporting not only the details of what happened, but the emotional responses of the individuals to the events themselves. The following account by Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, reveals that:

“The Namoha Battle took place on 27 November 1950. On a shiny afternoon a big crowd gathered at Namoha and we were singing and and dancing when we suddenly saw the police approaching us. We were deeply concerned because we knew we were not supposed to have any gathering of more than five people. When they came closer, they stopped and ordered us to disperse as our gathering was illegal. We ignored the order to disperse and when the police opened fire, we retaliated by throwing stones and sticks at them as we ran away. Nobody expected it. As I was there, I witnessed this, as people ran away in different directions yelling and crying After the fighting had stopped, other people came back to assist the wounded and placed the dead together. The Battle was followed by mass arrests, trial and conviction of some people. I shall never forget the sound of those guns, the crying and moaning of people and the blood that was all over the area where the confrontation began. It was such a tragedy that something like that happened.”⁷⁹

Written records usually refer to what happened, while oral sources almost invariably provide insights into the human element. The written history is ideally considered objective. Orally communicated history on the other hand, deriving as it does from the

⁷⁸ Allen and Montell, p. 36.

⁷⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 10/04/02.

personal experiences of individuals, tends to be viewed more as subjective and evaluative. The individual and community attitudes are clearly expressed in oral accounts of historical events.⁸⁰ The story, told by the Basotho, about feelings running high between the Basotho and the white people in the neighbouring towns and farms, is revealing in that regard. It contains the notion held by the Basotho community that the white people had no right to interfere in their affairs, even though the Basotho were under the control of the white government. Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, revealed:

“We were very angry about what the white people did to us in our own land. We were not expecting any interference from the Whites as we had our own Paramount Chief and his council who had the right to make decisions for us. We were attacked for no apparent reason except to force us to submit to white rule. After the Namoha battle, because we refused to surrender, even white farmers and those in neighbouring towns wanted to attack us and they chased us away from their shops. After the Battle nothing of the proposed improvements such as cattle culling continued, thus we felt justified in rejecting those measures in the first place.”⁸¹

Written history of all kinds, whether on the international, national, regional or local levels, typically deals narrowly with wars, elections, inventions, depressions, disasters, heroes, and other events that change the course of history. Despite the fact that important historical events may be better understood when they are placed within the context of the typical conditions under which life was lived, the routine activities of everyday life, such as childhood pass times, family life, courting customs and other social patterns, have generally been neglected by many formal historians. The lack of

⁸⁰ Seldon and Pappworth, p. 21.

⁸¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/01.

descriptions of ordinary people doing ordinary things gives very little idea of what the past was like for the people who experienced the history altering events. Through orally recorded life stories of ordinary citizens, as well as outstanding ones, an entire historical era or geographical region may be portrayed.⁸²

Reality is composed of both fact and perception, so documents alone do not come close to telling the whole truth, and while a researcher cannot fully re-create the reality or atmosphere of the period under investigation, he or she can get quite close by restoring the human will and human agency to what happened. Debating the superiority of either documentary or oral evidence is essentially sterile because both are essential in creating a complete historical account.⁸³ The value of each can be enhanced when it is used along with the other because they have been set down at different times and were subject to different personal biases, contemporary pressures and social conventions. They should be used to illuminate the defects of each other rather than to be seen as simple contradictions. Oral evidence is incomplete in itself; it is even more partial to imagine that the history of a class society can be written from evidence drawn only from one section. To realise its potential it must be related to the testimony of others and triangulated with documentary and material evidence.⁸⁴

Despite being complementary to each other, there are distinct differences between spoken and written sources. In the first place, the circumstances under which sources were originally produced should be considered. Though sources might relate to a common period and constellation of events, they are produced at different times and under quite different conditions. The documentary sources are contemporary with the

⁸² Seldon and Pappworth, p. 63.

⁸³ Jordan, M.J., "Race to Record cold war's inside story" in Christian Science Monitor, Vol. 91, No. 147, 25 .1999, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Lummis, p. 155.

events to which they relate. The events and the sources, in this respect, are of one time and the document can, therefore, be presented as a symbol of its own age. The interview data in contrast are produced after the time of which they speak.⁸⁵

Secondly, the two sources are also distinctly different in terms of the audience for whom they are produced. The documents relating to the topic under investigation are the products of formal discourses. They are always knowingly constructed as expressions that are essentially public and permanent. The oral data, in contrast, are the product of an immediate dialogue of which the interviewers are active parts and which, whatever the public uses to which the outcomes might be put, often has the character of a private and intimate personal conversation.⁸⁶ They stand as they are spoken, in contrast to the document, which may be redrafted and restyled many times before it is ready to go before its public.

1.5 Conclusion

The chapter has highlighted the definition, value and interaction of oral history and other forms of history. The definition of oral history as used in this study is, simply put, history about ordinary people remembering the past, through speech and what they did in the past and how the history affected and changed their lives. It is a means that would allow the grassroots people to produce their own history. It is also useful in the classroom. Armed with oral history methodology, teachers are in a good position to help students to participate fully in research projects and thus lay a good foundation for future research.

⁸⁵ Gardner, P. and Cunningham, P., "Oral History and teachers' professional practice: A wartime turning point?" in Cambridge Journal of Education, Vol. 27, No. 3, November 1997, p. 331.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Oral history allows ordinary people to express their views and to have a hand in creating historical awareness. Oral history is a history that considers everyone, irrespective of one's position in society, as an important actor in the reconstruction of past events. It is a history from below that acknowledges heroes, heroines, saints and sinners not just amongst the leaders, but from the unknown majority of the ordinary people as well. It gives common people dignity, a sense of significance and self-confidence and makes them feel appreciated and honoured.⁸⁷ Most of the interviewees in this study did not hold any significant positions in society and they felt honoured to be interviewed on their personal experiences of the Namoha Battle. The case of Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tsoeu village, drives home this point:

“I never thought that anybody would come to me and ask me about my personal experience in the Namoha Battle. My son, I feel very excited, about this and it is encouraging to see young people like you being interested in us old fashioned men and women in your culture. I will die peacefully knowing that I have left something for my children to remember me. May your ancestors be with you in your endeavour to write your history. I wish more and more children like you could do the same thing.”⁸⁸

It became clear from the discussion that oral tradition and oral history share a common element. While it is easy to propose distinctions between them, it is more difficult to sustain the differences in practice, because there are much more similarities in the ways they are collected, processed, stored and made available to researchers and in the equipment required to record and preserve these materials. In common practice, those who concentrate on oral history and those who work with oral tradition essentially belong to a common class of oral historians and share many of the same interests,

⁸⁷ Lummis, p. 156.

⁸⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tsoeu village, 19/09/01.

concerns, objectives, methods and procedures. The difference between the two is a matter of emphasis and angle.

Moreover, based on the above discussion, although orally communicated history is different in kind from written sources, in that it is richer in communicative power, containing as it does, inflections, hesitations, expressions and nuances not reproducible in written form, they both rely heavily upon each other. Both approaches have their own benefits. The fact that oral evidence can fill in the gaps within the written records, and that a background study is necessary for a successful oral history project, confirms this. Oral history has an important role to play in the collection of historical evidence. It serves as a means of transmitting and preserving the voices of those who, for a number of reasons, have not been heard in conventional written sources. Oral history preserves the past for us to remember, cherish and learn useful lessons.

CHAPTER 2

THE CHALLENGES OF ORAL HISTORY WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON THE BASOTHO COMMUNITY

2.1 Introduction

The significance of oral history has been discussed in the previous chapter. However, this is not to say that the gathering and the use of oral history data is without shortcomings. Notwithstanding its special benefits and attributes, conducting oral history or becoming engaged in eliciting personal life stories presents a range of challenges for the researcher. Some of these challenges have prompted some historians to believe that oral history does not produce valid history. But this is probably because there are different views on the nature of history itself, and what seems self-evidently valid to one historian may seem equally self-evidently useless to another. The debate as such between these schools of thought is worth conducting, but it is not relevant here. In this chapter the researcher aims to look closely at the challenges faced by the oral history practitioners and the role of the researcher in minimizing these challenges, the criticisms levelled against oral history, and the ways of ensuring the authenticity of the oral evidence gathered. Many of the problems identified and discussed here are drawn from the researcher's own experience in conducting this study.

2.2 The disregard for standard chronology

The first problem identified in oral evidence is its lack of precision. A written document is, by definition, stable. But an oral informant can give different versions of the same events at different times. Particularly worrying is the lack of precision in chronology. It seems paradoxical for people to talk about history without referring to chronology.¹ Yet in orally communicated history (as experienced by the researcher in conducting this

¹ Allen, B. and Montell, W.L., From Memory to History. Using Oral sources in Local History Research, p. 26.

study) standard chronology, whether as an overall framework or as the order of events, was usually missing. Frequently informants placed events in time by relating them to other occurrences. One of the reasons is because causal relationships are easily recognisable among the different events. That is, it is easier to say that a historical event took place in relation to an even greater event in history.² Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, said, for example, in response to the question: ‘when did this Battle take place and where were you’:

“Ke ne ke se ke le teng, mme ka nako ya lerole le lefubedu ke ne ke sa le mohlankana. Bothata ba ntwa ya Namoha bo qadile le ho lweella ka nako ya ntwa ya Hitlara. Ntwa yona e lwannwe ka nako ya puso ya Malane.”³

Here, the informant associated his date of birth with the 1933 drought in South Africa, the start of the Namoha Battle with the Second World War (1939-1945) and the actual Namoha Battle with the first term (1948-1953) of D.F. Malan, the former Prime Minister of South Africa. A researcher must know when these events occurred so as to establish some kind of time frame for his or her research. The events help the researcher to estimate how old this person was at the time of the Battle, when the problems leading to the Battle gained momentum, and when it was fought. The researcher had to establish this because the informant had indicated what was significant to him.

Very often, it is neither time nor chronology but the association of events that is important, as Barbara Allen points out in reflecting on her experience that:

“The stories the informants related that afternoon were not told in chronological order, nor were they linked together topically, for they dealt with more than just episodes of violence that were the ostensible subject of the interview. Rather, they seemed to be grouped according

² Ibid., p. 27.

³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2001. “I was around, and at the time of the ‘red dust (1933 drought) I was a young man; the problem of Namoha Battle started to increase during Hitler’s war (World war Two); the battle was fought during the rule of Malan.” Freely Translated.

to the association the informants made among the events they were recounting, the individuals involved in those events and the relations that bound those individuals to each other and to others in the community.”⁴

The ordering principle here is not time, but the emotional associations that the people have with the events and the persons being described. Alessandro Portelli explains this further:

“Historians may be interested in reconstructing the past, the informants are interested in projecting an image. Thus historians often strive for a linear, chronological sequence; informants may be more interested in pursuing and gathering together bundles of meaning, relationships and themes across the linear span of their life times.”⁵

The relative dating of events by association with other episodes in an individual’s life shows how the past becomes most meaningful only when it has been experienced personally. According to Barbara Allen and William L. Montell, persons, places and events are important in the human perception of history, time is not.⁶ As a result, asking about intricacies of chronology may prove frustrating and this could lead to a position where an informant would feel undermined and thus could refuse to cooperate. This can result in the total failure of an interview. This is not to negate the value of oral testimonies in recalling the details of specific events, but to point out that events are reminisced about, without a chronological frame of references. In the Western way of understanding of the past, it is common to order the past according to a date or period. However, for most ordinary African people, places and events are more important in their accounts of what took place in history, while time is not as inherently crucial.

⁴ Allen, B., “Recounting the Past: The Narrators’ Perspective in Oral History” in Oral History Review, Vol.12, No.7, 1984, p. 11.

⁵ Portelli, A., The Time of my Life: In death of Luigi Transtulli and other Stories: Form and meaning in Oral History, p. 63.

⁶ Allen and Montell, p. 27.

Another facet of the disregard for chronology that was experienced in the oral history interview was that the chronological order of events was usually scrambled. The informant could tell you about the last aspect and then go back to tell you about the course and then the causes of the event under investigation. Some of the informants interviewed, for example, related first, how they were brutally shot by the police, and then went back to narrate what led to the shooting and why some of them were imprisoned while others were not. The neglect of the chronicle may make it seem that there is no order at all to the way, some, Africans talk about the past. Yet there is a connecting strand in what is said, although it is quite different from what historians might expect it to be. Although the lack of a sequence of events may occasionally prove frustrating to the researcher, that lack may be relatively easy to supplement by comparing the oral information from one person with that gathered from another or from written sources. Therefore, there is the need for a thorough background study.

It is an established fact that in history chronology is essential. Improved interviewing techniques represent a partial answer to this problem. The interviewer can help the informant to get the right chronology by putting his or her questions in a manner that assists the informant to get the right chronology of events.⁷ Another solution is to do a thorough background study on the topic under investigation and to check the interview against alternative sources. Oral testimony is to be evaluated against all the sources pertaining to the topic.⁸

Another aspect of African culture which has an impact on the way in which the interview takes place and the outcome of the interview is the concept of time. Many ordinary Africans do not take the question of time, as viewed from the Western perspective, seriously. John Mbiti claims that:

⁷ Reid, G., "Keep on raising such testimonies: Collecting oral sources in the Hope and Unity Metropolitan Community Church" in South African Archives Journal, Vol. 39, 1997, p. 17.

⁸ Allen and Montell, p. 27.

“Historians think in serial time, as measured by the calendar and the wristwatch. But serial time is not the only sort of time that people use, particularly in Africa. African time, in most cases among ordinary African people, is not about hours, but in terms of dawn to sunset and the routine activities of the day.”⁹

To illustrate the African’s conception of time, the rising of the sun is an event which is recognised by the whole community. It does not matter, therefore, whether the sun rises at 5a.m or 7a.m, so long as it rises. When a person says that he or she will meet another at sunrise, wristwatch time does not matter, so long as it is during the general period of sunrise. Likewise, it is immaterial whether people go to bed at 9 p.m or at 12 midnight. The important thing is the event of going to bed. The time is, for the people concerned, meaningful at the point of the event and not as represented by the Western perspective. This has to be noted by any researcher wishing to conduct interviews among ordinary African people.

Mbiti goes further to point out that:

“The question of time is of little or no academic concern to African peoples in their traditional life. For them, time is simply a composition of events which have occurred, those which are taking place now and those which are immediately to occur. What has not taken place or what has no likelihood of immediate occurrence falls in the category of no time.”¹⁰

Thus, the impact of this conception of time is that the researcher may set the time for the interview to be 14:00 and the interviewee would arrive or be ready only at 15:00.

⁹ Mbiti, J.S., African Religions and Philosophy, p. 19.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 16-17.

This is not because he or she does not respect the researcher or the importance of the interview, rather that there is a contradiction in the time scales being used by the researcher and the interviewee. If the researcher gets aggravated at interviewee's lateness, the interviewee may see this as disrespect for a culture and time frame, and he or she may be reluctant in the interview and less helpful than he or she might have been. So, being aware of the time frames used by the researcher's prospective informants helps him or her and the interviewees to have successful meetings not underlined by emotions of disrespect and disappointments.

Furthermore, the timing of the interview could also have adverse effects on the outcome of the interview. When a researcher embarks on a set of interviews, he or she must be aware of the rituals which are observed by the interviewee due to their culture and in their community.¹¹ Interviewing a Uniting Reformed Church Christian woman, for example on a Thursday, may be seen as being insensitive, because Thursday is the day of prayer. As a result the woman may be reluctant to give the information the researcher requires because on that day she is very aware of the religious role she plays in the community.

The second difficulty of oral history that has been identified is the descriptive nature of the oral testimony. The historian's function is to advance towards a fuller understanding of the past.¹² The informants usually do not share this preoccupation. They are primarily concerned with the issues that affected them and they present them as they are remembered and not necessarily as the historians expect. They live in their own world and have their own mental categories. This, of course, contributes to the richness of their testimony. But personal stories can also fall into insignificance. Oral historians need to

¹¹ Working Draft: Training Manual for Oral History Project, p. 15.

¹² Ibid.

be aware of this danger.¹³ A good interview raises the testimony of an individual informant to the status of historical evidence. The quality of the interview depends on the informant's ability to communicate with the right words the meaning of his or her life. The interviewer plays a crucial role in this process. Like a midwife, he or she should assist the informant in bringing to light all the dimensions of his or her life experience about the event under study.¹⁴

2.3 Traditional practices

As oral history is conducted or gathered through words, it involves language. Language is understood as being the foundation for any given culture and forms the centre of the culture, and how it understands or expresses itself. For instance, an informant who is rich in the Sesotho language gives credibility to his or her attachment to his or her culture.¹⁵ That is to say, through the use of their own language, the informants are able to express themselves, their views and their feelings in a way that is unique to their context. It shows that they treasure that culture, and the way in which their culture enables them to express themselves. However, if a researcher is unfamiliar with the language used by his or her informants, this becomes a problem. Therefore, the researcher has to try by all means to understand the language of the informants.

Furthermore, because oral history has to deal with spoken accounts of people concerning events, it is unable to avoid being affected by the different aspects of language, and the ways in which people confront what they are saying. It is affected by the terminology

¹³ Morrissey, C., "Oral History reliability is under question" in Library Journal, Vol. 105, No. 12, 15.6. 1980, p. 320.

¹⁴ Allen and Montell, p. 29.

¹⁵ Asante, M.K., and Asante, K.W., African Culture, p. 55.

which is unique to the context in which cultural jargon is set.¹⁶ A person in South Africa, for example, would use a different language and references in telling their life stories than someone from the United States of America narrating theirs. A South African would generally understand “drugs” as illegal pharmaceuticals while an American might possibly understand this as any medicine. The general terms derive their meanings from the social context in which they are used. This is how people of the same group understand one another and why outsiders often find it difficult to understand them.

Moreover, as an example, it is customary among Basotho families to give boys names normally given to girls, particularly in families which have the misfortune of losing boys at a young age.¹⁷ A boy can be named *Mmakgotso*¹⁸, for example, to mislead any person presumed to be behind the death of boys in that particular family. This implies that if *Mmakgotso* has done remarkable things for the community and the researcher is investigating the development of that community, he or she might think that *Mmakgotso* was a woman. Again, a married woman is not supposed to call her father-in-law by name.¹⁹ If her father-in-law is named *Tau* and her son is named after him, she would call her son *Phoofolo*.²⁰ These names could easily mislead the researcher. Therefore, the researcher has to be aware of these different aspects and take them into account when using oral sources. Similarly the interviewer, in trying to minimize these, he or she could enlist the help of a skilled translator or someone conversant with the culture to help him or her to understand and try to experience the depth of that culture and language.

¹⁶ Sideris, T., Recording Memory in South Africa. The need for oral history in South Africa, p. 47.

¹⁷ Personal collection, transcript interview with Dr. E.N. Maletle, a Sesotho senior lecturer at the University of the Free State- Qwa-Qwa Campus, 8/02/2004.

¹⁸ “Mother of Peace.” Freely Translated.

¹⁹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Dr. E.N. Maletle, a Sesotho senior lecturer at the University of the Free State, Qwa-Qwa Campus, 18/02/2004.

²⁰ “An animal.” Freely Translated.

The other difficulty presented by oral history is that interviewees are often wary about imparting frank information which they consider confidential, especially if they do not know the researcher or his or her work. However, if the researcher has emphasized the serious nature of his research and has built up a relationship of confidence, the interviewee is less likely to be unduly discreet. In fact the interviewer would even find, on occasion, that the interviewee would be so relieved at being able to recall a matter of interest to the researcher that he or she will even be anxious to speak frankly and openly to expunge his or her initial feelings of self conscious or even guilt at agreeing to be interviewed.²¹ But this is not always the case. One of the informants for this study, for example, after meeting the researcher and going together with him to the chief, still did not trust the researcher enough to speak frankly to him. He went to the extent of calling one of his neighbours, who, fortunately, was the researcher's ex-colleague, to identify him and confirm that he was not a detective trying to 'catch' him. Furthermore, people may refuse to reveal information out of the fear of making allegations for which they may be held responsible, especially concerning sensitive issues in their society. The oral history researcher should be tactful in interviewing people about matters that are likely to create social friction.

The interviewees may, in other instances, also be unwilling to honestly discuss the mistakes or errors even years after the event, or even provide accurate accounts. The willingness or reluctance of the interviewees to recollect things is due to the nature of human memory. That is to say, a person is more likely to remember the good things in their lives and will be less willing to relate the bad aspects of their lives, as these memories can cause pain and emotional distress in the interviewee. This is a special concern when recounting traumatic events or actions that took place years before.²²

²¹ Nkabinde, A.L., In search of a method. Quoted from Oral tradition and Education, ed. E.R. Sienaert and A.N. Bell, p. 98.

²² Amado, J., "The Brazilian Quijote: Truth and fabrication in Oral History" in Luzo- Brazilian Review, Vol. 35, No. 1, Summer 1998, p. 3.

Janaina Amado argues that:

“As time increases between an experience and its recounting, individuals tend to condense the sequence of events and omit critical actions and judgements. Although historians should consider the elapsed time when weighing oral history materials, a long duration does not automatically diminish the value of an interview.”²³

This means then that researchers have to be aware that when asking the interviewee to remember difficult and painful events in their past, the interviewee may not give all the details that are desired as they may choose not to recall all the pain that they have experienced.

There is also an argument that oral evidence is mere gossip. Undoubtedly, some oral evidence is trivial or mere gossip, sometimes of a malicious kind. However, this is not the case with oral evidence in general, and the same criticism might as well be made of some written evidence. It is up to individual researchers to exercise their judgement about the value of the evidence. Anthony Seldon and Joanna Pappworth point out that by developing the practice of providing clear footnotes and other attributions, researchers can help to ensure that oral evidence is supplied and used as responsibly as written evidence to minimise the risk of gratuitous gossip being recorded.²⁴

2.4 Tendency to change the past

The tendency to reconstruct the past is another difficulty. The restructuring of data is the most vexing problem of oral history. Consciously or not, informants often try to

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Seldon, A. and Pappworth, J., By Word of Mouth, p. 21.

embellish the past. They distort their narratives, edit their stories or omit sharing episodes that place a negative light on them. Donald Ritchie argues that:

“While the narratives polish and shape the narration of experience, it also selects aspects of experience that are capable of being placed in it, but at the price of ignoring others. In the end much remains untold. How much and how important we will never know.”²⁵

This is normally done to justify past actions. Public figures are particularly prone to such self-indulgence. They are careful not to say anything that could tarnish their image. They minimize, distort or even deny certain aspects of their roles, actions and decisions.²⁶

The desire for describing oneself in the best light is always there. No matter what the form of expression, people who write their account without an interviewer often make themselves heroes of the stories, justifying their actions to themselves, as they reflect on their experiences. Ordinary grassroots people can also, of course, arrange their stories in accordance with the popular belief, or what is frequently proclaimed. Mafako Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, for example, went to the extent of describing the death of Lieutenant Jonker, who was killed during the Namoha Battle, as follows:

“Jonker was killed by women And after he was killed, his head and private parts were cut off and used as *setlhare*,²⁷ that is why the police guns ended up pumping out water and oil instead of bullets. When this happened, police ran away

²⁵ Ritchie, D., Doing Oral History, p. 33.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Traditional medicine used to perform magic or witchcraft.” Freely Translated.

and we chased them.”²⁸

However, according to the information on documents as well as what the majority of the informants gave, the above description was incorrect. Lieutenant Jonker never lost any part of his body and the postmortem²⁹ confirmed that. Such inaccurate information could possibly mislead those researchers who have little background knowledge about the event under study. Thus, the conscious falsifying of oral evidence does pose a problem. To counter this problem, the interviewer needs to have strong background knowledge of the event he or she is trying to unravel and to cross-check the testimonies and compare them with available written evidence on the event being investigated.

Furthermore, oral evidence is frequently used as a means of settling old scores, particularly at the expense of those who cannot answer back. Oral history, at first glance, may appear to provide a unique forum for a witness to attack former or current rivals.³⁰ Individual researchers can usually discover this when people hold strong feelings about others, and so can alert themselves to this tendency. Tshepo Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tsoana village, for example, claimed that:

“Charles Mopeli was never a real Paramount Chief. He stole this position, as he was not of royal blood but a commoner because his mother was impregnated by a commoner. That is why he let the police kill us. If he had been a real king he would have protected us from the police attack. But because we were led by Mopelinyane, whom he did not like, because he accused him of wanting to unseat him from his position as the paramount chief, he led the police punish us too. This

²⁸ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mafako Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 05/04/2002.

²⁹ Unisa, Acc. 219, Post-mortem Reports, 28 November 1950.

³⁰ Hermanson, L.W., “Listening to the new world: voices from the Velvet Revolution” in Oral History Review, Vol. 21, No. 1, Spring 1993, p. 9.

to be as accurate as possible.⁸² A good transcript is very valuable. Interviewers seldom have time to transcribe their own interviews and, therefore, usually rely on transcribers, who may be unfamiliar with the contents of the interview. It takes an estimated ten to twelve hours to transcribe one hour of tape, although an experienced transcriber, who is familiar with the subject and uses a word processor, can probably finish in less time than the transcriber translating manually. Transcribers should provide a verbatim transcript.⁸³

To retain validity in transcripts, most of the editing, if possible, should be done by the interviewer because he or she was the person who experienced the interview personally and has observed all the nonverbal behaviour of the interviewee. These experiences place the interviewer in a better position to retain validity.⁸⁴ A transcript is at best an imperfect representation of an oral history interview. Many of the aspects that took place during the interview are lost such as the sound and gestures. The transcriber's most important task is to render as close a replica to the actual event as possible. Penyak and Duray point out that accuracy, not speed, should be the transcriber's goal.⁸⁵ This means that the transcriber should not race against time in transcribing because that could cause a loss of the gist of the interview. Taking time in transcribing helps the transcriber to portray as close as possible the actual interview.

Having looked at the general aim of transcribing, it is important to focus on the specific aspects of the transcribing process. The first hurdle to cross in the transcribing process is the question of what language is the transcript to be in, and whether the transcript is to be

⁸² Working Draft, p. 38.

⁸³ A Panel Discussion, "From Interview to Manuscript: Three Ways to Transcribe and Shape your Oral History" in Writing: Teacher's Edition, Vol. 23, No. 3, November/December 2000, p. 2.

⁸⁴ Banaka, p. 26.

⁸⁵ Penyak and Duray, p. 26.

translated.⁸⁶ For this project, interviews were conducted in Sesotho and had to be translated into English. This was not an easy task as some of the meanings are diluted in the process of translation as well as in transcribing. In this study transcription was done first, and was followed by translation of the transcript into English.

Another aspect to be considered in transcribing is the layout. The transcript should have the cover-page, which will contain the information that will be used to identify this transcript. The information to be reflected on the cover-page should be as follows: “the topic of the interview; the interviewee’s name; the interviewer’s name; the date of the interview, location where the interview was conducted and the project for which the interview was done.”⁸⁷

The next step is the layout of the transcript itself. Here the transcriber needs to remember to number pages as this would help in the case pages get separated. Note, again, that the transcript does not have an introduction or a conclusion; it only has the spoken words of the tape and explanatory notes.⁸⁸ In the transcript it is important to identify who is speaking. For this it is adequate to have the initials of the person speaking after a key of the people involved has been given.⁸⁹ For example:

Key: Interviewer: Mokena Semela: M.S.
 Interviewee: Disala Mopeli: D.S.
 Transcript: M.S.: Where were you born?
 D.S.: I was born here in Qwa-Qwa
 M.S.: How
 D.S.: Well

Following the completion of a rough transcript, the interviewer should read the text while

⁸⁶ The Working Draft, p. 38.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

⁸⁸ Slim and Thompson, p. 8.

⁸⁹ Working Draft, p. 39.

listening to the tape. Because the nature of a transcript is conversational, sentences are often disjointed or run on for many lines. The transcriber should decide whether to leave them alone or to form several sentences out of separated or incomplete phrases.⁹⁰ Spelling should be checked and acronyms used accurately. Corrections can be made quickly and easily when a transcript has been typed. When making corrections on a typescript, it is advisable to use standard editorial or proofreading marks.⁹¹

A copy of the edited transcript, where necessary and depending on the type of the interview the researcher conducted, should be sent to the interviewee for review, noting any passages that may need his or her special attention or explanation. This revision is the interviewee's opportunity to clarify and develop comments, to correct inadvertent errors of fact and to improve grammar and syntax.⁹² Deletions from the text should be discouraged whenever possible. Interviewees may be slow to return their edited transcripts; therefore, it is crucial to impose a reasonable suspense date. Once returned, the statements in the transcript are considered. At this time, a second review to check for any remaining spelling errors or other editorial oversights is advisable before printing a clean transcript.⁹³ This procedure is more appropriate and is normally applied by interviewers conducting interviews on behalf of institutions such as libraries and archives. It is to ensure that what is archived is as close to the event portrayed as possible.

Before storing interview tapes and transcripts, the researcher has to make sure that each copy of the interview tape is properly labelled.⁹⁴ Ideally, tapes should be stored in a dust

⁹⁰ http://www.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Styleguide.html, 30 July 2001.

⁹¹ Wilmsen, C., "For the Record: Editing and the Production of Meaning in Oral History" in *Oral History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1, Winter/Spring 2001, p. 65.

⁹² http://www.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Styleguide.html, 30 July 2001.

⁹³ Everett, p. 28.

⁹⁴ Working Draft, p. 40.

free environment that is kept at constant temperature and relatively low humidity. The researcher should not rewind the tape before storing. Rewinding can create uneven tension within the tape. Tapes should therefore be stored after they have been played. All interview tapes, transcripts or memoranda for the record and supporting materials should be stored together.⁹⁵

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, attention to details and techniques that are essential to expert interviewing have been discussed and emphasized. It has been pointed out that for the successful completion of a project the researcher has to choose a subject for research that is of interest to him or her. This is a head start on a successful project. Furthermore, the researcher has to carry out informational interviews to find out what the people who lived the event judge to be important. In drawing up the interview guide, the interviewer has the opportunity to ask questions that will enable him or her to situate his or her findings in historical context. Here the researcher can draw on his or her background reading to suggest questions that will reveal to what extent the people he or she talked to were like the rest of the nation, or how they were different. In the wording of his or her questions, the researcher should strive for clarity. Choose the strategy that will work best, given the topic and the particular kind of informant. Equipment in good working order and conscientious record keeping enable the researcher to stay in control of the project.

Meeting a potential interviewee before the actual interview means that the interviewer does not appear as a stranger on the day of the interview. If this happens, then he or she has to explain the purpose of the project and give some indication of what would be discussed. It is recommended by most established researchers that the researcher should start with nonthreatening questions that are easy to answer. To get the best out of the interviewee he or she has to build rapport by being sensitive to the informant's feelings,

⁹⁵ Everett, p. 28.

showing appreciation, listening carefully, explaining why he or she changes topics, and why he or she asks a line of questions, following the informant's pacing, and communicating interest and respect. Know when to probe, when to use a follow-up, when to ask for clarification, to try a suggestion, to ask for a reason why, and to pose a hypothetical question. Challenging questions are appropriate, but must be pursued with caution. At the end of the interview, the interviewer has to thank the informant and politely ask for names of other possible informants. After completion of each interview, or as the interviewer may decide, he or she has to transcribe the interview while the information is still fresh in his or her mind. This should be done as accurately as possible.

Lastly, every interviewing experience is unique, and this is part of the charm of fieldwork. Thus practice makes perfect. As can be seen above, there are things the researcher can do before, during and after the interview to make every interview more successful. All of these steps are aimed at helping him or her to have as successful an interview as possible, but they are not hard and fast rules. Rather, they are suggestions as the researcher must assess each interview as he or she conducts it and be flexible to the needs of the project and the interviewee.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE 1950 NAMOHA BATTLE

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the general historical and geographical background of the Witsieshoek Native Reserve. It also gives a brief background to the unrest in the Reserve, as reflected mainly from written sources. The chapter forms the basis for chapters six to nine that follow. It aims at highlighting issues such as the position of the Reserve before the unrest with respect to history, geography and administration. This chapter also gives a brief account of the underlying and immediate causes of the disturbances that culminated in a clash with the police. Descriptions of the detailed causes of the Battle are discussed in the next chapter. This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the South African Union government's legislation with regard to the settlement of the Africans. The pressures rural people were subjected to in terms of the betterment scheme, the Union government's response to the Africans' need for more land, and the reaction it provoked from the Africans, especially the Basotho of Witsieshoek, are discussed.

4.2 A broad historical background

The policy of the South African Union government (hereafter called the government) in the African-occupied portions of the countryside, should be understood within the broad context of the South African political economy of that era. In the pursuance of its policy of segregation, the government confined black people to the areas not particularly suitable for pastoral and agricultural activities. Thus, the people were forced to survive in the areas without access to adequate resources and infrastructure.¹

The boundaries of the Reserves (later Bantustans and Homelands) were configured by

¹ Cock, J. and Koch, E.(eds), Going Green: People, Politics and Environment in South Africa, pp. 176-177.

two sets of Acts: the 1913 Native Land Act and the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act² (hereafter referred to as the 'Trust'). The Land Act of 1913 made provision for separate land allocation for Africans within the new Union dispensation to occupy as opposed to a temporary place of residence where they were merely tenants of the state or individuals.³ It set aside the rapidly diminishing areas under African communal tenure for exclusively African occupation, and prohibited Africans from purchasing and or leasing land outside those areas. At the same time everyone not of African descent was prohibited from purchasing land in African residential areas, except with the permission of the Governor-General.⁴ Certain areas occupied by Africans were scheduled as Reserves.⁵ The 1913 Land Act also set out, with limited success, to restrict the surge of African squatting on white-owned farmland⁶ as squatting continued thereafter.

The 1936 legislation amplified the anti-squatting provisions of the 1913 Act, (actually making squatting illegal) and established a Native Trust to buy up land in the so called released areas to be occupied and farmed by Africans under stringent supervision by the Trust officials. As the population increased and more land was needed for cultivation, pressure for more land increased. Overstocking and overgrazing became acute in the Reserves and drastic steps were needed to halt the rapid deterioration of land. Thus the Trust further made provision for the improvement of areas under occupation by the Africans.⁷

² Lodge, T., Black Politics in South Africa since 1945, p. 261.

³ Brookes, E.H., History of the Native Policy, p. 143.

⁴ Maylam, P., A History of the African People of South Africa from the Early Iron Age to the 1970s, p. 143.

⁵ A Reserve was an area set aside exclusively for Africans' residential purposes by the former South African Government.

⁶ Wilson, M. and Thomson, L., The Oxford History of South Africa, 11, 1870-1966, p. 62.

⁷ Lodge, p. 261.

Proclamation 31 of 1939, which outlined a programme of livestock limitation and land conservation measures (the betterment scheme) was outlined in the 1936 Act. This was the first attempt by the state to deal with the deterioration of the land in the Reserves. The betterment scheme embodied the limitation of livestock to what was conceived to be the land's carrying capacity, and the re-division of the land into residential, cultivation and grazing areas. Kraals would no longer be scattered but grouped together "in convenient villages".⁸ The Africans in the rural areas vehemently opposed these measures, despite their alleged good intentions to improve the deteriorating situation in the Reserves. The opposition to the betterment scheme led to unrest. Between 1940 and 1955 there was a succession of bitter localised conflicts between the African people in the Reserves and the authorities.

Following the demarcations imposed by the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts, Qwa-Qwa, then Witsieshoek, was classified as a native Reserve.⁹ It was to be under the administration of the Native Commissioner, assisted by the Witsieshoek Native Reserve Board. After it came into power in 1948, the National Party vigorously pursued its policy of apartheid that led to the passing of the Bantu Authorities Act in 1951, and provided for the establishment of the homeland system. Thus Qwa-Qwa became the homeland for the Basotho under this Act and was granted self-government in 1974. It remained semi-autonomous until 1994, when it was re-incorporated into South Africa and became part of the Free State Province.

The original inhabitants of Qwa-Qwa were the San people. Their rock paintings are still visible in the area. They were driven out of this area by one of *Morena*¹⁰

⁸ Eiselen, W.M.M., The Development of Native Reserves, p. 31.

⁹ Davenport, T.R.H., South Africa: A Modern History, p. 293.

¹⁰ "King or Chief."

Moshoeshoe's¹¹ subordinates, Lephatoana Oetsi,¹² who, in turn, settled there around 1838. The Voortrekkers settled around this area and established farms along the boundaries of Oetsi, but did not settle in Witsieshoek. Initially the two groups lived peacefully side by side. However, a conflict later arose between Oetsi's people and the farmers when the Makhlokoe were suspected of cattle-raiding by the farmers. The farmers reported Oetsi to Major H.D. Warden, the British Resident in Bloemfontein, in charge of the administration of the *Republiek van die Oranje` Vrije Staat*¹³ after it was annexed by the British in 1848. Major Warden ordered Oetsi to retrieve the stolen cattle from his people. When Oetsi refused, Major Warden ordered him to evacuate the area. But Oetsi refused and no immediate action was taken against him. The complaints about Oetsi and his subjects (of stealing the cattle) kept flooding in.¹⁴

Finally, in 1856, two years after the signing of the Bloemfontein Convention,¹⁵ the order to expel Oetsi and his people was executed. Two punitive expeditions were sent out against Oetsi: one in May and the other in June the same year. This marked the first armed conflict between Whites and Blacks in that area. Oetsi was forced to retreat. His last hideout was a horse shoe-shaped cavern about 107m long, 35m deep and approximately 121m high with boulders at the entrance. The ragged surroundings rendered Boer rifles utterly ineffective for they could not advance within shooting distance.¹⁶ The cavern is still known even to this day among the Basotho as *Lehaha la Oetsi*(Oetsi's cavern).

¹¹ The founder of the Basotho nation.

¹² Oetsi, the original name of Witsie.

¹³ Republic of the Orange Free State.

¹⁴ Ross, J.J., Die Sending te Witsieshoek: Paulus Mopeli, pp. 12-13.

¹⁵ This was the agreement through which the British authorities handed the Voortrekkers in the Orange River Sovereignty their independence, in 1854.

¹⁶ Ross, p. 13.

The commandos, therefore, surrounded the area with the object of starving Oetsi and his subjects. As Oetsi's resources got exhausted, he, together with a few headmen, sneaked out under the cover of darkness and fled to Lesotho where Moshoeshoe gave them land at Likgoele, south of Maseru, in what is now the District of Mafeteng.¹⁷ The following day the rest of his people came out of the cavern. Many were shot at and those who escaped fled and scattered. The Orange Free State's expeditions captured most of their cattle, horses and sheep¹⁸ and marked the end of Oetsi's position as chief of Makholokoe.¹⁹ The farmers subsequently annexed the area and turned it into their property. For about ten years the area remained unoccupied.

During the Second Orange Free State-Basotho War of 1865, the Basotho were forced to retreat and were defeated by the Free State forces. Following this war the Treaty of Thaba Bosiu was signed on 5 April 1866. Its terms severely truncated the Basotho kingdom and gave the Orange Free State much of the land it had conquered.²⁰ With this arrangement the Basotho forfeited their occupation rights over about two thirds of their land, which constituted the most arable parts of Lesotho. Chief Paulus Howell Mopeli, whose former territory was now inside the ceded territory, found himself in a difficult position. Was he to stay with the rest of the Basotho with whom he no longer felt at ease and fight the burghers to regain their lost land? Or was he to leave Lesotho entirely and save himself and his followers? If he decided on the latter, where would they go? The only way for him was to handle the situation diplomatically. He, thus, asked Moshoeshoe for permission to visit the Boers. Moshoeshoe, who knew about the divisions and the jealousies among his sons and chiefs towards Mopeli, readily granted

¹⁷ Haliburton, G., A Historical Dictionary of Lesotho, p. 182.

¹⁸ Stals, E.L.P., Die Geskiedenis van Witsieshoek en Thaba Nchu, p.29. Quoted from M. Matli: Native Policy, Management and their Impact on Tribal Society: The Witsieshoek Native Reserve, 1907-1951, pp. 1-3.

¹⁹ Oosthuizen, S.P.R., Die Verskuiwende Grens tussen die Vrystaat en Basutoeland, p. 160.

²⁰ Maylam, p. 114.

permission. Mopeli, thereupon, approached the Orange Free State authorities to be taken over as their subjects.²¹

Mopeli requested J.H. Brand, the President of OFS, to allow him to re-occupy his former place in the conquered territory under whatever terms and conditions the Orange Free State government may wish to impose on him. He furthermore expressed his wish to withdraw himself and his people from Lesotho.²² He succeeded in the negotiations and thus became a subject of the Republic of the Orange Free State. Mopeli and his people were allowed to settle in Witsieshoek.²³

A formal treaty was entered into between Mopeli and the Orange Free State on 1 July 1886.²⁴ Thus, this piece of mountainous land was handed to the Basotho after the signing of the *Traktaat*²⁵ between President Brand, two members of the Assembly, A.J. Erwee and John Changuin on the one hand and Chief Paulus Mopeli and his council men, Apollos Mopeli and X. Maibe on the other (see addendum C). According to the *Traktaat*, Witsieshoek was not given to Mopeli as personal property, but was granted *ter bewoning*²⁶ and remained the property of the Orange Free State.²⁷ The *Traktaat* required Paulus Mopeli to recognise the authority of the Republic. Secondly, a commandant was to be appointed for him with instructions to ensure that Mopeli kept to the spirit and letter of the *Traktaat*. Thirdly, the Basotho tribe was allowed to

²¹ Badenhorst, p. 114.

²² Ibid., p. 120.

²³ Thompson, L., African Societies in Southern Africa, p. 60.

²⁴ Van der Poel, J., Basotoland as a factor in South African Politics, 1815-1870, p. 52.

²⁵ "Treaty, contract or agreement signed between Paulus Howell Mopeli and the Orange Free State government."

²⁶ "Per occupation." Freely Translated.

²⁷ G.S. 1459 Goewermentsekreteraris van die Oranje-Vrystaat: Traktate en Konvensies, pp. 120-122.

continue their cultural traditions as long as they subscribed to “civilized” principles.²⁸

It was also agreed that Mopeli would live in Witsieshoek as long as he and his people were obedient to the Orange Free State government. The Orange Free State government reserved the implicit right to expel Mopeli from the territory should circumstances necessitate it. Mopeli agreed to pay an annual tax and to handle minor civil cases according to tribal custom. He promised to be submissive and loyal to the Free State government.²⁹ The historic *Traktaat* was of importance during the resistance to cattle culling, as the Basotho based their claim on the independent and uncontrolled management of the Reserve on it.

Moreover, the Dutch Reformed Church was to be the only church allowed to establish missions in Witsieshoek. It sent the first missionary in 1873.³⁰ In 1888 a farm *Eerste Zending* No. 776, adjoining Witsieshoek and approximately 500 morgen in extent, was granted by the Republican Government to the *Nederduits-Gereformeerde Kerk of the Oranje` Vrije Staat*. This land was transferred in 1889 to the name of the church by means of a properly executed and registered deed of transfer.³¹

Later, the Batlokoa, another Basotho sub-group, under Chief Koos Mota, moved into the *Hoek* around 1873. Chief Koos Mota and his people were allowed to settle there by virtue of their long friendship with the Boers. Mota’s position in the Reserve remained unclear. The mere fact that Mota and the Free State government did not sign any agreement was the source of a long standing and protracted boundary dispute between the Batlokoa and the Bakoena. They were separated by the Elands River. The

²⁸ Theal, G.M., Basotoland Records, p. 798.

²⁹ Lagden, G., The Basotos: Mountaineers and their Country, p. 56.

³⁰ Van Rooyen, T.S., From unrest to peace, p. 263.

³¹ Witsieshoek Reserve District Record Book, Magistrate Court, Phuthaditjhaba.

Bakoena, under Paulus Mopeli, occupied the western side of the area while the numerically smaller Batlokoa tribe under Koos Mota occupied the eastern side.³²

As the number of the Basotho in Qwa-Qwa increased and new measures introduced, the number of villages also increased. Each village was given a name accordingly and each was under a sub-chief. Namoha,³³ which is the focus of this study, was one of such villages. It was situated between Monontsha and Poelong villages. This village came into being in the early 1940's. This piece of land was handed to a sub-chief, Moreneng Mopeli, after he was ordered to move from a place called Boiketlo, a very fertile land on top of the mountains above Monontsha village, when the Boiketlo area was declared a grazing camp. According to an eyewitness's account, Chief Moreneng Mopeli refused to accept the orders because he was tired of being tossed up and down and opted instead to return to Matsieng in Lesotho. Moreneng's family remained in Qwa-Qwa when he returned to Lesotho.³⁴

The action of Moreneng should be understood with the background that this was the third time he was ordered to move. According to the informants' accounts, on arrival in Qwa-Qwa Moreneng settled at the place now called Boloukomong, dithakong tsa Mokhele. He was later relocated to Mohomeng, lekgalong la Mosila Mongane and, then, to Luting, where his village was called Boiketlo, against his will. Then his eldest son, Kamohelo Paulus Howell Mopeli (popularly known as Mopelinyane³⁵), after

³² Badenhorst, C.H., "Witsieshoek: sy betekenis vir die opheffing van die Bantoe," (D.Ed thesis, p.204). Quoted from: Matli: Native Policy, Management and their impact on Tribal Society: The Witsieshoek Native Reserve, 1907-1951, MA Dissertation, p. 7.

³³ The name Namoha is translated as "fold your legs." Freely Translated.

³⁴ Personal collection, tape recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Dibe Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

³⁵ Kamohelo Paulus Howell Mopeli, the eldest son (of five children) of a sub-chief, Moreneng Howell Mopeli, was born in 1896 in Witsieshoek, and studied at the University of Fort Hare in 1924. Mopelinyane was the cousin of the Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli. He was married to Bohlokwa and Mmahlouwe. Mopelinyane had two children with Bohlokwa,

initially resisting, acceded and descended to Namoha. This place was given this name because two sub-chiefs, Chief Pikoko Mopeli of Monontsha village and Chief Libe Mopeli of Ha-Libe, were ordered to reduce their areas and give Mopelinyane a place to stay.³⁶ As the Basotho put it Mopelinyane said: “Pikoko namoha le nna ke dule”³⁷

On arrival at Namoha, Mopelinyane, the son of Moreneng Howell Mopeli, acted as a sub-chief on behalf of his father who had gone back to Lesotho. Many people considered Mopelinyane as a chief of the village, even though he was not officially inaugurated. That was because he was the son of a chief and was acting as chief in his father’s absence. It was from this village that the authorities later encountered problems that climaxed in the 1950 battle. This was not the only village involved in the campaign to resist cattle culling, but it was used for meetings and its acting Chief, Mopelinyane, was in the forefront of the campaign.³⁸

Khaeletso and Machakela. After completing his studies at Fort Hare University, Mopelinyane worked in Johannesburg until he came back home in 1939, when his father was ordered to move from Boiketlo to Namoha. Having returned home, he never went back to Johannesburg. He remained behind to assist his father to rule and to help him against his struggle with his cousin, Charles. Kamohelo was popularly known as Mopelinyane amongst the Basotho. That was to differentiate him from the great Chief Paulus Howell Mopeli, whom he was named after. The suffix *-nyane*, denotes small or “little”. Some people use this name to undermine him, labeling him *little thing*. He was actively involved in the campaign to resist cattle culling and was the leader of the resistant movement Lingangele. His role in the struggle against cattle culling earned him a nickname *Morena wa Diphoofole* (king of the animals). According to informants, Mopelinyane was always in constant conflict with his cousin, Charles. According to him Charles stole the Paramount Chieftaincy from his father. Mopelinyane’s actions in Witsieshoek could also be understood from this conflict.

³⁶ Personal collection, tape recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Dibe Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

³⁷ “Pikoko fold your legs so that I can get a place.” Freely Translated.

³⁸ Personal collection, tape recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Dibe Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

4.3 Geographical background

Qwa-Qwa,³⁹ which previously used to be known as Witsieshoek⁴⁰ until 1969, is an area situated in the corner formed currently by the boundaries of the Free State, Kwazulu-Natal and Lesotho. It is currently part of the Free State Province. In the northeast and northwest, it is completely enclosed by farms that mostly belong to white citizens of the Free State. In the east and south it is separated from adjoining territories by lofty physical barriers, the Drakensberg Mountains separate it from Kwazulu-Natal, and the Maluti range from Lesotho. On the west it is separated from the rest of the Free State by the Maluti range called Qwa-Qwa.⁴¹

The nearest towns to Qwa-Qwa are Bethlehem, Kestell, and Harrismith. Qwa-Qwa is characterized by magnificent mountain scenery. It is a mountain locked, fertile valley of some 50,000 morgen with an average altitude of 7, 000 feet. The mountain slopes are covered with a thick layer of sour grass that makes for excellent grazing, and the soil in the valleys has been described as “rich, loamy, and the best suited for agriculture.”⁴²

Qwa-Qwa forms a catchment area for the Elands River, which rises on the Mount-Aux-Sources, the southeastern corner of the area. The Elands is one of the chief tributaries

³⁹ The name Qwa-Qwa, means (from oral evidence) *whiter than white*. It has various origins to various people: to some it refers to the white sandstone cliffs found in the area; to others the name originated as a result of the snow that used to cover the surrounding mountains in the area; to others the name comes from the original inhabitants of this area, the San.

⁴⁰ Witsieshoek is derived from Afrikaans “Witsie se Hoek”. It could be translated as *White’s corner*, or *Witsies’ corner*. The name Witsie, directly derived from the name of Chief Oetsi of Makgolokoe, the Basotho sub-tribe. ‘Hoek’ or ‘Corner’ refers to the cave which Oetsi and his people used to hide themselves and their cattle from attack by the Boers.

⁴¹ University of South Africa Documentation Center, Pretoria, Accession No. 219, DA Kotze, The Witsieshoek Revolt. Quoted from MS Rakometsi: The Witsieshoek Rebellion, 1940-1950: A community in Crisis, (Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1992), p.8.

⁴² Van Rooyen, T.S., From unrest to peace, p. 262.

of the Vaal River. Mount-Aux-Sources, one of the highest mountain peaks in South Africa, is situated in Qwa-Qwa and is the source of the Tugela River, which runs into Kwazulu-Natal down to the Indian ocean. Qwa-Qwa has a typically high-veld climate, with hot summers and cold winters. The grazing area in Qwa-Qwa consists of two portions, namely, the summer portion in the Maluti above an altitude of approximately two thousand metres, and situated between five thousand metres and two thousand metres above sea level. The latter includes valleys and river banks.⁴³

The summer pastures are mainly situated on the slopes of the Maluti Mountain, and rank among the best grazes found in the Eastern Free State. With the exception of the slopes of the foothills of the Maluti facing south or south-west, where the veld is mainly sour, the pasturage can be grazed virtually throughout the year. This *veld* is mainly grazed during summer because the winter is very cold for the animals, and they usually have to be brought to the lower lying and warmer areas in winter. The extent of lower lying and warmer areas is estimated at fourteen thousand hectares, and by 1950 had been divided into six grazing camps by the Native Trust. However, land surveyors, had never surveyed these camps, a fact that amazed the Commission of Enquiry appointed in October 1950 to investigate the disturbances in Witsieshoek.⁴⁴

The fact that this pasturage is situated on the mountain slopes, which are very steep with deep *kloofs* and have exceptionally high rainfall estimated at least sixty inches per annum limits the carrying capacity and the period during which it could be grazed, notwithstanding the high quality of the types of grass which grow there. According to the commission of enquiry that investigated the unrest and the disturbances of the

⁴³ University of South Africa Documentation Centre, Pretoria, Accession No. 219, DA Kotze, The Witsieshoek Revolt. Quoted from: Rakometsi: The Witsieshoek Rebellion, 1940-1950: A community in Crisis, (Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1992), p. 7.

⁴⁴ Union Government(U.G.) 6/422, 26/1951. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

people of the Witsieshoek in 1950, the total available grazing area, including lands, comprises forty thousand hectares. The stock holding was a vital condition of most of the people's subsistence. The land was ill-suited for cultivation and in any case there was too little land of arable quality to produce a significant portion of many people's food requirements. Cattle were for the migrants the crucial means of retaining a stake in the reserve society and they would invest in stock purchases, farming their cattle out with relatives and friends.⁴⁵

The Witsieshoek Reserve was one of the most inhospitable areas in South Africa. It is very mountainous and only about 400 acres of which is cultivable. In its report, the Commission of Enquiry into the disturbances in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve found that arable land was very small and in the case of the Batlokoa tribe's section, there was virtually no arable land. Therefore, the Commission recommended that the agricultural land should at least be doubled, in other words, the Reserve should be extended so as to provide more suitable arable land.⁴⁶ This recommendation suggested that instead of rehabilitation measures being introduced, the government should have provided more land for the Basotho.

4.4 The administration of the Witsieshoek Native Reserve

The Basotho in Witsieshoek, apart from being subjected to the laws of the Republic, criminal, as well as civil, lived to a great extent in their tribal setting according to their tribal customs and laws. The Paramount Chief⁴⁷ served as a leader, legislator, judge and

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ The Paramount Chief is the chief occupying the highest authority in a given African community. He is the leader of the nation that is made of different groups in different areas. Because of the large nation he leads, he would appoint sub- chiefs for different villages to assist him in ruling the nation. These chiefs would become the eyes and ears of the Paramount chief. Apart from these chiefs, the Paramount Chief would also have his own council which advises him. The position of the Paramount Chief is hereditary, so is that of the sub-chief.

administrator. He exercised his duties through his councillors and headmen, who assisted him in an advisory capacity.⁴⁸ According to oral tradition, the Basotho have been living this way since their arrival in Witsieshoek, and had never clashed with either their white neighbours or the government. They felt that they were independent and were expecting no direct outside interference in their affairs. That is one of the main reasons why they later felt justified in not taking and fulfilling orders from the union government.⁴⁹

From 1907 the Additional Native Commissioner, formerly called Commandant, was stationed in Witsieshoek, and the Reserve as such fell within the Magisterial District of Harrismith. He was the local representative of the Department and exercised judicial as well as administrative functions. He was answerable to the Chief Native Commissioner, Western Areas, whose headquarters were at Potchefstroom. In terms of Ordinance 6 of 1907, a Reserve Board was constituted in that year. It consisted of four blacks and two appointed black members, together with a white chairperson and vice chairperson. The chairperson was always the local Native Commissioner.⁵⁰

The black members of the Board were invariably headmen and prominent members of the black community who manifested a keen interest in the work of the Board. The activities of the Board were under the direct control of the government. The functions of the Board were laid down in section 9 of Ordinance No. 6 of 1907. They consisted inter alia, of the following: the construction and maintenance of roads, the erection of fences, the making of furrows, the provision of water supplies, the provision of sanitary

⁴⁸ National Archives Repository,(NAB) Vol.1, File 346/08, Regarding the powers of the chief of Witsieshoek, 1908.

⁴⁹ Personal collection, tape recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Dibe Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

⁵⁰ National Archives Repository,(NAB) Vol.1, File 346/08, Regarding the powers of the chief of Witsieshoek, 1908.

services and the improvement of livestock and agriculture.⁵¹

4.5 The historical background to the unrest in Witsieshoek

The government in response to the need for more land and to make the Reserves economically viable, introduced measures which were aimed at improving conditions in the Reserves. On 13 October 1939, in terms of Proclamation No. 31 of 1939, Witsieshoek Native Reserve was declared a betterment territory.⁵² Thus measures popularly known as Betterment scheme were introduced. The Betterment measures were embodied in the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936.⁵³

The objectives of these measures were to enforce stock reduction, to curtail overgrazing, to consolidate arable land and provide soil conservation measures. They were also aimed at drawing scattered populations into closer settlements and to provide normal facilities to improve soil conservation.⁵⁴ The implementation of these measures resulted in a sense of deprivation and powerlessness among the people who were affected by them. The Basotho were not happy about the implementation of the measures as they felt that their traditional way of life was under threat.⁵⁵

The Witsieshoek Reserve Board⁵⁶ and the traditional chiefs lost much of their power in

⁵¹ Naturellek, Central Archives Depot, Pretoria (NTS), TS, Vol. 8150, File 15/341, Secretary of Native Affairs to M. Senooane, n.d. Quoted from Rakometsi: Witsieshoek Rebellion, pp. 27-29.

⁵² Government Notice (G.N.) No. 1573 of 13-10-1939. It declared the Witsieshoek Native Reserve a betterment area under Proclamation No. 31 of 1939.

⁵³ Lodge, p. 179.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Personal collection, tape recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Dibe Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

⁵⁶ The Board was responsible for the upkeep of roads, bridges, sanitation, schools, local taxation and, until 1939, agricultural improvement.

the process. The Reserve Board had lost much of its competencies so much that it could no longer efficiently carry out any of its duties. In actual fact, the Board henceforth became ineffective, for it was now reduced to nothing more than a *talk shop* of the Reserve.⁵⁷ The government officials had taken over all the critical duties of the Reserve Board.

The reduction of the Board's powers did not go down well with the Basotho who felt that the government was now becoming authoritarian, and had taken over their only means to participate in discussions with regard to their territory. As a result, the distrust of the union government was now growing among the Basotho. Every step or move of the government was viewed with suspicion.⁵⁸ This was to cause serious problems later with the government's enforced rehabilitation measures because they were in conflict with the entrenched Basotho traditions. The Basotho who have been peaceful since settling in Witsieshoek were now becoming unsettled by the actions of the authorities.

The major source of conflict between the Basotho and the government emanated from the rehabilitation measures by the latter in Witsieshoek. With declining economic conditions and the deterioration of the land in Witsieshoek, the government, as indicated above, embarked upon measures to contain soil erosion and overstocking. The government officials were aware of the fact that if they allowed the soil to deteriorate, there was a strong possibility that the number of animals in the Reserve, as well as the ability of the land to carry them, would diminish. Thus this would lead to impoverishment resulting in people deserting the land and heading for the industrial

⁵⁷ National Archives Repository,(NAB) Vol.1, File 346/08, Regarding the powers of the chief of Witsieshoek, 1908.

⁵⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Dibe Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

areas.⁵⁹

The only question was how to implement remedial measures, given the prevailing traditional norms and beliefs in the Reserve. What the authorities failed to do was to consult and involve the people who were affected by their plans in order not only to win their commitment before implementing the plans, but also to decide together on issues such as setting targets and agreeing on time-frames.⁶⁰

With the advent of these measures, a completely new and drastic change was brought about. Old traditional ways of ruling and doing things had to give way to new drastic changes. Surely, these new moves would not be welcomed by the majority of the people, who had to suddenly change from the traditional way to a new one. Proper mechanisms should have been put in place that would have ensured a smooth transition, which included involving those directly affected by this on how best they thought certain things could be put into practice.⁶¹

Unless matters such as those suggested above were done, regardless of the good intentions of those measures, the government's changes would not be easily accepted. In a tribalist society like that of the Basotho it is easy to understand that such a change would cause a natural dissatisfaction in the people's minds, something that the then government took lightly or ignored, with serious repercussions. Mafu Rakometsi attests to this:

“Some of the measures imposed on the Basotho by the white Free State regime were well intentioned. They, however, did not satisfy them because, in most instances, they were in conflict

⁵⁹ Lodge, p. 263.

⁶⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

⁶¹ Ibid.

with the entrenched traditions of the Basotho.”⁶²

The Betterment scheme was, at its inception, meant to be voluntary, and its adoption depended on its being accepted at the meetings that were convened by chiefs or headmen in each rural location.⁶³ In some instances such meetings could not have been very representative or were misunderstood, as Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, recalled that:

“In some instances the people have accepted the betterment proclamation but if you ask them personally you find that they know nothing of the whole affair. Some of us initially accepted the envisaged betterment measures because we thought our lives will now improve for the better, but it was not to be. We thought that the government had finally took notice of our plight in Witsieshoek and was doing something to assist us. However, we were not aware of the danger the measures were holding for us. Had it become clear to us during the meetings we attended we would have disagreed from the beginning.”⁶⁴

The opposition to the Betterment measures increased as these measures were implemented, especially with regard to the limitation of livestock. To the Africans, the Basotho people in particular, cattle represented wealth, prestige, status and security.⁶⁵ In the words of one of Witsieshoek spokesman:

“Cattle are my bank and money is useless to me, for it does not

⁶² Rakometsi, M.S., *The Witsieshoek Rebellion, 1940-1950: A community in Crisis*, (Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1992), p. 9.

⁶³ Lodge, p. 262.

⁶⁴ *Personal collection*, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

⁶⁵ *Personal collection*, transcript interview with Dr. E.N. Malete, a Sesotho senior lecturer at the University of the Free State, Qwa-Qwa Campus, 18/02/2004.

give birth, as cows do every year. It cannot confirm marriage and it cannot serve at ceremonies. From cattle I get meat and hides to make blankets, but I would rather have my beast die on its own than slaughter it I dream of no wealth. Even if my beasts are miserable and thin, they are as valuable as fat ones.”⁶⁶

Furthermore, the interference by the officials of the Department of Native Affairs (hereafter called the Department) in matters that previously were the concern of the chiefs or headmen fuelled the tension.⁶⁷ Land allocation or the regulation of the agricultural circle, reduced the popular standing of chiefs and headmen and could be in conflict with the principle that each household had sufficient land for its needs.⁶⁸ The other main objection to the betterment scheme was that it did nothing to solve what many people felt to be the most pressing problem. Chief Setsoto Mopeli, pointed out what they considered to be the main problem:

“We wanted more land and nothing else. If more land was provided to us, as it was a pressing need, there was no need for those measures. But the government ignored the real issue and instead tried to make our areas suitable for us. That was not going to work as the population in the Reserves was increasing. The problem with the land allocation in South Africa was that most of the land was given to a few, while the smallest piece was given to many. The result of that was that we were grouped together with our stock in a small piece of land and that brought about soil erosion. Now, if we reduce our livestock we would deprive ourselves of food and milk.”⁶⁹

The powers of the chiefs were taken away by the Trust. The chiefs could no longer control allocation of land for their people. In brief, the chiefs were made responsible for the local maintenance of law and order and the implementation of government-inspired

⁶⁶ Lodge, p. 265.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Pampallis, J., Foundations of the New South Africa, p. 207.

⁶⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

measures, including, of course, the rehabilitation scheme. As far as the traditional leaders were concerned, the advantages of the new order, the Trust, were not clear.⁷⁰ It enhanced their local powers but detracted them from their legitimacy as they became responsible for implementing unpopular laws.⁷¹ Many would have shared the sentiments of Abram Moiloa of the Bafuretse:

“It seemed to us that they just want us, chiefs, to sign a document which says destroy me *baas*. Let them destroy us without our signatures.”⁷²

In 1937, before the passing of the betterment proclamation, the grazing control measures of the Land Act were implemented in Witsieshoek with the fencing of six grazing camps. The residents in the enclosed areas were told to move, and in the case of the sub-chief and his son (Chief Moreneng Howell Mopeli and Mopelinyane) were prosecuted when they refused to do so⁷³ (the source of conflict between Moreneng, his son and the authorities is discussed in the next chapter).

In an effort to help improve the quality of the cattle in Witsieshoek, the government in consultation with the Paramount Chief in 1936, brought in Witsieshoek subsidised bulls. In 1938 the supplying of subsidised bulls to the Basotho was accelerated.⁷⁴ By the beginning of 1950 the South African Native Trust had seventy-five bulls in the area.⁷⁵ At the meeting of the Assistant Native Commissioner, Mr. H.P. Smit, and members of the Mopeli sub-group in December 1938, Mr. Smit reported that:

⁷⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

⁷¹ Lodge, p. 266.

⁷² Hooper, C., Brief Authority, p. 105.

⁷³ NTS, Vol. 8150, File No.15/341, Howell Removal Order, 19/05/1943.

⁷⁴ Lodge, p. 265.

⁷⁵ NTS, Vol. 7459, File No. 506/327: Witsieshoek: Rehabilitation, A Report from Additional Native Commissioner to the Chief Native Commissioner, 15/01/1950.

“We have up to date received five Swiss and eight Afrikander bulls in Witsieshoek. We anticipate a further seventeen Afrikander bulls. The Swiss bulls will be kept in the camp erected earlier during the year and selected cows will be allowed to go into the camp for service. As for the Afrikander bulls, they will be allowed to roam in the grazing camps. I urge the people to make use of the Swiss bulls for this breed is very necessary to combat malnutrition.”⁷⁶

In 1939, at a public meeting of the Board, the Betterment Areas Proclamation was accepted in Witsieshoek. In August of the same year a resolution was passed by the Reserve Board as a result of which the Betterment Areas Proclamation was applied to Witsieshoek.⁷⁷ In order to give effect to the provisions regarding the control of the stock, officials of the Department visited the Reserve with the object of assessing its carrying capacity. The proclamation in which the carrying capacity was assessed was promulgated in 1940, and the carrying capacity was limited to 12,500 stock units.⁷⁸

The next step was to take count of all the stock; this took place in November 1941. Following these initial steps, a first cull took place in February 1942 with satisfactory results as many people did not oppose it. This was done to bring numbers down to the veld's carrying capacity, and was completed in 1943. The culled stock numbered just under one thousand heads of cattle. During this time the culling process went well, and the only resistance came from the regent of the Batlokoa, Eva Mota, who was subsequently fined for refusing to bring her stock to the cull.⁷⁹

The table below was to be used as a basis for stock culling. The first column shows the number of head of cattle a person possessed, and the second indicates how many cattle

⁷⁶ LW1 A1/1/3. Minutes of quarterly meeting held at Namahadi on Wednesday, 28 December 1938.

⁷⁷ Government Notice (G.N.) No. 1573 of 13/10/39.

⁷⁸ G.N. No. 178 of 1940.

⁷⁹ BOV 1/206 (61) N1/15/4, Free State Archives Repository, Bloemfontein. Summary of events leading to the present position at Witsieshoek.

should be culled. People owning one to five head of cattle were not expected to bring their cattle for culling. However, in cases where an animal was weak it should be culled, and the owner had a right to replace it.⁸⁰

Number of head of cattle	Number to be dispose off
6-7	1
8-9	2
10-11	3
12-13	4
14-15	5
16-17	6
18-19	7
20-21	8
22-23	9
24-25	10
26	12
27-28	13
29-30	14
31-32	15. ⁸¹

The cull operations were suspended during the Second World War (1939-1945) owing to the lack of staff. A second count was made in 1946, and it was proposed to cull nearly 1300 cattle.⁸² Notices for a second cull were issued as stock had by then increased to a number far in excess of the carrying capacity of the veld. However, the hostility to the cull was more widespread this time as many in the community had believed that culling would be a singular incident. Four cattle owners, Mopelinyane,

⁸⁰ DNA, Vol. 365 File No. 06/327, Press Statement, 1946. This table appears incomplete in the original source.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Lodge, p. 269.

Libe Mopeli, Michael Molingoana and Khoelinyane Masoeu, deliberately ignored the culling order. Consequently, they were arrested.⁸³ On their request a joint trial was held. They appeared before the Native Commissioner at Witsieshoek on a charge of contravening section 10 (1) (a), read with section 6 (1) of Proclamation 31 of 1939 and were found guilty and convicted in a local court⁸⁴(see addendum D).

Section 6 (1) reads: "Every owner of stock shall produce all stock belonging to him at the time and place fixed by the culling officer. Section 10 (1) (a) of Proclamation 31 of 1939 reads: "Any person who, being the owner of any stock, fails to produce it in accordance with the provisions of sub-section (1) of Section 6, shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding twenty pounds, or in default of payment to imprisonment for a period not exceeding three months."⁸⁵

However, the judgement was set-aside on appeal on the grounds that the charge as framed discloses no offence. The defence argued that: "The declaration by the Minister of Native Affairs of the Witsieshoek Native Reserve as a betterment area is illegal and ultra vires for the reason that no consultation as contemplated by and provided for in Section (2) of Proclamation 31 of 1939 took place. Section (2) reads: "If the owner of any stock fails to produce it, the Native Commissioner may, after due inquiry and in the absence of a satisfactory explanation of the failures, declare the stock or any portion thereof forfeited to the Trust."⁸⁶ The defence went further and stated "Even if it be assumed that the declaration referred to in the preceding paragraph is not illegal and ultra vires then by reason of the failure of the Culling officer to take account of the stock owned by certain Europeans in the area, the cull was irregular and therefore the

⁸³ LW1 1/1/1/, case No. 171 of 1946: Summons in Criminal cases.

⁸⁴ All South Africa Law Reports, Vol.1, May 6, 1947, Mopeli and Others v. Rex, pp. 84-86.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Notice of Appeal: In the Court of the Witsieshoek, District Harrismith, case No. 171 of 1946.

man was so cruel, he even took away my father's last beast when my father could not heed the call to repair damaged fences due to ill health and age. I hated him for what he did to my father."³¹

Nevertheless, most informants were found to be honest and fair-minded, and tried hard to avoid attacking other persons. The researcher needs to be aware of biased evidence as this could spoil his or her work. The other tendency of the interviewees is giving superficial answers to questions for some reason or other. They might be pressed for time or not keen to go into the matter in depth, or they genuinely might have forgotten all but the haziest of outlines, or they might be reluctant to bring to the surface suppressed memories which could be painful. Andrew Hoffman provides a solution to this:

"The way to counter the undoubted tendency for oral evidence to be superficial and lacking in subtlety is again for the researchers to impress the interviewees with the seriousness of their work, to be persistent in their questioning, and to ensure whenever possible that they can capture the person for a sufficiently long time and in a suitable enough environment to delve beneath surface responses."³²

However, this could depend partly on whether the questions interest an informant or not. Moreover, persistent questioning might be interpreted by the interviewee as lack of respect for him or her, especially when the researcher is younger or of the opposite sex. Keeping him or her longer against his or her wish could make the informant restless and unwilling to cooperate. Among other factors is the lack of any intrinsic interest which debilitates the outcome of an interview. Some informants are not willing to reminisce about the historical events that they witnessed. If they eventually agree to be interviewed,

³¹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Tshepo Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 10/04/2002.

³² Hoffman, A., Reliability and Validity in Oral History, p. 24.

albeit reluctantly, they might necessarily not go deeper in their recollections.³³

According to Thomas Brewster, a willingness to remember is an essential feature of memory which is especially relevant to interviewing. There can be either a conscious avoidance of distasteful facts or an unconscious repression.³⁴ Oral testimony depends to a large extent on the ability of the interviewer to elicit the information from his or her subject. This means that, as well as the expected and possible lapses in memory, the interviewee may choose to withhold information that he or she feels uncomfortable about revealing, or to give responses that he or she believes the interviewer wishes to hear. Seldon and Pappworth argue that such suspicions could potentially cause great difficulties for the interviewer and, indeed, for those who wish to use this oral testimony at a later date.³⁵ As for deliberate omissions, this is just as likely to happen with official documents such as government press releases, or personal documents such as letters, as with oral histories.³⁶ Perhaps the omissions are less likely with oral histories if the interviewer keeps probing. Or he or she may try to use different angles, like rephrasing the question or asking the question at a later stage in a different context.

There is also a major difficulty raised by the transcribing of the scripts of interviews. The unique impact the voice has, its shifts in emphasis, its silence and all that this conveys is virtually lost in transcription. These problems are magnified by the process of translation. Dialect and accent as possible indicators of people's social position are extremely difficult to capture in the translated form. For this reason, Tina Sideris claims that:

“Literal translation is clumsy and often difficult to understand.

³³ Ibid., p. 26.

³⁴ Brewster, T., “Remembrance(More or Less) of the Things Past” in Civilization, Vol. 6, No. 4, August/September 1999, p. 77.

³⁵ Seldon and Pappworth, p. 20.

³⁶ Ibid.

A good translation involves restructuring and the intervention of a third party. Metaphor and proverb, which can convey collective memory are inevitably lost.”³⁷

Allesandro Portelli sums this up by pointing out that the greater or lesser presence of formalised materials, proverbs, songs, can be witness to a greater or lesser presence of the collective viewpoint within the narrator’s tale.³⁸ The original evidence is filtered through a process which extinguishes emotional expression. Nicknames given to places, expressions and laughter, are often lost. The loss of the above aspects is unavoidable and researchers need to keep the original tapes in case they are needed, and try to describe the informant’s story as correctly as possible.

Furthermore, a person’s memory is also affected by his or her political and religious ideas as these factors contribute to how the interviewee constructs his or her story and what aspects of the event become memorable.³⁹ A person, for example, who is strongly opposed to premarital sex due to religious convictions and is asked to recount the cases of single mothers in their community at the particular time, the person may highlight the aspects of the story that show how these women have suffered for their deeds. This shows how the religious and political views of a person may cause them to emphasise some aspects of the story as opposed to others to the extent that they may reject certain facts. But it must be noted that distorted or false stories, nonetheless, give one a clue as to the psychology or social attitudes of the interviewee. They can also be used to identify the values of the informant rather than the facts of the events being discussed.⁴⁰ Therefore, one should not dismiss an interview because one feels that it is distorted.

³⁷ Sideris, T., Recording living memory in South Africa, p. 48.

³⁸ Portelli, A., The Peculiarities of Oral History, p. 99.

³⁹ Thompson, P., The Voice of the Past, p. 102.

⁴⁰ Everett, S.E., Oral History: Techniques and Procedures, p. 6.

Rather, an interview should be assessed carefully so that the researcher may establish what it tells about the person and the events rather than what it does not tell.

The unconscious use of literary sources is another challenge that an interviewer has to deal with. The informant's memory is filtered through subsequent experiences. They may think they remember, but in fact they reproduce the version given officially after the event. Instead of sharing their experience, they may knowingly or unknowingly repeat stories read in the newspapers or in any other written source. The written documents, in such a case, are said to serve as a base for oral tradition.⁴¹ The researcher, with sufficient background research, would be able to quickly notice when the narrator reproduces what has been documented and can thus change the questioning manner so as to get the informant's personal experience about an event being investigated.

2.5 The place and time for the interview

The other aspect that could have a drawback on the outcome of the oral history interview, especially among Africans, is the place where the interview is conducted. African communal mentality makes provision for allowing any disturbance during the interview.⁴² This means that people may come by to visit during the interview and will be welcomed into the meeting place by the interviewee. The interview may be broken for a time and in some cases postponed to a later date due to intrusion. Nonetheless, this needs to be allowed because it is a way to show respect for the interviewee and his or her culture.

⁴¹ Oosthuizen, S., "History of Personal experience" in Adults Learning, Vol. 9, No.4, December 1997, p. 15.

⁴² Van Jaarsveld, A., Oral Traditions of the Ndzunda Ndebele, unpublished Article, University of Zululand, 1998, p. 5.

There are also other things to be taken into consideration, which could have an effect on the outcome of the interview. The mode of sitting especially on grass mats with women, for example, is a sign of being relaxed. Most important, as a visitor, the researcher does not sit on the chair until asked to do so. To make informants accept the researcher freely, the latter should sit on a grass-mat with them as this helps to develop an atmosphere of trust and relaxation in the interview. It is important to engage with interviewees in a way that makes them most comfortable, particularly when dealing with sensitive issues, as this would help the researcher to get the best possible results from the interview.⁴³ The environment in which the interview is conducted can stimulate the ability to remember or recall an event or an aspect of the event. The interview, for example, if it is conducted at the battle site and the researcher is asking about aspects of the battle, the interviewee may find it easier to remember the events, being at the place where the event being investigated took place.⁴⁴ So, if possible, the researcher should try to conduct the interview in a place that will help the interviewee to remember what took place at the time they are recalling.

The prevailing atmosphere at the setting of the interview, is another factor that would have an impact on the outcome of the interview. Was the interview conducted in a quiet or a busy place? If it was a busy place, the interviewee may be more careful about what they say as they may feel that someone may overhear them. If it was a quiet place they might be more open as they do not fear being overheard. This also connects to the idea of memory being affected by a person's loyalty to the community as they may not wish to remember things that may hurt the community in any way. Thus they may leave out certain issues for fear that if someone in the community could hear their revelations, that may cause trouble for the interviewees.⁴⁵

⁴³ Asante and Asante, p. 65.

⁴⁴ Hoffman, p. 26.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

2.6 Criticism of oral history

In interviewing there is also the question of bias on the side of the interviewer. Researchers cannot help being socially rooted persons.⁴⁶ They inevitably bring their backgrounds and their subjectivities to every stage of the research process, and this influences the questions they ask and the way in which they try to find answers. Questioning often reflects the interviewer's personal bias. The content of history is susceptible to the way questions are phrased and posed. The researcher could unconsciously manipulate questions and interpretations to suit his or her way of thinking and thus use the interview to distort the truth. According to Seldon and Pappworth, one way of doing this is either to ask leading questions, or to be motivated by political ideology.⁴⁷ It is reasonable to believe that the historian's own subjectivity and judgement are just as important for written as for oral history. But in order to pursue objectivity, historians need to be particularly aware of these shortcomings and to be self critical.

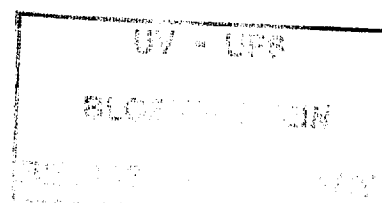
There are also problems which are inherent within the nature of the interviewing process, which are not easy to avoid. There is the problem of time. A researcher needs time to draw up a list of questions, writing to the person concerned, meeting with him or her, writing up or checking notes, writing letters of thanks, and transcribing. With the last, one can take up to a week transcribing a single interview. Taking short-cuts in the writing up of notes or transcribing the tape is not possible.⁴⁸ However, careful planning of interview schedules can save a great deal of time.

There are also the financial implications that are unique to conducting oral history interviews. A general effect is that an individual researcher without special grants for

⁴⁶ Hoffman, p. 35.

⁴⁷ Seldon and Pappworth, p. 29.

⁴⁸ Reid, p. 17.



research may find the expense, like travel costs, tape recorders and tapes, of conducting an interview prohibitive.⁴⁹ Furthermore, in a society where poverty, hunger and survival form the essence of daily reality, the question of remuneration of interviewees can become a destructive force by standing in the way of true information. While conducting this study, the researcher encountered numerous requests for compensation. This is one of them:

“Now that you want something from me, what is in it for me? I know you are going to make a lot of money with my help but how much are you going to give me? I have helped many people who never came back to thank me, I am tired of just giving my knowledge for free.”⁵⁰

This was a genuine concern, considering the wealth of information the individual had. How to concretely honour the value of knowledge remains a difficult question. Since this research was done for a specific purpose, which would in turn benefit the Qwa-Qwa community, the researcher managed to successfully explain the purpose of the study to informants and patiently convinced claimants that the information they were freely giving was priceless and would eventually benefit them, their children and grandchildren.

Another challenge that the researcher experienced in conducting this oral history research was that of expectations raised that could never be met. For example, some interviewees felt and acted as if they were directly addressing a government representative who had come to collect their complaints on the Namoha Battle. The government, they hoped, would immediately come and compensate them for the losses suffered in 1950. This was magnified by the tape recorder, a ‘foreign’ object, and the sense that these words were going to be taken somewhere. There was a perception that their hard circumstances had

⁴⁹ Stuart, R., “Commentary on ‘Assessing the Field: An Oral History interview’” in Canadian Review of American Studies, Vol. 23, No.2, Fall 1993, p. 213.

⁵⁰ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002.

been caused by the government and that it was its responsibility to compensate them. For example:

“Now that the government has finally sent you to us, please tell them that we are still waiting for our compensation. We lost many good cattle and my father died because of that Battle. The government must pay us for our losses. But I am happy that you came and you should be able to speak on our behalf.”⁵¹

The researcher, in this case, had to explain that what he was doing was worlds apart from something like the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and that he was not a representative of the government but a student wishing to document their life experiences for future generations. To most informants, this was acceptable while a few remained unconvinced and continued giving the researcher messages for the government.

The authenticity of a source is clearly vital, regardless of its format. Just as there are certain principles governing the use of written documents, the same goes for sound recordings, which are irreplaceable. Oral evidence must be analysed and weighed just as carefully as other kinds of evidence. Even first hand accounts need to be subjected to effective tests for validity.⁵² Just because someone says something is true, however colourfully or convincingly they say it, does not automatically mean it is true. Just because someone witnessed an event does not mean they fully understand what happened. Thus, authenticity of oral evidence or sources has to be established before it can be accepted as historical evidence. Checking reliability of a source is, in fact, a way of gaining greater knowledge of the source and understanding what role the source plays in the accounts of the event being studied. The first step in exploring the reliability of a

⁵¹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Rev. Thabo Mpotla, a minister of religion from Poelong village, 20/09/01.

⁵² Hoffman, p. 72.

source is through information on a source. To do this, one would explore questions such as: how the source came into being and who compiled it.⁵³ These questions help the researcher gain a greater understanding of why the source was written in the context in which it was written.

In addition to the above, the researcher could also ask how researchers recognise the truth. First, direct eye-witness testimony is to be preferred to others. Second, an eye-witness account corroborated by a second witness is to be preferred to an account given by a single witness. Third, the test of probability should be based on the nature of things, that is, on common sense and reason.⁵⁴

2.7 Age and gender

Furthermore, in doing oral history research, especially among African communities, there are also the issues of age and gender sensitivity which could determine the outcome of researcher's interviews. The researcher's age, sex and ethnic background can pose sometimes intricate methodological problems and can serve as both an aid and a hindrance to oral history research.⁵⁵ A young woman interviewing an elderly man, for example, would feel restricted by cultural norms from questioning him on certain matters. However, the elderly man might also feel so honoured to be interviewed by a young woman that he could even go deeper than expected in order to impress her. Either way, the researcher needs to assess carefully the evidence that is gathered in order for it to be accepted as authentic.

Moreover, in any culture the researcher has to be aware of gender issues in doing oral history as this will influence his or her work. The researcher, in the African context, has

⁵³ Caunce, S., Oral History and the Local Historian, p. 53.

⁵⁴ Mbunwe-Samba, P., Oral traditions and the African past, p. 65.

⁵⁵ Asante and Asante, p. 69.

to be aware that gender differences are culturally produced, as women are often expected to behave subordinately to men.⁵⁶ This is called *ho hlompha*⁵⁷ and requires children and women to show deference to their social superiors. This implies that in an interview, the people seen as subordinates would feel obliged to express themselves indirectly, especially in the presence of the superior, so that the superior does not have to acknowledge that he has something to learn from inferiors. For example, in the presence of her husband, a woman will prefer to speak through the permission of her husband, usually affirming her husband's opinion.⁵⁸ This can have an effect on what material the researcher gains from an interview.

Thus a researcher must note carefully, who is present at the interview and how this may impact on the material received. Being aware of the gender of the person being interviewed, the interviewer will be able to gain a better idea of why he or she got the material he or she did and from what perspective it is presented (a male or female perspective).⁵⁹ The researcher had the experience of a husband of an interviewee insisting on staying in the room. He dominated the interview by interrupting from time to time, despite the fact that he never experienced the Battle. The researcher's categorical advice is as far as possible never to permit a husband and wife to be interviewed together unless the project specifically calls for joint interviews. The presence of one often inhibits the performance of the other. Often the presence of one is also likely to slant the performance of the other. The wife respects the husband and the husband wants to prove he knows better. For an in-depth interview the researcher has to insist on being alone with the informant.

⁵⁶ Personal collection, transcript interview with Dr. E.N. Malete, a Sesotho senior lecturer at University of the Free State- Qwa-Qwa Campus, 18/02/2004.

⁵⁷ A Sesotho word for "Respect." Freely Translated.

⁵⁸ Working Draft, p. 8.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

The other problem with the oral history interview is the dependability of, in this case, survivors and those who agree to be interviewed. The reason is that oral history is about collecting and documenting personal experiences; that is, interviewing people who witnessed the event being researched.⁶⁰ One might be conducting research on an event where there are few survivors. Some of these persons might also refuse to be interviewed and this could lead to a position where one interviews only a few people. There is no way around this problem other than for the researcher to admit in the report that the account may be incomplete because certain witnesses were not available to be interviewed.

Furthermore, the other aspect to look at in oral history research is that of the use of different characters in African languages and characterization as a form of expression.⁶¹ Understanding this will help the researcher to gain a greater understanding of what he or she is being told and will add greater depth to the interview. In African culture there is a tendency not to address older persons in the singular nor direct speech. Older persons are addressed in the plural.⁶² For example, an interviewee can say “ha ba a bua letho hore ho bile jwang ntweng”⁶³. This could easily misdirect the researcher when trying to understand the story behind the event being investigated. Indeed the researcher might think that the informant is referring to a number of persons, when he or she is actually referring to one person.

Also, Africans have a strong belief in the power of their ancestors. This can easily mislead the researcher, if he or she is not aware of it, into believing that the deceased

⁶⁰ Allen and Montell, p. 33.

⁶¹ Working Draft, p. 16.

⁶² Personal collection, transcript interview with Dr. E.N. Malete, a Sesotho senior lecturer at University of the Free State- Qwa-Qwa Campus, 18/02/2004.

⁶³ “They did not say anything of how the Battle went.” This would be said in reference to a single elder by a young person, after being asked about what he or she heard on the battle. Freely Translated.

character is alive and well, when in fact they have been dead for some time. This African belief in the continuity of life does not make it easy for them to be story-tellers who stand outside an event. Due to this, Africans find it very difficult to tell the researcher about an event without offering an opinion.⁶⁴ Thus, they cannot easily maintain some distance between themselves and the materials presented. That is to say that they tell stories and add their feelings and perceptions on what they saw and experienced. In this way they characterise themselves as participants in the story even if they were not there themselves. This is the method of telling and expressing themselves on history, rather than an attempt on the part of the interviewee to place them in an event at which they were not present.⁶⁵ For example, if the researcher interviews people who did not directly experience an event, they may tell about the things that lead up to the event as if they had witnessed it. The researcher has to be aware of this and take it into account when using interviews as a source for his or her work.

One other important aspect that the researcher needs to take into cognisance when conducting oral history research is the position or relation of the researcher to the community where the oral history research is conducted.⁶⁶ This also has both advantages and negative aspects. On the positive, side if the researcher is an 'insider,'⁶⁷ he or she will have knowledge of the locations of written records and ways to get them, know the people with whom he or she will need to consult, and will understand the general background and context of the event being investigated. The researcher will understand nuances of meaning accessible only to someone thoroughly imbued with the cultural values of a specific group.

⁶⁴ Van Jaarsveld, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Masolo, D.A., African Philosophy in Search of Identity, p. 59.

⁶⁶ Allen and Montell, p. 33.

⁶⁷ "A member of the community within which the research is being conducted and who is familiar with the culture and tradition of that community."

Nevertheless, being an insider could also work to the researcher's disadvantage. He or she may be so close to a subject as to overlook some very obvious aspects of it that a detached reader may wish to know about. Some things will be so familiar as to seem not to require explanation, yet an outsider may be baffled by them. A researcher may be hesitant to ask someone about what is known to be a sensitive subject, and conversely, people may be reluctant to talk about such subjects with someone from within the community who knows all persons and factors involved. The inside researcher's natural emotional involvement with the subject at hand may tend to affect his or her objectivity and lead to an avoidance in exploring unpleasant aspects of it because of personal feelings about it or fear of offending others in the community by bringing it up.

Just as the role of the insider has both positive and negative aspects, being an 'outsider'⁶⁸ also has both advantages and disadvantages in oral history research. The outside researcher can note many facets of a community or a subject that an insider may take for granted.⁶⁹ People are more likely to talk freely with an outsider about sensitive issues, once rapport and trust have been established, than they would with someone they know well. The lack of emotional involvement on the part of the outside researcher is more likely to assure an objective investigation of the subject. On the other hand, because the outside researcher is unfamiliar with the local scene, he or she may not ask the right questions to elicit information on certain important aspects of the subject. Furthermore, people may be suspicious of a stranger or an outsider and give false information or even refuse to talk at all.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ "Any person who is not a member of the community in which he or she is conducting an oral history research."

⁶⁹ Allen and Montell, p. 54.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 55.

2.8 The authenticity of oral history

Over and above the challenges facing the gathering of oral history evidence, some historians feel that oral evidence is not to be trusted for a number of reasons. Many historians question the reliability of oral sources, arguing that oral testimony is often too subjective, inaccurate, and that it contains distortions. That individual memory is unreliable and subject to subsequent changes in people's perspectives. Paul Thompson has countered these criticisms by arguing that documentary evidence and written sources are influenced by the prevailing ideological climate, in which they were recorded and are in many cases derived from human exchange.⁷¹ Masegonyana Keakopa also notes that:

“Because of rapid social change, people argue that oral recordings are unreliable sources of information. Controversy on the validity of oral evidence will always exist. But in post-colonial Africa, preservation of oral material is essential as a check against colonial records.”⁷²

Sideris argues that the general rules for examining all evidence for reliability can be applied to oral sources as well. That is, they can be checked for internal consistency and cross-checked with other sources and other interviews, and, as with all sources, the researcher must be aware of potential bias. In addition, Sideris discusses the importance of symbolic meaning in anecdotes and stories told as possible indicators of the values and attitudes held by a social group.⁷³ Gesture, intonation, bodily stance and facial expression are all cues in oral ambience to topic orientation as well as to a speaker's claim to authority.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Thompson, p. 42.

⁷² Keakopa, M., “The role of the archivist in the collection and preservation of oral traditions” in South African Archives Journal, Vol. 40, 1998, p. 87.

⁷³ Sideris, p. 42.

⁷⁴ Tonkin, E., Narrating our pasts: The Social construction of Oral History, p. 40.

The issue of bias or subjectivity is again of the greatest concern for historians with regard to oral evidence. The difficulty is that this concerns both the content of the interviews and the way in which they are collected. Unlike a written document, where one is presented with the evidence in a concrete and immutable form, oral testimony depends to a large extent on the ability of the interviewer to elicit the information from his or her subject. This means that, as well as possible lapses in memory, the interviewee may choose to withhold information that he feels uncomfortable about revealing, or to give responses that he or she believes the interviewer wishes to hear. Such suspicions could potentially cause great difficulties for the interviewer and, indeed, those who wish to use oral testimony at a later date.⁷⁵

There are, conversely, some scholars who are just as hostile towards ‘traditional’ documents as others are to oral evidence. Oscar Handlin gives an extreme example when he states that:

“It is ludicrous to consider the newspaper as a type of evidence. Newspapers are written with the target readers in mind, and this may not necessarily be factually correct. Writers may portray an event in such a way that readers see only one side of the story.”⁷⁶

His concern is credible, because personal correspondence, whilst forming original communication, is nevertheless written with the recipient in mind, and therefore, contains many emphases and omissions on the part of the researcher. Ritchie also adds to that:

“Business records too may choose to paint a picture somewhat different to the true course of events. The boardroom squabbles and disagreements can be hidden in order to present a united front in the committee minutes. An optimistic view of the organisation’s financial situation may be circulated in order to put shareholders’

⁷⁵ Oluwole, p. 10.

⁷⁶ Handlin, O., Truth in History, p. 134.

minds at rest.”⁷⁷

In this respect, oral history as a form of evidence is no different. While in the past it has been accused of portraying “too individual a picture,”⁷⁸ exactly the same criticism could be made of written sources. For both types of evidence, one needs to be rigorous in checking the provenance and context of the information one is presented with. In order for the historian to have confidence in the recording, he or she must have a full and authenticated record of its creation, preservation and processing, confirming that the record has not been tampered with.⁷⁹ One needs to realise that no source is either reliable or unreliable for every purpose. That is to say, every source can be used by someone in some way. A source could be used to prove or disprove one’s findings or the findings of someone else. Thus sources are only as reliable as the purpose they are needed for.

Whatever source one is dealing with, one needs to be aware of the potential weaknesses that it contains, and the reasons why it was created, and by whom. Thompson argues that the general rules for examining all evidence for reliability can be applied to all sources as well. That is, they can be checked for internal consistency, cross-checked with other sources and other interviews, and as in all sources the researcher must be aware of potential bias. By accumulating sources of information and comparing them, researchers can arrive at an approximate understanding of what happened or is happening and hold this information with some certainty. But there is never absolute certainty about any event, about any fact, no matter what sources are used. No single source or combination of them can ever give an absolute picture of the exact complexity of the reality. Historians cannot reconstruct a past or present event in its entirety because the evidence

⁷⁷ Ritchie, p. 58.

⁷⁸ Roper, M., Oral History in the Contemporary History handbook, p. 347.

⁷⁹ Colman, G.P., “Oral History: an appeal for more systematic procedures” in American Archivist, Vol.28, No. 1, January 1965, p. 80.

is always fragmentary.⁸⁰ They need to have both official records and their more private personal documents.

For oral evidence to be accepted, just as written evidence, the oral history practitioner needs to ensure that it has been handled correctly, and it meets the highest possible standards of reliability. The first step in assessing an interview is to consider the reliability of the narrator and the verifiability of the account.⁸¹ The narrator's relationship to the event under discussion, and personal stake in presenting a particular version of events, the physical and mental state at the time of the event, and the moment of the interview, as well as the overall attention and care the informant brings to the interview and the internal consistency of the account itself all figure into the informant's reliability as a source. The veracity of what is said in an interview can be gauged by comparing it both with other interviews on the same subject and with related documentary evidence.⁸² If the interview corresponds with other evidence, if it builds upon or supplements this evidence in a logical and meaningful way, one can assume a certain level of veracity in the account.

If, however, it conflicts with other evidence or is incompatible with it, the historian needs to account for the disparities. For instance, there may be a need to establish whether or not different interviewees were differently situated in relation with the event under discussion. It may also be necessary to find out if the interviewees had different agendas, which lead them to tell different versions of the same story. Similarly, it is also needful to establish the extent to which the written sources on a particular event might be biased or limited in a particular way. Furthermore, it may also be important to establish how

⁸⁰ Yow, V., Recording Oral History: A Practical guide for Social Scientists, p. 22.

⁸¹ Hoffman, p. 59.

⁸² Yow, p. 27.

intervening events such as the ideological shifts from the time of the event under discussion and the time of the interview or subsequent popular cultural accounts of these events, have influenced later memories.⁸³ Divergent accounts are not necessarily in disagreement with each other, although they may sometimes seem to be, on the surface. For example, in the description of Mopelinyane (Paulus Howell Mopeli, the then leader of the resistant movement in Witsieshoek) by two of the informants: the first informant, Dimakatso Masamsone Sethunya, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Sethunya village, said that:

“Mopelinyane was a terrorist, a crook, he wanted to be the Paramount Chief, a position he did not deserve. He was using some other people to fight his battle with Chief Charles People like me could not be persuaded by a hypocrite like Mopelinyane to show that he was wrong, their plot failed and he was banished to Nebo. To prove this, since his banishment no confrontation has ever occurred here in Qwa-Qwa.”⁸⁴

And the second informant, Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, commented that:

“He was man among men who will not be moved from what is right. He was loved, honoured and respected by people He was fighting for our well being That is why the government banished him from his home and kept him from us his people. They wanted to destroy him The government had lost the battle, nothing of the betterment measures were continued after the battle, and we kept our cattle to this day.”⁸⁵

⁸³ Ibid., p. 29.

⁸⁴ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Dimakatso Masamsone Sethunya, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Sethunya village, 05/04/02.

⁸⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

The two divergent reports about Mopelinyane confirm that there was a battle between the Basotho and the government, and Mopelinyane was, indeed, a leader of the opposition group. The first informant described Mopelinyane as a greedy person who was exploiting other people to fight his own battle. This informant saw the aftermath of the battle as a defeat for Mopelinyane and those who supported him. The second informant portrayed Mopelinyane as an altruistic leader, who championed the cause of the oppressed. The informant viewed the aftermath of the Battle as victory to the Basotho. Each oral account, therefore, represents truth as it is known by its narrator. A close analysis of each text will often demonstrate that it represents that portion of the story with which the narrator could naturally identify through personal or ancestral association.

A foundational process of oral history research, as pointed out earlier, is the retrieving of memories from the people being interviewed. For this reason, the researcher needs to be aware of how people construct their memories and, indeed, how memory works. All of these will help one to gain a better understanding of why the information that is gained is formed in the way it is and how this impacts on one's findings.⁸⁶ Also the interviewer should be careful not to guide the interviewee's memory too much as this will cause the interviewer to mis-shape the information he or she has gained.⁸⁷ When interviewing a person the interviewer should be aware of the issue of memory and its impact on the information gained in an interview and to use the other tools mentioned above in conjunction with memory to get the best possible result out of the interview.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Brown, L.M., "Remembering the Orangeburg Massacre" in Black Issues in Higher Education, Vol. 18, No. 1, January 2001, p. 22.

⁸⁷ Douglas, J., Creative Interviewing, p. 10.

⁸⁸ Parsons, M.L., "Let's grab a granny off the street!: The Problems of oral history and how they can be minimalised them" in Teaching History, No. 84, June 1996, p. 30.

Memory is very important in recalling the past. It is not a passive repository of facts, but an active process of the creation of meaning.⁸⁹ The specific utility of oral sources for the historian lies not so much in their ability to preserve the past as in the very changes wrought by memory. These changes reveal the narrators' effort to make sense of the past and to give form to their lives, and set the interview and the narrative in their historical context.⁹⁰ The fundamental place of memory in some of the more serious aspects of human activity serves as a reminder that memory is seen as having an essential part to play in rigorous examination of what has happened in the past. It must also be pointed out that at the same time, under questioning, evidence by memory can prove fallacious or at least fallible.⁹¹

Despite questions on its reliability, oral history remains an important additional source for historians in their attempt to construct a more comprehensive picture of the past and is, therefore, a vital supplement to official records.⁹² Oral history has no strict rules, it is told from a multitude of viewpoints and the impartiality traditionally claimed by historians is replaced by the partiality of the narrator. Partiality here stands for taking sides. Oral history can never be told without taking sides, since the sides exist inside the telling. And no matter what their personal histories and beliefs may be, historians and sources are hardly ever on the same side. There is confrontation between their different partialities, confrontation as conflict and confrontation as a search for the truth, which makes oral history interesting.⁹³

⁸⁹ Algazi, G., "The Past in the present" in History and memory, Vol. 13 No. 1, Spring/Summer 2001, p. 2.

⁹⁰ Perks, R. and Thompson, A., Oral History Reader, p. 69.

⁹¹ Liddle, P.H. and Richardson, M.J., "Voices from the Past: An evaluation of Oral History as a source for research" in Journal of Contemporary History, Vol.31, No.4, 1996, p. 52.

⁹² Ibid., p. 54.

⁹³ Perks and Thompson, p. 73.

Some historians continue to hold the notion that old people's recollections are notoriously fallible and that oral history expression springs up only when trustworthy records are not available.⁹⁴ Historians who have doubts about the reliability and accuracy of oral history feel that the human memory is incapable of retaining a firm grip on historical facts and that historical truth becomes distorted and diluted through repeated telling. They point out that oral accounts of historical events not only vary in important details, but may even be contradictory.⁹⁵ This may be true, but it calls on the historian to assess his or her gathered data carefully.

The argument that human memory cannot be trusted has been disproved by the traditional life of Africans in particular, who have a marked propensity for retaining historical truths over long periods of time. The unwritten or oral tradition goes far back over many centuries. Traditions were passed down from one generation to another by means of various oral techniques. Africans kept their cultural wisdom alive through powerful memories passed from one generation to the next by means of tales, fables, proverbs, and other theater narrations. This oral literary form of human expression and communication was used for capturing, preserving and imparting knowledge about man and his world as well as his fears and hopes, his ideals, values and history⁹⁶. All these form an essential component of human culture. However, just because Africans conveyed culture, stories and wisdom over period of centuries, this does not mean that facts about historical events have been passed along unscathed. This also applies to culture as it is dynamic.

As pointed out already, Africans have a long history of retaining and retelling their

⁹⁴ Hockett, H.C., The Critical method in Historical Research and writing, pp. 49-51.

⁹⁵ Brown, p. 28.

⁹⁶ Masolo, p. 129.

history without referring to written records. They were used to and still are used to convey cultural aspects to younger generations by word of mouth and this is taken as “correct” or authentic because it comes from an elder. According to African customs, such information from elders must be adhered to because age was, and is equated with wisdom and experience.⁹⁷ The art of the elders of conveying this information was vital for keeping the family or a community together and for teaching its youth.

In the Basotho community under study, the youth are advised to consult the elders in everything they do. Children must grow up closely learning from their elders as wisdom is derived from such an association. Children are not allowed to question whatever an elder says. This has been a norm and has kept families and communities together for generations.⁹⁸ African communities place great trust on the reliability of the accounts of the past and the present. This is revealed in five Basotho proverbs: “nnete ha e fele, nnete ha e be le mafome, nnete ha e bole nnete e ya phedisa, leshano le a fela empa nnete e na le mokoka.”⁹⁹

However, African communities were also too aware of the existence of error and of deliberate falsehood. The Basotho warned against error, even in the best qualified authorities, in the following proverb: “E kgoptjwa e le maoto a mane.”¹⁰⁰ Africans also have a way of restricting themselves from providing a false or an inaccurate report. If an elderly interviewee could not remember or knows very little about an event under study, rather than giving a deliberate inaccurate report, he or she would say this proverb:

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 133.

⁹⁸ Personal collection, transcript interview with Dr. E.N. Maletle, a Sesotho senior lecturer at University of the Free State- Qwa-Qwa Campus, 18/02/2004.

⁹⁹ “Truth never finishes; truth never rusts; truth never rots; truth is worth more than money; lies have their end- but truth lives forever.” Freely Translated.

¹⁰⁰ “Even a four legged horse stumbles and falls.” Freely Translated.

“Kgomo ha e nye bolokwe kaofela.”¹⁰¹

This proverb is used by the Basotho in most cases to protect them from divulging details of a particular issue. It is also used to shorten a conversation when one is in a hurry or does not wish to continue with the discussion. If one is interviewing a Mosotho and he or she says this, then one should understand that the individual is not prepared to go further and should stop the interview.

Furthermore as culture is transmitted through words, it is reproduced by remembrance put into words and deeds. The mind, through memory, carries culture from generation to generation. In the Africans’ beliefs and practices, the mind remembers, and through oral information, spins simple information to ideas that are more complex messages and instructions for the living. This transmission manifests continuity over time and becomes one of the distinctions between animals and human beings. It is an indicator of human intelligence and thought.¹⁰²

These oral legacies are engraved in the minds and hearts of old people who are moving archival repositories among Africans. The often quoted and well known African scholar, Hampate Ba, says that in Africa, when an old man dies, it is a whole library burnt down.¹⁰³ In African custom old people are major sources of oral traditions. However, young people can also be interviewed to find out their views on their culture, since culture is dynamic and changing. The preservation of oral traditions depends entirely on the powers of memory of successive generations. This proves that what people remember

¹⁰¹ “A cow does not defecate all dung.” This means that a person cannot tell everything at the same time. Freely Translated.

¹⁰² Algazi, p. 1.

¹⁰³ Mbunwe-Samba, p. 106.

and share with others is trustworthy, as this has been done over many years, especially among the illiterate societies.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to show that effective gathering of oral testimonies requires, first of all, a solid set of aims and objectives along with a firm knowledge of the existing related written records. The researcher can ensure that the oral material relates directly to the written records, thereby avoiding the trap of accepting vague and rambling testimonies, which are of little use to anybody. Such restrictions aid the oral testimony's authenticity, linked as it is to other types of records with which it can be cross-checked. As regards the other issues of authenticity that have already been covered in this chapter, oral history is exactly the same. It, too, contains the biases and prejudices of the written record, and should, therefore, be treated in exactly the same way.

It has been noticed that questions of accuracy are not unique to oral history, but are there irrespective of sources of historical data are used. If historians understand the characteristics of their sources, they have a better chance of controlling the process to minimize difficulties and inaccuracies. A single interview by itself can pose frustrating questions, while an interview in a context of other data can clarify details and create a sense of the whole. Oral history has a better chance to give access to the *hidden transcript* than document-based history. To get the full story, many conditions need to be met. Oral history is not easy. However, if the interview is well prepared for and is conducted with all the necessary skills, the informant may accept to share in confidence the story that nobody has ever written. To make the most of oral sources historians need to recognize and be aware of the limitations of these sources. Therefore, the users of oral history, aware of the characteristics of their medium, may proceed cautiously but without an apology. Oral history has come of age and now commands a receptive, respectful audience.

The role of the oral history researcher is a vital one with regard to management and effective use of oral materials. Indeed, so vital is it that, by becoming part of the process, the researcher's own skills can help to defeat many of those problems previously seen to be an integral part of oral evidence. The oral history researcher is able to protect and promote oral history to his or her readers through careful presentation, and thus provide as full and representative a picture of the community that he or she is attempting to document.

Finally, comprehensive and meaningful history can be written only when oral sources are researched as thoroughly as written sources. The circumstances under which the evidence has been gathered need to be taken into account in weighing the information. Knowing as much as possible about sources of information, including the factors outlined here, will provide a solid basis for their evaluation. It is through thorough planning, preparation and knowledge of the sources that a researcher's interview could be successful. As discussed above, just as any other historical research, oral history has its own challenges that a researcher would have to overcome. Arguably the most important is to have knowledge of the community where the research is to be conducted. This would help to build rapport between the interviewer and his or her interviewees.

CHAPTER 3

THE COLLECTION AND MANAGEMENT OF ORAL HISTORY APPLICABLE TO THE NAMOHA BATTLE

3.1 Introduction

Interviewing people with the aim of gathering oral history is another tool in the larger repertoire of tools of the discipline of history. Collecting oral history requires proficiency in such specialised skills as historical research, equipment operation, and interviewing. It also demands alertness on the part of the interviewer. Careful planning and preparation are key elements in a successful oral history interviewing situation. While in most forms of research one can re-examine sources to correct a mistake or fill a gap, with oral history there is ordinarily only one opportunity. Few informants have the patience to cover the same ground over again due to faulty preparation or negligence by an interviewer. Since oral history depends on the goodwill and cooperation of the informants, it is imperative that the interviewer is well prepared for all the initial as well as subsequent sessions. This chapter contains information that is intended to help move the researcher from the beginning to the conclusion phase of the interview. It begins with a brief definition of the interview, and, then, the following aspects are discussed: the conceptualisation of the topic, doing careful background research, deciding what the researcher wants to find out, drawing up the interview guide, selecting informants, getting tape-recording equipment ready, ways to build rapport, the interview process and, lastly, managing the interview product.

3.2 Preparation for the interviewing project

The interview is generally regarded as the stock-in-trade of oral history. Certainly many guides, handbooks and manuals are written from that point of view.¹ A standard definition

¹ Swain, D.C., "Problems of Practitioners of Oral History" in American Archivist, Vol. 28, No. 1, January 1965, p. 17.

of the interview, as offered by a leading American oral historian, Willa Baum, posits that interviews are conducted:

“In question and answer form, they are guided by a skilled and a knowledgeable interviewer and they are reviewed by both interviewee and interviewer to verify that the statements are as accurate as possible. If not quite in the class of legal depositions, they are nonetheless carefully framed and verified accounts, not spontaneous conversations, which are better suited, perhaps, for a folklore collection.”²

The British historian, Trevor Lummis, has taken a similar view, claiming that:

“The great advantage of the retrospective interview is that it enables historians to intervene directly in the generation of historical evidence. It should be a good deal more informative and precise than even various forms of autobiography and personal testimony The verbatim evidence is frequently indistinguishable from the sort of testimony given in an oral history interview.”³

This rigorous and tightly controlled approach to interviewing represents a very respectable school of thought. However, looking at what many oral historians actually do, rather than what hand books, manuals and guidelines say they should do, it is found that the very formal interview concept championed by Baum and Lummis is frequently jettisoned in favour of much informal, and sometimes very indirect, ways of eliciting and evoking recollections. Oral history interviewing is not the quick journalistic or talk show style interviewing.⁴ Instead, adds Kestner Bhavnani that “oral history requires a patient and slow style that is sensitive and respectful to where the interviewee comes from, and to the mood he or she is in.”⁵

² Baum, W.K. and Hardwick, B., ‘Oral Histories’. In J.C. Larsen(editor.), Researchers’ Guide to Archives and Oral History Sources. Hamden: Library Professional Publications, 1998, p. 95.

³ Lummis, T., Listening to History. The Authenticity of Oral Evidence, pp. 11-12.

⁴ Gourley, G., “Writing History from Inside Out” in Writing, November/December 2000, Vol. 23, Issue No.3, p. 6.

⁵ Bhavnani, K., What’s power got to do with it? Empowerment and Social Research, p. 17.

This style of interviewing will help the interviewee to tell more intimate stories and details. Oral history comes in various forms. Some of these are, first, simple biographical projects in which the objective is to gather as much information about an informant's life as possible. Secondly, some times oral historians select a topic rather than one person for their subjects. In this case the researcher will interview many persons about the same topic, possibly limiting the interview in each case to a particular episode. Similar to the latter is the project that points to a particular historical event by interviewing some of its participants or observers,⁶ for example, the Namoha Battle, which is the focus of this study. Most oral history projects pursue each of these approaches. The important thing for the researcher is to choose the project carefully according to the distinctive needs, resources and opportunities of his or her research.

Before embarking on oral history it is necessary for the researcher to have a clear idea of the aim of the research. Once the researcher has decided on what he or she wants to do, he or she should decide on manageable goals. Firstly, the researcher needs to know what objectives he or she hopes to achieve through his or her oral history project. For example, James Fyfe and Hilton Manson suggest that the researcher first answers questions such as:

“Why are you doing the interview or project? What are you going to do with the material? Is it to be collected principally for archival use? Is it some form of publication, for studies or broadcast? How available will the material be to the public?”⁷

In this identification of objectives it is important to note that:

“Researcher must answer these questions before he or she begin because they will affect the way he or she carries out the interview or project and they will affect the way the person or people interviewed take part.”⁸

⁶ Davis, C., Oral History, p. 9.

⁷ Fyfe, J. and Manson, H., The Gamble: Campaign Diary of Oral History Challenges, p. 2.

⁸ Working Draft: Training Manual, Oral History Project, p. 26.

Having identified the objectives of one's project and the end result that researcher wishes to achieve, it is time to plan the practical ways in which he or she hopes to reach these goals. In doing this, Fyfe and Manson recommend that the researcher keeps the following in mind:

“Do not be too ambitious by taking on a greater number of interviews than you can handle. If you plan to interview a large number of people, start with the pilot project, or not more than three interviews. Having done these, you will be able to refine your methodology and confirm what areas of inquiry should be concentrated on in the principal project. A pilot project may also bring to your notice additional potential people to be interviewed.”⁹

What is recommended above by Fyfe and Manson was employed by the researcher in this study. From the pilot study that was undertaken a number of people who were knowledgeable about the Namoha Battle were identified. Furthermore, those interviewed as part of the pilot study revealed that they had been waiting for such an opportunity to share their experiences with other people and appreciated the fact that the researcher had undertaken a decision to interview them. They willingly supplied the names of those who were involved in the Battle and some offered to accompany the researcher to talk to others who were staying in other villages.

The background research helps the researcher to ponder upon and outline the project, conceptualise research goals, and identify the sort of information needed. It also helps him or her to identify informants with the most information and to enter into the interview from a knowledgeable perspective.¹⁰ With extensive background study, the researcher will have a good idea of the issues that should be discussed by the interviewees and will be in a better position to identify the information needed to complete the research project. This also helps the interviewer to formulate interview questions with ease.

⁹ Fyfe and Manson, p. 2.

¹⁰ Banaka, W., Training in Depth Interviewing, p. 17.

Background research begins with the study of documentary resources: books and scholarly works on the topic and knowledgeable persons about the topic at hand. Valerie Yow adds that background study is essential for preparing for the interview guide.¹¹ Knowing the pitfalls and possibilities that other researchers have encountered can be helpful if the researcher also maintains awareness of how preconceived notions may be influencing the course of his or her research. Researcher should carry out informational interviews with knowledgeable persons, like librarians and archivists, on the event, and write down names of individuals named as having knowledge of the subject and inquire if they can be interviewed. Part of the preliminary questions to ask resource persons are: Whom would you recommend I interview? Who was present at the time of the event? Who was instrumental in making this happen? Who was affected by this?¹² How the researcher goes about conceptualising the interviewing project depends on the kind of the project he or she is doing.

As the researcher reflects on the information in these oral and written sources, his or her knowledge and understanding grow,¹³ and more questions come to mind. For example, how, why and where certain things happened and to what extent? Because the researcher had pondered the information that was needed to place the experience of participants in a historical context, the researcher was able to write an interview guide (see addendum A) so that unique aspects and shared aspects could be discussed. Planning the interview guide means that the researcher will obtain testimony on a wider range of topics. Careful planning prevents regrets at the end of the project. The researcher should not neglect topics, because he or she cannot go back to all of the informants. If the researcher has

¹¹ Yow, V., Recording oral history: A Practical Guide for Social Scientists, p.36. Interview guide is a topic outline of the historical information the project is to obtain, it is a plan of interview. It contains the topics that the interviewer will pursue but does not limit the interview to those topics because the informant will have the freedom to suggest others.

¹² Yow, pp. 33-35.

¹³ Williams, R.Y., "I 'm a Keeper of Information: History Telling and Voice" in Oral History Review, Vol. 28, No. 1, Winter/Spring 2001, p. 41.

done the preliminary work with written and oral sources described above, he or she can compose an interview guide that is inclusive.

Humphry Mogashoa indicates that in drafting the interview guide, it is important to ask questions that are directly related to the researcher's stated purpose of research, and not to ask questions because they are merely interesting or he or she has always wondered about. The questionnaire needs to be focussed on the topic of research, not on what the interviewer thinks is interesting, even if it is not a concern of his or her research.¹⁴ The following guidelines are to be considered in drafting a questionnaire:

“Do not put important items or questions at the end of your long questionnaire as they are likely to be answered briefly as the interviewee is tired. You need to see the questions from the point of view of the informant. For example: questions which are either too long, unintelligible or too complicated will only serve to confuse the interviewee, so keep the questions as short as possible.”¹⁵

A clear questionnaire makes the interview easier both for the interviewer and the interviewee and it is the first step towards getting good results from the interviews one conducts. Having explored the general planning of a research project, it is necessary to explore the complex details for carrying out the chosen project, for example, what tools to use. The following tools are recommended for interview purposes, but the list can vary depending on resources and availability: “a note book or exam pad; two working pens; a working tape recorder and sufficient tapes for the interviews.”¹⁶

During the informational interviews, in the first phase of the research, names of individuals to be interviewed, formally, are gleaned. A researcher may need other ways to find informants. Jan Vansina prefers informants whose status is such as to have equipped them

¹⁴ Mogashoa, H., Questionnaire and Identification of Interviewee. Free State Archives, Bloemfontein, Workshop on Oral History Methodology, 1-4 July 2002.

¹⁵ Working Draft, p. 27.

¹⁶ Ibid.

with the requisite kind of information, that is, old and mature persons.¹⁷ Hamish Forbes concurs by pointing out that it is surely a reasonable assumption that the veterans to be interviewed would all be recalling events that took place at the time in their lives. At that impressionable age the unprecedented nature of images, in some cases the starkly unforgettable nature of the scenes engraved on their conscience, meant that the imprint would be indelible.¹⁸

For this project, the researcher asked around for chiefs, who are guardians of culture and some old people with whom he sat down. The best method in the researcher's experience, however, has been personal recommendation. Once the researcher identified few of the old chiefs and commoners, he asked them for those among them who still lived in the vicinity and was well enough to participate in the project. Then the researcher asked those named who they thought he should talk to. This process of asking informants to refer others who are relevant to and might be interested in the project is called *snowball sampling*¹⁹ by ethnographers.

The next step in selecting potential informants is to draw up a tentative list of interviewees. The word tentative is used because the researcher will probably add to the list as the interviewing project goes on and informants provide more names. In selecting informants for recording, the researcher will want to choose informants who were involved in pivotal events. The researcher insisted on interviewing informants at all levels, that is, chiefs, ordinary people and ministers of religion. He also sought people who were still young enough at the time of the Battle to have taken part so as to share their experiences and perceptions of the event. Many people who had been part of that history and still reside

¹⁷ Vansina, J., Oral Tradition as History, p. 13.

¹⁸ Forbes, H., "Security and Settlement in the Mediaeval and Post-Mediaeval Peloponnese, Greece: Hard History versus Oral History" in Journal of Mediterranean Archeology, Vol, 13, No. 2, December 2000, p. 204.

¹⁹ Yow, p. 45.

in Witsieshoek were contacted, but could not all be interviewed as some were too old and had difficulty in hearing while others were unable to speak because of old age. The researcher believes that the age of the interviewee does not matter that much in interviews, as long as those people selected can provide valuable information and are familiar with the event under research. Anthony Seldon and Joanna Pappworth add that: “age and gender are of no importance in selecting a good informant, but one should be a mature person.”²⁰

When the researcher is engaged in the process of selecting informants, he or she often discovers that many potential informants are pessimistic, sceptical and reluctant. Some may mistrust his or her motives, be anxious about the interview situation, or just want to fool around with it. Others may act reluctantly while the researcher senses that they want to talk, and would, with a little encouragement and persuading.²¹ If other evidence suggests the person would be a good informant, the researcher should be politely persistent. If it seems necessary, the researcher has to reassure the prospective informants that he or she is not out to exploit, ridicule, or take advantage of them; that he or she will not misuse the information they provide, or obtain profit from it.²² Furthermore, the researcher has to make the interviewees to understand that they are respected, and that knowledge of their experience is crucial to the researcher’s project and understanding of the subject. The researcher should offer a truthful but brief explanation of the research, as in the following:

“I want to document the history of the Namoha Battle in Witsieshoek,
so I am talking to people about what they remember of the event and
its significance.”

The point here is to give some notion of the kinds of things that the researcher is interested in. This gives the informant time to think about the topic before the interview. Also, the researcher should make sure that the informant understands that he or she will be bringing

²⁰ Seldon, A. and Pappworth, J., By Word of Mouth, Elite Oral History, p. 59.

²¹ http://www.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Styleguide.html, 30 July 2001.

²² Yow, p. 46.

a tape recorder.²³ The researcher has to explain that he or she wants to be sure that he or she remembers everything the informant tells, that the tape recorder serves in place of taking notes, and also provides a permanent record for future generations. Valerie Yow argues in the following manner:

“Do not try to tape an interview using a concealed tape recorder; it is unethical and a betrayal of trust. If they refuse to talk and your good interviewing techniques are of no avail, do not be discouraged. Knowing that you have done your best to interview this key witness, turn to the next informant and try to get the information from other witnesses and written records.”²⁴

However, this does not mean that if the informant refuse to be taped he or she does not wish to be interviewed; it might simply be that the informant does not like the idea of being electronically recorded. Indeed while conducting this study, there were some cases in which informants refused to be tape-recorded. Thus, the researcher took notes as the informants narrated their memories and experiences of the Namoha Battle. Some potential informants will just come forth because they are interested in the history and want to talk.

Paul Thompson notes that:

“The sample is to some degree self-selective because it is the confident, articulate persons who agree to be interviewed. Laconic, isolated, or withdrawn individuals do not often appear in the sample of an oral history project.”²⁵

Finally, the researcher should look at the list of the informants and prioritise. With respect to this study, individuals who were most involved in pivotal decisions, were most active in important events, or were most directly affected should be at the top. In fact, informants who are very elderly or with health problems should be sought in the first phase of

²³ <http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/special/ohp/intsteps.html>, 22 June 2000.

²⁴ Yow, p. 48.

²⁵ Thompson, P., *Voice of the Past*, p. 130.

interviewing.²⁶ This prioritisation of names was helpful to the researcher, as some of informants interviewed have since passed away due to old age and poor health.

3.3 Interviewing techniques

When the researcher has the topical outline for the interview format, he or she is ready to plan the questioning strategy. Some professional oral historians like to begin the interview with a basic announcement: date, names, place and topic. This officially marks the beginning of the interview, and helps the researcher and other future users to identify the tape afterwards.²⁷ On the other hand, some researchers prefer to ask for basic biographical information: date and place of birth, early life history, or occupation.²⁸ Others prefer to begin by asking first the substantive question that goes directly to one of the topics on which they need information.²⁹ Regardless of how a researcher begins his or her interview, the first question sets the tone for the interview. It is important that it should be one that the informant knows a great deal about, and which requires a lengthy and detailed answer. This helps the interviewee to bring together scattered memories about him or her and the event under research. A useful starting point, for example, would be ‘please tell me about your life during the 1940s.’

Starting the interview with an open-ended question (for example: tell me about your life in 1950s) helps to keep the interview going. Closed questions have only one definite answer: yes or no. Open-ended questions are more open to interpretation and can be answered in different ways, usually requiring more depth and detail. Furthermore, the interviewer should ask a single question at a time as a series of questions will not only

²⁶ <http://www.history.navy.mil/faqs/faq87-4.html>, 3 July 2001.

²⁷ <file:///A:/BBC%20History%Primer.html>, 10 August 2001.

²⁸ Payne, S., “The Art of Asking Questions” in *Oral History Review*, Vol.12, Issue 14, 1985, p. 34.

²⁹ Hayes, P., “Order Out of Chaos: Mandume ya Ndemufayo and oral history” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 19, No. 1, March 1993, p. 89.

confuse the interviewee, but will also result in perhaps only the first and the last questions being answered. Questions should be kept short and clear to enable the interviewee to slide effortlessly into his or her reminiscences.³⁰ In addition, the interviewer should not ask leading questions. Leading questions interfere with the natural remembering or narrating process by injecting content from outside.³¹ These are the questions that indicate to the interviewee how the interviewer wants him or her to respond. For example: ‘You must have been pretty disillusioned by what happened at the Namoha Battle?’ Such a question puts the interviewee in the awkward position of having to agree or disagree with the interviewer. The interviewer needs to note that he or she is pointedly asking for the interviewee’s thinking at the time. The interviewer should ask, instead: ‘what was your reaction as you went through the whole Battle experience?’

Peter Hayes suggests that the researcher must not be concerned with keeping to a rigid sequence of questions, but should be flexible, facilitate, listen and build rapport.³² During the process of the interview, the interviewer should help the informant to remember the past and record the greatest quality and quantity of information possible. In facilitating this the interviewer should be assuring, friendly, courteous, attentive, non-judgmental, and be the perfect listener.³³ The researcher should keep quiet while the informant is talking and not interrupt the conversation because he or she has thought of a question, or because the narrator is straying from the planned outline. Interruptions may cut off irretrievable information. If the information is pertinent, let the interviewee go on, but jot down the question on a note pad so as to ask it later.

If the informant does stray into subjects that are not pertinent, the interviewer should try

³⁰ <http://www.indiana.edu/~ohrc/pamph1.html>, 17 January 2000.

³¹ Payne, p. 28.

³² Hayes, p. 89.

³³ Penyak, L.M. and Duray, P.B., Oral History and Problematic Questions, p. 71.

to pull him or her back as quickly as possible. The interviewer should also tolerate silence to allow the informant to collect his or her memories and put them into words. He or she should give informants freedom to reminisce and encourage them with nods and the occasional smile. The interviewer has to look attentive and avoid appearing nervous, impatient or bored.³⁴

When ready to start interviews, the researcher should schedule the interview at the informant's convenience as much as possible.³⁵ With elderly informants ask what time during the day they like having a visitor. Colman Gourley points out that the scheduling of an interview is not easy with very busy people, because the time they suggest may sound strange. But because the informant's goodwill is necessary for the interview to take place at all, the researcher should be accommodating as much as possible.³⁶ When going to conduct an interview the first thing that the researcher needs to do is to make sure that he or she arrives on time: rather let the interviewee keep the interviewer waiting than the interviewer keep the interviewee waiting.

The interviewer also needs to be aware of his or her personal appearance before the interview. The tone the interviewer sets nonverbally can be as important to the interview's success as what he or she says. His or her attire tells the interviewee something about how the interviewer views him or her and the interview itself. Casual clothes can suggest a more informal atmosphere, but it can also suggest a lack of care or respect to some interviewees. Businesslike clothes can suggest a more formal, purposeful atmosphere, but can also intimidate some interviewees. The researcher has to try to match his or her appearance to what will best put the interviewee at ease with him or her and the interview

³⁴ Oluwole, S.B., *Philosophy and Oral Tradition*, p. 15.

³⁵ <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu.BANC/ROHO/rohotips.html>, 22 June 2000.

³⁶ Gourley, C., "Writing History from Inside Out" in *Writing*, Vol. 23, No. 3, November/December 2000, p. 11.

process.³⁷

On arriving at the place of the interview, the researcher once again needs to briefly explain the purpose and nature of the project. Assure the informant that they are not obliged to answer all of the questions. The interviewer has to inform the interviewees that he or she will not be offended if they decline to answer a particular question.³⁸ The researcher has to be as polite as possible as the interviewees have the information that the researcher wants. Again the interviewer wish to enter into a good relationship with interviewees as their help may be needed not only at the time of the interview but later on in interviewer's research. The researcher need to be aware that there can be subject areas or data out of his or her reach because of some inhibiting factors in his or her relationship with the interviewee: sex, age, race or religion. The researcher needs to be sensitive to these factors and try to work past them, but not to alienate the interviewee by pressing too hard for information he or she does not want to share.

After the interview begins, the interviewer gives the informant a chance to talk. During this time the interviewer should remain silent about his or her experiences. Steven Everett suggests that a good interview should "begin with routine questions about the place such as, where were you born, then follow with uncomplicated questions about the place or family."³⁹ These nonthreatening questions help both the interviewer and the interviewee to ease into the interview. When the interviewer is conducting an interview, it is important to remember that he or she is dealing with another person and they are not just some machines designed to give answers wanted and then turned off until they are needed again.⁴⁰ The interviewees have emotions, expectations, fears, joys and the information the

³⁷ Oluwole, p. 33.

³⁸ Connerton, P., How Societies Remember, p. 56.

³⁹ Everett, S., Oral History: Techniques and Procedures, p. 19.

⁴⁰ <http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/special/ohp/intsteps.html>, 22 June 2000.

researcher has come to ask them to share.⁴¹ Therefore, the best thing in the relationship is to enter into a state of mutual respect with the interviewee.

In an interview the interviewer needs to show the interviewees that he or she respects them and their views and that he or she will look after the precious memories that they are giving and will not abuse them for his or her own ends.⁴² Everett attests that every interview begins with uncertainty on the part of the interviewer and the informant. The interviewer does not know how the interview will go. That informant does not know what is expected of him or her. Often the informant says something like “I do not think I know enough to be of any help to you.”⁴³ In this case the interviewer needs to make sure that the informant’s fears and concerns are addressed surrounding the interview process and the use of the information that they are going to give. An interviewer should always be friendly and not just rush the interviewee so that he or she can get his or her work done and then get out of the interview situation.

Once the interview begins, the interviewer and informant explore the situation and they soon become at ease. This is the period of listening and observing. John Spradley points out that running through the minds of the interviewer and the interviewee are questions such as “what does he want me to say? Can she be trusted? Is she going to be able to answer my questions? What does she really want from these interviews? Am I answering questions as I should? Does he really want to know what I know?”⁴⁴ The interviewer needs to interact with the interviewee just as he or she would with any other person whom he or she knows and respects, and has to remember that this is a relationship, not an interrogation. The best results are often gained from relaxed and friendly interview

⁴¹ Working Draft, p. 23.

⁴² <http://www.indiana.edu/~ohrc/pamph1.htm>, 17 January 2000.

⁴³ Everett, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Spradley, J., *The Ethnographic Interview*, p. 79.

situations in which both parties feel able to talk and communicate their feelings, most notably the interviewee.

Before and during the interview the informant will decide whether or not to trust the interviewer. It is thus crucial for the interviewer to be honest and straight forward about the project and to answer the informant's questions honestly and respectfully. This may require repeated explanations of what the project is all about and why he or she is there, interviewing this particular individual.⁴⁵ The researcher recalls a moment in an interviewing session where he thought everything was understood. Suddenly, the informant asked: "Ha ntle-ntle taba ya hao ke efe? Lebaka-baka la ho fuputsa taba ee ke lefe?"⁴⁶ Then the researcher realised that he would have to explain in far more detail exactly what he was doing and why. Taking time to make sure the informant understands builds trust because the informant understands why the researcher is interviewing him or her. Reassurance that the informant is responding in a helpful way should be given. Spradley suggests, in communicating to the informant, a statement such as the following is useful indeed: "I understand what you are saying; I am learning; it is valuable to me."⁴⁷

The interviewer should express appreciation that the informant is offering his or her time to answer questions. In fact, the interviewer should make it clear that the informant's expertise or special effort is appreciated. Everett suggests the following commentary:

"I know I am asking you some questions that are not easy to answer, and I really appreciate your helping me with these. You know the details of that situation better than anybody else. Talking to you really helps me to understand it."⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Douglas, J., Creative Interviewing, p. 100.

⁴⁶ "What is the point now? Why are we doing this?" Freely Translated.

⁴⁷ Spradley, p. 81.

⁴⁸ Everett, p. 24.

Positive commentaries such as these on the informant's work in the interview contribute to his or her motivation to continue and to cooperate in the endeavour. Furthermore, the interviewer's nonverbal responses are important. Nodding, smiling and shaking of head shows that the interviewer is following. It is, furthermore, important to maintain eye contact. Looking down or looking around and not looking into the person's eyes makes the interviewer seem to be thinking about something else, and this prevents the him or her from observing the informant's nonverbal behaviour.⁴⁹ However, while the textbook guideline is for eye contact, in African context such eye contact must be minimised as this could be interpreted as a sign of disrespect, depending on the gender and age of the interviewer. The Basotho children are usually taught not to look at old people in the eye as they talk because, it is said, they would become liars. It is thought that they would distort what an elder said or tell what he or she heard the elders talking about. Therefore, if an interviewer received such teaching, it becomes difficult to always maintain eye contact with an elderly informant.

One other point an interviewer should bear in mind is that in an interview he or she should not show off his or her knowledge, but with well constructed questions and listening skill the informant will sense that the interviewer is informed and that he or she takes the interview seriously. Yow advises that:

“Do not try to convey the impression that you are in the in-group by using jargon, but learn as much as you can about terms specific to the topics to be discussed before the interview begins, ask the informant the meaning if you do not know them.”⁵⁰

These techniques will help the interviewer win the informant's cooperation. The most important basis for a good interview is sensitivity to the informant's feelings.⁵¹ As it

⁴⁹ Frisch, M., A Shared Researcherity: Essays on the Craft and Meaning of Oral and Public History, p. 29.

⁵⁰ Yow, p. 64.

⁵¹ file:///A:\Oral%20History%20Primer.html, 10 August 2001.

occasionally happens, the informant becomes grateful for this understanding. For example:

Informant: “Ka nako eo ke ha ke qeta ho pepa, mme hwa eba boima
ho nna ho amohela ho lahlehelwa ke monna.”

Interviewer: O lahlehetswe ke molekane o qeta ho ba le ngwana?
A ntho e bohloko. E be o kgonne jwang ho phela maamong a
jwalo?”⁵²

When the interviewer shows interest and respect, a desire to understand, and sensitivity to the feelings of the informant in a life situation, a real partnership in the interview may begin. Spradley defines participation as a situation in which the informant accepts the role of teaching the interviewer.⁵³ The researcher sees this as occurring when the informant takes some responsibility for making the interview productive. There is earnest and intense involvement in the process on the part of both the interviewer and the informant.

The interviewer, if not careful, can also break the rapport already built by him or her not showing sensitivity to the informant’s feelings.⁵⁴ For example:

Informant: “Ka nako eo ke ha ke qeta ho pepa, mme hwa eba boima
ho nna ho amohela ho lahlehelwa ke monna.”

Interviewer: “Mathata a mang ao o bileng le ona ke afe?”⁵⁵

The second example creates a message, “I am detached from this. I just want some information.” This interviewer shows no sensitivity to the feelings of the respondent, no appreciation of what this experience is like for the person going through it.

Reginal Gorden lists interviewing skills such as wording the question so that it is clear and appropriate for the topic, listening to the informant, observing the informant’s nonverbal

⁵² “At that time I had just had a baby, and that made it a bit difficult for me to adjust to the loss.”
“You lost your husband when you had just had a baby? How did you manage?” Freely Translated.

⁵³ Spradley, p. 81.

⁵⁴ <file:///A:\BBC%20Education%.html>, 10 August 2001.

⁵⁵ “At that time I had just had a baby, and that made it a bit difficult for me to adjust to the loss.”
“What were some of the problems.” Freely Translated.

behaviour, remembering what the informant has said, and judging the relevance, validity, and completeness of the answer so that the interviewer knows when to follow up and probe.⁵⁶ Probing is used when an interviewer senses that something has been left out, that the informant could give a more complete answer. For example: “were there any other reasons that made you to resist the government order to cull your stock?” Then the informant begins to provide more and more reasons why they resisted the order. Lee Penyak and Pamela Duray add that:

“A general probe may also follow a line of questioning, when the interviewer senses that the informant is still thinking about the topic or seems to be expecting further questions or might talk more if encouraged, then ask, You have done an excellent job in giving me insight into this problem. Is there anything else you would like to add before we go to another topic?”⁵⁷

Another way to do a probe is to ask for the same information in a different way or to raise the topic again later in another context, for example, comparing yesterday and today.⁵⁸ Remembering what the informant has said can be improved by taking notes.⁵⁹ Interview notes are useful for indicating when follow up questions are needed, for organising thoughts, and for preparing a preliminary word list of items requiring verification. If the discussion digresses from the subject of the interview, the interviewer should return to the interview plan by tactfully asking a question from the list.

The follow-up question is closely related to the probing question.⁶⁰ The interviewer picks up a clue in the informant’s statement and pursues it. The informant may just slide past the topic, indicating in an offhand manner that he or she could tell more, as is illustrated in the

⁵⁶ Gorden, R.L., Interviewing: Strategy, Techniques and Tactics, p. 43.

⁵⁷ Penyak and Duray, Oral History and Problematic Questions, p. 234.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 235.

⁵⁹ Baum, W.K., Oral History for the Local Historical Society, p. 53.

⁶⁰ Yow, p. 68.

following example:

Informant: “Re ile ra hana ho amohela diphetoho tseo di tlišwang ke mmuso Ha e le morena e moholo yena o ne a sa hlakisa lehlakore la hae. Ka ha re hanne ho amohela diphetoho tseo, mmuso wa batla ho re hatella hore re di amohele.”

Interviewer: “Ke kopa hore o ke o ntlhakisitse hore morena e moholo o ne a sa hlahise lehlakore la hae jwang.”⁶¹

An interviewer can also use a follow-up question when an informant has given a factual account but not indicated the feelings, and the interviewer senses that something important is being left out.⁶² For example:

Informant: “Re ile ra tloha Namoha ka lehlapha-hlapha mme ra ya dula Thaba Bosiu. Ke moo ke ileng ka ha ha teng.”

Interviewer: “Ke ya ipotsa hore e ka be ke ile ka ikutlwa ke le jwang ha Tseo di etsahala. O ile wa ikutlwa o le jwang ka phetoho e tlileng bophelong ba hao?”⁶³

Sometimes, a gentle suggestion can evoke information.⁶⁴ This is helpful especially when the interviewer has come to the end of questioning and he or she believes the answers have been honest but that the informant could be encouraged to reflect and go beyond a factual account.

Another kind of clarification question is the request for the source of the information. The researcher needs to know whether the event described is a first hand account or a handed

⁶¹ “Well, we refused to accept the betterment measures as implemented by the government. By the way our Paramount Chief was indecisive. But as I said, we rejected all those measures and that led the government trying to force us to accept them.” “I am interested in knowing how the Paramount Chief was indecisive. Please tell me.” Freely Translated.

⁶² Yow, p. 69.

⁶³ “So, we left the Namoha village hurriedly and moved to Thaba Bosiu, where I have stayed until today.” “I am imagining how I would have felt in that situation. Would you tell me how you felt about this change in your life?” Freely Translated

⁶⁴ Quinney, V. and Wood, L., How to find out by asking: A guide to Oral History in Rhode Island, p. 20.

down story. The credibility of the account must be established.⁶⁵ One could ask a question such as did you see it happen, in order to establish the location of the informant relative to the event described. Or a researcher could also ask questions such as how close were the police before they opened fire, were they using machine guns. If the informant was there but far away, then he or she may not have seen the guns the police were carrying and may not have heard what the police said before opening fire.

During an interview, it does happen sometimes that when an interviewer interviews an informant, the informant breaks down and weeps. In most cases the interviewer could not have known that he or she would touch on a topic that would evoke such sad memories for the informant.⁶⁶ At one point in this project, the researcher asked an informant how her husband was killed. The informant started to cry as she recalled the tragic death of her sweetheart she had loved many years ago. When this happens, be silent for a few minutes and be compassionate. Every person is entitled to express his or her private grief. Then apologise for stumbling on to a topic that was painful.⁶⁷ When such a painful experience occurs, the interviewer should then ask the informant if he or she would like to continue with the interview. If the informant agrees, then the interviewer should continue with the topic.

In interviewing, one of the most important things that an interviewer should avoid doing is challenging accounts that he or she thinks might be inaccurate. Instead, a researcher should try to develop as much information as possible that can be used by later researchers in establishing what probably happened. Informants may be telling the interviewer quite accurately what he or she saw. For example, this is how Walter Lord explains the interviews he had with survivors of the Titanic:

⁶⁵ Dunaway, D., "Field Recording Oral History" in Oral History Review, Vol. 15, Spring 1995, p. 9.

⁶⁶ Lewis, G., "The Ultimate Oral History" in Library Journal, Vol. 126, No. 14, 1.9.2001, p. 202.

⁶⁷ <http://www.indiana.edu/~ohrc/pamph1.html>, 17 January 2000.

Every lady I interviewed had left the sinking ship in the last lifeboat. As I later found out from studying the placement of the lifeboats, no group of lifeboats was in view of another and each lady probably was in the last lifeboat she could see leaving the ship.⁶⁸

Alternatively, the interviewer could tactfully point out to the informant that there is a different account of what he or she is describing, if there is.⁶⁹ Interviewer could start out by saying:

“I have heard that Mopelinyane was the trusted leader of the *Lingangele*; or I have read that Mopelinyane was the trusted leader of the *Lingangele*; or you just told me that you believe that Mopelinyane was not the trusted leader of the *Lingangele*. Some people have said that he was the heart of the *Lingangele* movement. How would you respond to that statement?”

This is not to challenge the informant’s account, but, rather, an opportunity to bring up further evidence to refute the opposing view, or to explain how that view got established, or to temper what he or she has already said. If done skilfully, some of the best information can come from this juxtaposition of differing accounts.⁷⁰ Again to get the best out of the interview, he or she could use what John Wright III calls *memory joggers* such as photographs, old letters and copies of newspapers from the past.⁷¹

There is no rule with respect to how long an interview should take. The interview could be ended after a reasonable period of time. Usually, sometime between forty-five minutes and two hours people will begin to tire. It is a matter of being sensitive to the interviewee’s limits and being aware when the interview is over. The interviewer and the interviewee could mutually recognise when the subject has been exhausted and that the interview must come to an end. There are times when the interviewee, as experienced by the researcher,

⁶⁸ www.lib.berkeley.edu/BANC/ROHO/rohotips.html, 22 June 2000.

⁶⁹ Yow, p. 67.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ <http://www5.genealogy.com/tip10.html>, 16 April 2000.

does not want to let go and then the interviewer must take charge and gracefully close the interview. In this respect the interviewer should protect both himself or herself and interviewee against over-fatigue as both are likely to be tired by the end of an hour. Some informants will very frankly say so if they are tired. Graham Dominy and Makhosi Khoza claim that:

“In a case where the information is still needed from a particular interviewee, another meeting should be scheduled as more and better material is elicited by several short interviews rather than long ones.”⁷²

As the interview winds down, the interviewer should thank the informant on tape and should always ask for the names of other people and written documents that will lead him or her further in his or her research.⁷³ After completion of the interview it is important that the interviewer does not rush away as this may appear to be a sign of disrespect to the interviewee. If the interviewer is offered a cup of tea or coffee, he or she should accept it, as this helps to improve the interviewer and interviewee relationship. In Sesotho culture, it is a normal practice that after a certain task has been completed successfully food or drink is served as a way of thanking the visitor or visitors and to show hospitality.⁷⁴ The Basotho would not like their guest just to leave without having tea or coffee, even soft porridge with them after a meeting. When these are unavailable, they would want, at least, the visitor to drink a glass of water. Then they would be satisfied. This is a token of appreciation for a visit.

The after-interview conversation is also important in that the interviewer would never be seen to be running away, because this would be interpreted as a sign of disrespect and that he or she was hiding something. But during this period after the interview, the interviewer

⁷² Dominy, G. and Khoza, M., “The Problems with contemporary oral history collecting: The Natal Museum’s Amandla Project” in South African Archives Journal, Vol. 37, 1995, p. 73.

⁷³ <http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/special/ohp/intsteps.html>, 22 June 2000.

⁷⁴ Personal collection, transcript interview with Dr. EN Maletle, a Sesotho senior lecturer at the University of the Free State- Qwa-Qwa Campus, 18/02/2004.

should make sure that controversial subjects are avoided as this will only cause the researcher's interviewee to become uneasy and unhappy with him or her. Therefore, keep the conversation light and topical.⁷⁵ After leaving the interview the interviewer should complete the field report⁷⁶ (see addendum B). This is done to assure the accuracy of the material collected as the feelings and information are still fresh in the interviewer's mind.

3.4 Managing the interview product

The interview tapes should be labelled with the names of the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer should listen to the interview tapes shortly after each session, while the memory of the events is still fresh. This review enables the interviewer to determine if a follow-up session is required and, accordingly, to proceed with the necessary arrangements in order to expand upon the interview notes, to clarify any garbled sections of the tapes, and, if not already prepared during the interview, to make a word list of terms requiring identification.⁷⁷

Once the interview is completed, the researcher's task is that of product management: transcribing the interview tape or typing up interview notes if the conversation was not recorded, editing the transcripts, and storing the tapes and transcripts. Transcribing is one of the most time consuming and important parts of oral history research. Hugo Slim and Paul Thompson summarise it as follows:

“The basic rule of transcription is to render the original speech into written text as accurately as possible by including hesitation, repetition, exclamation, emphasis and dialect. It is important not to correct grammar or word order, or to attempt to make the account read more like a written one. It should remain the spoken word in the style of the narrator, with all the meandering and inconsistencies

⁷⁵ Working Draft, p. 35.

⁷⁶ This is the form that the interviewer fills after the interview and covers the following aspects: interview details, interview process, after the interview and any comments that the interviewer might have apart from the aspects listed above.

⁷⁷ Baum, p. 54.

this may imply.”⁷⁸

Oral historians disagree among themselves about the ways in which transcribing should be done. Some insist that the transcript should be an absolutely accurate representation of the tape, as Slim and Thompson have pointed out above. At the other extreme are those who argue that the transcription should be edited into a smooth narrative in polished English.⁷⁹ These arguments are all worth pursuing, but do not form part of this study. Advocates on both sides of the debate seem to all agree, however, that accurately portraying the informant’s meaning is of paramount importance. What is needed is to transcribe tapes verbatim, then edit the transcription to remove false starts, *uhs*, *ahs*, stuttering and words such as *well* and *you know*. Carel Wilmsen argued that spelling and word forms should be standardised, (*get*, not *git*,) but texts should not be altered to the extent of correcting grammar. If the informant said, *I seen*, the text should not be changed to read *I saw*.⁸⁰

The researcher believes that whether to transcribe the entire tape verbatim or not depends largely on the dictates of an individual research project. An oral history transcript should reflect as closely as possible the actual words, speech patterns, and thought patterns of the interviewee. The informant’s word choice, including his or her grammar and speech patterns should be accurately represented. Oral history is not an exercise in literary composition. The transcriber should avoid value judgement about the grammar or vocabulary of an interviewee.⁸¹

It is through the transcription, in conjunction with the tapes, that interviewers are able to share the memories of the interviewee with other people. Due to this, the researcher needs

⁷⁸ Slim, H. G. and Thompson, P., Listening for Change: Oral History and Development, p. 88.

⁷⁹ Allen and Montell, p. 103.

⁸⁰ Wilmsen, C., “For the Record: Editing and the Production of Meaning in Oral History” in Oral History Review, Winter/Spring 2001, Vol. 28, Issue 1, p. 65.

⁸¹ Ibid.

notice calling on the accused to produce their stock was of no force and effect.”⁸⁷ The outcome of the case caused the Department not to press for the disposal of culled stock for the time being with the result that numbers still remained far in excess of what the veld could carry.⁸⁸ This incident, in the eyes of the community, created a precedent and did more harm than any other event in encouraging the Basotho to disobey the rule of law.

Following this demonstration of a doubtful legal basis of the betterment proclamation and the authorities not pressing for the disposal of the culled stock, some people refused to sell off their culled cattle. Taking advantage of the situation, many people followed and kept their culled stock. The number of the people opposed to the culling grew tremendously as a result. The defiance of the Trust and its officers was intensified. These dissidents began to cohere into a movement under the leadership of Mopelinyane, whom they admired for understanding their needs. The group became known as the *Lingangele*.⁸⁹ Mopelinyane’s status was raised from insignificance to virtual leadership of a larger proportion of the tribe. At the same time this encouraged him, and others, to defy the law in many ways.

These developments were accompanied by the revival of a Witsieshoek Vigilance Association,⁹⁰ that had existed since 1914. The Association was based in Johannesburg and most of its members were migrant workers from Witsieshoek, who felt that as a

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Lodge, p. 269.

⁸⁹ “Lingangele means those who stand firm, instigators, dissidents, agitators or the resisters.” Freely Translated.

⁹⁰ This was an organization composed mostly of the Basotho of Witsieshoek who were working in Johannesburg, and felt that they needed to come together and speak in one voice to protect their interests in Witsieshoek, if they were under any threat. The Witsieshoek Vigilance Association assisted the *Lingangele* in its opposition to the culling of cattle and supported it with money. It was, however, not recognised by the authorities in Witsieshoek and was labeled as a rebel rouser.

result of the work of the betterment program by officials, their own interests within the Reserve were threatened.⁹¹ According to the information gathered from the informants, this Association worked with and provided the *Lingangele* with financial and moral support.

With the support of the majority of the people and the backing of the Witsieshoek Vigilance Association, the *Lingangele* leaders embarked on a campaign to make the government aware of their concerns, to suspend its activities in the reserve and to establish a Commission of Enquiry that would look into the problems that were created by the Trust. But nothing satisfactory came from the government.⁹² The group also went to the extent of appealing to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Trygve Lie, for intervention, but no response was received (see addendum E).

When the government did nothing to address the concerns of this group, and of the Basotho in general, the *Lingangele* embarked on open defiance of the government orders.⁹³ They wanted to force the government to accede to their demands. As a result of their stance against cattle culling, more and more people began supporting the *Lingangele*. The *Lingangele* leaders began to assume a heroic status among many members of the community. It was popularly felt that the stock culling had involved deception by the officials, that rather aiming to improve the reserve's stock by eliminating the weakest, the main intention was to reduce overall numbers. This, it was charged, was not what the Basotho had accepted in 1939.⁹⁴

⁹¹ NTS 8150 File No. 15/341:A memorandum from Witsieshoek Vigilance Association to The Secretary for Native Affairs, 16/03/1944.

⁹² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

⁹³ Lodge, p. 269.

⁹⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

The Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli, was also not happy with the Trust. This became more evident when, in giving testimony in court in a subsequent *Lingangele* trial following the Namoha Battle in 1951, Chief Mopeli said that:

“When I was first asked for approval to the cull in 1939 I gave it. But it was only later when the law was brought into practical application that I realized that the objective was not culling, but reduction or limitation of stock. This was proved because everybody irrespective of the quality of his cattle was compelled to hand over a certain percentage. As a result, I personally sponsored a petition to the Minister of Native Affairs, asking for the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry. The Commission to investigate whether or not what was happening was exactly what was contained in the Trust. The way it was applied was totally different from the way it was introduced to me. Therefore, I wanted the government to suspend it until all the complaints had been addressed.”⁹⁵

On 10 February 1947, alarmed by the rising tide of dissatisfaction, the Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli, and most members of his tribe (with the support of the Native Commissioner) sent a petition to the Minister of Native Affairs, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, in which the Minister was requested to appoint a Commission of Enquiry in connection with the original explanation of the Betterment Areas Proclamation, of 1939, and in which it was alleged, *inter alia*, that the limitation of stock had been explained to them.⁹⁶ At the same time Mr. Smuts, an attorney in Bethlehem, on the request of Charles Mopeli, sent a telegram to the Minister of Native Affairs requesting that the Proclamation be suspended and a Commission be appointed. In his response, on 31 March 1947, the Secretary for Native Affairs, Mr. G. Mears, stated in a letter that the Proclamation would not be repealed and that the Department was not prepared to depart from its policy with regard to the stock limitation. He indicated that steps would be taken to amend the Proclamation in the light of the decision by the Appeal Court.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Chronicle, 26 May 1951.

⁹⁶ NTS, Vol. 6814, File No. 29/318, Request for a Commission of Inquiry: Witsieshoek Native Reserve, December 1947.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

In pursuing the matter further, in May 1947, Chief Charles Mopeli sent three members of his sub-group, viz., Paulus Howell Mopeli, Atwell Mopeli and Albert Mopeli (they were chosen at a public meeting) to Cape Town to interview Mr. Hayman Meyer Basner,⁹⁸ who at that time represented the Natives of this area in the Senate, for advice concerning the Trust regulations.⁹⁹ The deputation had a copy of the petition that they had to hand over to Mr. Basner and they had to request him to place the difficulties of the tribe before the Minister of Native Affairs and to request him to appoint a Commission of Enquiry. On their return they reported to the chief and requested that a *pitso*¹⁰⁰ be convened so that they could inform the people of the result about their mission. The request was granted and the Paramount Chief convened a *pitso*.¹⁰¹

On the day of the meeting Atwell Mopeli and Albert Mopeli reported to the Paramount Chief that the Minister had informed Mr. Basner that the Department had its hands full now and could not attend to the grievances of the Basotho. Consequently, it was alleged that Mr. Basner had advised them to tell the people that if the protest was unaccompanied by action, it would be futile. He allegedly advised them to destroy the grazing camp fences as a way to bring their complaint forcefully to the attention of the government. Chief Charles Mopeli requested them not to make this known to the people at the *pitso* as this might create lawlessness. However, they allegedly disregarded

⁹⁸ Advocate Hayman Meyer Basner made close contacts with the Basotho and defended most of the cases brought against them. According to the informants, Advocate Basner had won most of the cases he had defended. According to the reports, the local crown prosecutor, R. Kotze, was no match for him. He was a shrewd, clever legal man with much experience. He succeeded in making the then existing legal machinery a laughing stock of the Natives: Report on Native unrest at Witsieshoek, O.F.S. 27 March 1950.

⁹⁹ Union Government(UG.) 6/422, 26/1951. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

¹⁰⁰ "A *pitso* is a Sesotho traditional assembly or gathering where issues that affect the nation are discussed. Under normal circumstances, only men are eligible to attend. Women are allowed to attend only when an issue is affecting them directly."

¹⁰¹ Lodge, pp. 270-271.

his advice and told the meeting the exact words that Mr. Basner had said.¹⁰²

Chief Charles Mopeli was very disappointed in view of the fact that he had told his envoys that if they conveyed such a message to the people, some of them might be impetuous enough to commit such a rash act.¹⁰³ This message sowed confusion among the people. Chief Charles Mopeli closed the meeting with an address and warned the people that if they should be party to such action, it could have serious consequences, and they must remember that one of the conditions of the occupation of the land in Witsieshoek, was that Mopeli's people had to keep peace and not commit any breach of law and order.¹⁰⁴ But these words did not help; the split had occurred. After this meeting the three envoys then commenced to organise active resistance, which progressively widened the rift between them, the Paramount Chief and the loyal¹⁰⁵ subjects.

On 10 December 1947, the decision of the Minister of Native Affairs with regard to the petition of 10 February 1947, was made known and the decision was a refusal of the request for an independent Commission. It was stated thus:

“The Honourable Minister of Native Affairs had decided that there was no justification for a Commission of Enquiry, that the complaints of the Natives could be dealt with and disposed of finally by the Department officials; that it was a question of policy to discuss matters with the people and to obtain their consent prior to the application of legislation but that there was no obligation to do so.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Ibid., p. 271.

¹⁰³ Maylam, p. 191.

¹⁰⁴ U.G 6/422, 26/1951. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

¹⁰⁵ The Basotho who were loyal to what the Paramount Chief was saying and opposed the use of violence to force the government to halt the cattle culling.

¹⁰⁶ U.G 6/422, 26/1951. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the disturbances in Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

Following the announcement of the Minister's reply, a meeting on 22 January 1948 was convened. Mr. H.B. Myburg, the Chief Native Commissioner, addressed the meeting.¹⁰⁷ At the meeting the atmosphere was very tense, and all that was actually achieved was that the Chief Native Commissioner repeated the Minister's decision and that was the end of the matter. According to the informants, the decision of the Minister was a very disappointing one as it did not solve anything but only aggravated matters.¹⁰⁸

What followed this decision was the cutting down of fences that had demarcated camps. Chief Charles Mopeli was very furious about this action. He requested the government not to intervene as he would deal with his people himself. He instructed all the men to come and repair the damaged fences and ordered that any person who would not come would be fined heavily. Those who did not heed this call were severely punished by being charged a head of cattle while others were chased out of Witsieshoek. This incident angered people even more and many became more determined to render the reserve ungovernable.¹⁰⁹ In commenting on the Paramount Chief's announcement, Tshepo Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tsoana village, remarked that:

"The impression we got from the Chief's speech was that he was giving too much to the union government and wanted to impress it at our expense. To us the chieftainship was losing credibility under Charles Mopeli. We felt obliged to ignore him and try to protect the dignity of the monarchy."¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁷ NTS, Vol. 7459, File No. 506/327, Control and Improvement of livestock in the District of Witsieshoek.

¹⁰⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Tshepo Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tsoana village, 10/04/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Betty Mpele, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, 16/04/2002.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Tshepo Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tsoana village, 10/04/2002.

A further setback to the cooperation by the Basotho was a statement made by the Under-Secretary of the Department, Mr. J.J. van der Merwe at the meeting on 18 January 1950. The meeting was held with the chiefs and their followers. At that meeting the Basotho were informed that the Department would continue with the culling in spite of their feelings; that they had to cooperate; that the government could make laws whereby the whole community could be punished and that their huts would be removed from the slopes. They were reminded of communal fines (such as being fined a head of cattle) and were told that their complaints were unfounded.¹¹¹

Most of the informants pointed out that they trusted the government and believed that if the government could listen to their plea, the culling would stop. What led to this thinking was the fact that the Basotho were always addressed by somebody claiming to represent the government but not acting as such. These were state officials who were merely carrying out instructions. Their behaviour and actions, however, made the Basotho to doubt whether or not their appeals did reach the intended authority as what they requested were not forthcoming.¹¹² Betty Mpele, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, remarked that:

“When all our requests were rejected and following what the Under-Secretary told us in one of the meetings, we doubted whether or not our grievances had ever reached the head office. That is why we insisted on the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry. At this time the situation was getting out of hand and I believe that had the government instituted the Commission of Enquiry earlier, the situation could have been saved. However, the Department opted for an unwise decision.”¹¹³

Proclamation No. 116 of 1949, which substituted Proclamation No.31 of 1939, promulgated a further cull to take place on 13 February 1950 at Makeneng crush. The

¹¹¹ Minutes of the meeting of Chiefs and his subjects held in Witsieshoek on 18 January 1950.

¹¹² Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Betty Mpele, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, 16/04/2002.

¹¹³ Ibid.

decision was taken as a matter of necessity because the deterioration of the area was becoming rapid. Despite the threats made earlier, the cull of 1950 was a total failure. The few people who actually brought their stock to the cattle crush had them driven off forcefully by a number of Basotho horsemen. Their attitude was most hostile.¹¹⁴ The majority of stock owners did not produce their stock. Ten persons were prosecuted but, again, they won the case when it went to appeal¹¹⁵ (see addendum H). This decision, once again, thwarted the efforts of the government to enforce the betterment measures.

The opponents of the Trust subsequently seized Chief Charles Mopeli's stock, which had been assembled at the auction sale pens and drove them back home. As a reaction, Chief Charles Mopeli blamed the leader of the *Lingangele*, Mopelinyane. In addition to this he wrote to the Commissioner requesting the removal of Mopelinyane from the Reserve. He claimed that Mopelinyane was the instigator of the trouble in the Reserve. He also stated that Mopelinyane worked hand in glove with the Witsieshoek Vigilance Association, the body which had already caused trouble during the election of the Board members. He further stated that the trouble would only cease if Mopelinyane and a certain number of his followers were removed from the Reserve.¹¹⁶

Furthermore, in trying to persuade the Basotho to cooperate, on 20 February, 1950, a meeting was convened by the Magistrate of Harrismith, Mr. J.J. Snyman. The aim of the meeting was to try to restore order and appeal to the Basotho for voluntary culling of cattle. The meeting was held in Witsieshoek in conjunction with the District Commandant of the South African Police, Captain I. Terblanche. Very few Basotho attended this meeting, Chief Charles Mopeli voiced his disappointment at the poor attendance and exhorted those present to maintain law and order and never allow themselves to be misled by the instigators. A large number of dissatisfied members of

¹¹⁴ NTS, Vol. 7459, File No. 506/327; Natal Witness, 29/2/1950.

¹¹⁵ NTS, Vol. 6814, file 29/318: First Information of Crime: Statements handed in, 10/2/1950.

¹¹⁶ NTS, Vol. 7459 File, No. 506/327, A letter from Chief Charles Mopeli to the Native Commissioner, Review of my position, 18/02/1950.

the tribe did not attend the meeting. Instead, they sent a message that they were holding their own meeting at the Show grounds at the same time. At this unofficial meeting, speakers said culling must be rejected as it would bring poverty and misfortune to the people. They demanded that a Commission of Enquiry be appointed to look into their grievances.¹¹⁷ The Commission of Enquiry that was appointed later reported that after the 'official' meeting, the Magistrate went to the Show grounds to address the Basotho who gathered there, but they had already disbanded.¹¹⁸

Attempts to get the Basotho in the Witsieshoek Reserve to cooperate with the authorities in the cattle culling scheme had failed and a deadlock had arisen. There was no response to the appeal made by Mr. Snyman for voluntary cattle culling. Not one of the estimated 11000 heads of cattle in the Reserve had been brought in for culling.¹¹⁹ Following the meeting of 20 February 1950, a letter of appeal from the office of the Deputy Commissioner of South African Police, J.J. du Toit, was sent to the Commissioner of the South African Police in Pretoria requesting his help. The Commissioner was informed of the deliberations at the meeting. The appeal was made to suspend culling temporarily and to withdraw all the summonses issued against those Basotho who had refused to bring their cattle for culling. Lastly, the letter appealed for the appointment of a Commission to enquire into grievances among the Basotho in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve.¹²⁰ The letter was an indication that the police were also in favour of a Commission of Enquiry as a way of stopping the escalating unrest and disturbances in the Reserve. The Commissioner, J.R. Muller, however, rejected the requests, and stated: "I regret, but these requests I cannot support."¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Chronicle, 21 February 1950.

¹¹⁸ Union Government(U.G.) 6/422, 26/1951. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

¹¹⁹ Chronicle, 21 February 1950.

¹²⁰ DNA, 24/2 file 506/327: Native Unrest: Witsieshoek, 22/02/1950.

¹²¹ NTS, Vol. 7459, File 506/327, For information, 27/02/ 1950.

This response from the Commissioner, refusing to support the appeal, disappointed those who had first hand information of the situation in the Reserve.¹²² This response did not help as the events that followed indicated the seriousness of the situation in the Reserve. Lawlessness was creeping in.¹²³ This worried the Paramount Chief, who, at that time was aware that all the peaceful means to solve the problem had been rejected. It, therefore, appeared to the Basotho that the only logical way to follow was to use violence to compel the government to heed their complains.¹²⁴ However, the use of violence was not an option to the Paramount Chief. He, once again, as the Paramount Chief, appealed to the authorities to attend to his people's concerns.¹²⁵ Noticing the number of policemen that were entering the Reserve, while accepting that they were to maintain law and order, the Paramount Chief pleaded with the government as follows:

“My people have a grievance and are disturbed. To use force against them at this stage or at a later stage might have unpleasant results.”¹²⁶

The Basotho's resistance to cattle culling had been relatively peaceful even though some state officials were reporting that the Basotho were hostile.¹²⁷ An engineer who was employed to survey the residential areas in Witsieshoek made this observation. In his report the engineer pointed out that after being assigned this task, he was informed by the Additional Native Commissioner, Mr. Smit, and Agricultural officer, Mr. Johan

¹²² The Star, 29 February 1950.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Betty Mpele, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, 16/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Tshepo Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tsoana village, 10/04/2002.

¹²⁵ Chronicle, 02 March 1950.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

Roberts, that in their opinion the Natives in the reserve would not allow him to carry out his work. He further pointed out that he was told that their own work had practically come to a standstill due to the hostility of the Natives.¹²⁸ He stated in his report that on 18 July 1950 when he went out with Mr. Roberts, as follows:

“I did not notice any symptoms of hostility on the part of the Natives where we happened to pass them on our way. When I started with my survey that afternoon, I heard women ululating very excitedly. However, some men refused access to their yards to my staff bearers, but yielded when Mr. Roberts soothed them with the promise ‘that it was not the intention of the government to interfere with their residential sites.’ Their complaint was that they were not informed of our activities. Had the Natives known about the Department’s true intentions they would have probably smashed my instrument into pieces.”¹²⁹

According to the above report the Basotho in Witsieshoek were understandably suspicious of the actions of some state officials. Some of the measures were allegedly implemented not as directed by the higher authorities. Maabia Molaba, an ordinary Mosotho from Matsieng village, claimed that some of the government officials did not represent the government well hence the continued unrest in the area.¹³⁰

After a long time of appeals for a Commission of Enquiry the government finally relented. On 12 October 1950 the appointment of the Commission of Enquiry was announced to the Basotho.¹³¹ However, members of the *Lingangele*, under the leadership of Mopelinyane, who had been yearning for the appointment of the commission, now declared that they did not want anything to do with the Commission. They pointed out that they were opposed to the personnel, not to the Commission per

¹²⁸ BOV 1/212 (61) N2/11/2 File No. (55)2/31/2, Free State Archives Repository, Bloemfontein. Report of an engineer on the Witsieshoek Disturbances, 28/07/1950.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Maabia Molaba, an ordinary Mosotho, Matsieng village, 19/09/2001.

¹³¹ U.G 6/422, 26/1951. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

se, as the Commission was composed only of white people.¹³² On 10 November 1950, when it had been arranged that the representatives of the *Lingangele* section were to give evidence before the Commission, approximately one thousand Basotho males and about three hundred Basotho females arrived at the Court and started a demonstration which, according to the report of the Commission, was without doubt, intended to intimidate the Commission. According to the members of the Commission, these tribesmen were armed, in some cases with sickles, axes, assegais and knobkerries.¹³³

When the Commission began its sittings, the *Lingangele* leaders, Mopelinyane, Scotland Koloi, Paulus Mpheteng and Letsie Mopeli, at first refused to testify. They only consented to do so after intensive persuasion from Basner, who previously represented the Basotho, and Senator W.G. Ballinger, their legal representative. Mopelinyane then demanded an open sitting so that all the people could hear and follow the Commission's proceedings. This having been refused, the four *Lingangele* witnesses withdrew. It was only after a considerable delay that they were sworn in, but it was too late to give evidence that day.¹³⁴ The enquiry was then adjourned to the 27 November 1950. The *Lingangele* agreed to meet again publicly just before the Commission opened on 27 November 1950, at Namoha, the home of Mopelinyane, so that they could strategise the next move in the light of the arrival of more police, some of whom were allegedly arrogant.¹³⁵

On 22 November 1950 all public meetings were forbidden by a proclamation. However, this prohibition had little effect as the *Lingangele* continued to meet. According to

¹³² Chronicle, 19 May 1951.

¹³³ U.G 6/422, 26/1951. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

¹³⁴ Chronicle, 11 November 1950.

¹³⁵ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Selina Opeka, an ordinary Mosotho, from Botjhabela village, 16/04/02.

defence witnesses at the ensuing trial, few were aware of any ban on meetings.¹³⁶ On 27 November 1950 the *Lingangele* meeting went on as planned. Chief Setsoto Mopeli recalled that:

“People went to the meeting because we wanted to protect our spokesmen by accompanying them to court. We did not trust the police who had just invaded our land.”¹³⁷

The four *Lingangele* leaders who had already been sworn in to give evidence did not show up on 27 November 1950, the day set aside for them. Major L.P.S Terblanche, a District Commandant of Police at Bethlehem, was asked to serve subpoenas to the four. He went out with thirty-six men armed with batons and revolvers, while seven of them carried Sten and sub-machine guns.¹³⁸ On arrival at Namoha, the police ordered the people to disperse. When the people refused to disperse as the police ordered them, shooting began after the expiry of the ten minutes given by the police. The Basotho retaliated to the first shot with sticks and stones, and “in a battle that lasted nearly an hour, fourteen tribesmen were killed and several more wounded.”¹³⁹ Police casualties were two dead and sixteen wounded.¹⁴⁰ The sequel to the skirmishes included mass arrests and searches in the mountains along the Lesotho border, and a huge trial which far depleted the material resources of the Witsieshoek community (a detailed discussion of the confrontation and trial are discussed in chapters six and seven, respectively):

4.6 Conclusion

The Betterment scheme of 1939 was perceived by its authors as a direct approach to tackle the problem of the degeneration of the Reserve. On the other hand, it was also seen by the broader community as an indirect attack on their cultural traditions and

¹³⁶ Lodge, p. 271.

¹³⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong Village, 25/09/2001.

¹³⁸ Chronicle, 5 May 1951.

¹³⁹ Lodge, p. 271.

¹⁴⁰ Maylam, p. 191.

means of livelihood, and by the chiefs as yet another attack on traditional authority. The state hoped that by these state-aided schemes land would be rehabilitated, while at the same time the number of cattle units would be limited.

According to some reports, the Basotho had been living peacefully in Witsieshoek and enjoying freedom under tribal customs with little or no interference from the Union government. Before the implementation of the Trust, matters of stock, grazing, control of lands and residential allotments fell entirely within the jurisdiction of the Paramount Chief and his councillors. The Department of Native Affairs did not concern itself much with these matters as long as law and order were preserved. However, with the advent of the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936, a completely new and drastic change was brought in which was bound to unsettle the Basotho. To them it was intended to bestow unlimited powers on the Department of Native Affairs. Not only was it naturally the most hated bit of legislation as far as Basotho were concerned, but it was also full of legal loopholes, hence the successful appeals by the Basotho.

The introduction of the Betterment measures amounted to the curbing of the freedom of the Basotho with respect to controlling their livestock. The measures placed the Basotho under the jurisdiction of the Native Commissioner, then Mr. K.D. Morgan, as far as their stock, land, grazing rights and felling of trees were concerned. Thus, it is easy to understand that such a change would cause a natural dissatisfaction in the minds of the Basotho, especially those who were unable to understand the logical arguments from the point of view of the Europeans, which formed the basis for the introduction of these new measures.

CHAPTER 5

THE CAUSES OF THE BATTLE AS TOLD BY THE INFORMANTS

5.1 Introduction

In view of the fact that the Witsieshoek Native Reserve was one of the Black areas that fell under the provisions of the Native Trust Land Act (no.18 of 1936), the Department of Native Affairs (hereafter the Department) after 1936 set out to implement betterment measures in the Reserves. The plan involved fencing off the grazing camps, provision of bulls to improve quality stock and the culling of ailing livestock to reduce soil erosion. The Basotho did not have a say in the Trust plans and their implementation. This exclusion of the Basotho proved disastrous. In this chapter the causes of the Namoha Battle are discussed. Emphasis is laid on the unequal distribution of the land, the culling process and provision of bulls, the role played by Mopelinyane and the impact the appointment of the Commission of Enquiry had on the prevailing situation in Witsieshoek. The discussion of the causes is based on the recollection of the informants, supplemented and complemented by documentary sources.

5.2 Introduction of betterment measures

Prior to the Trust being put into operation, according to the recollections of the informants, the Basotho had been living under their tribal customs. There was very little interference from the government. Matters of stock control, grazing, control of the land and residential allotments fell entirely within the jurisdiction of the Chief and his councillors.¹ With the advent of the Trust, a new and drastic change was brought about. The measures inaugurated by the Trust were seen by the Basotho as amounting to the curbing of their freedom with respect to their cattle and other stock.²

¹ NAB, Vol. 1. File 346/08: Regarding the powers of Chief, Witsieshoek, 1908.

² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recoding of interview with Mr. Leuta

According to the informants, these measures placed the Basotho under the direct jurisdiction of the Native Commissioner in terms of their stock, land, grazing rights and the felling of the trees planted by them or their ancestors. It is not surprising that the Basotho were not going to accept these changes without a fight. Several appeals and representations were made to the government to immediately suspend its activities in the Reserve, but all proved futile. The implementation of the Trust and the subsequent stance adopted by the government increased the intensity of the unrest.³

The first step the government took was the demarcation of areas into camps. In the camped areas only certain types of livestock could graze in some of the camps.⁴ These were the newly acquired Afrikaner and Swiss bulls (the issue is discussed further in this chapter). The Basotho cows were not allowed to graze in those camps unless they were 'given' to the bulls for mating. People who resided in camped areas were ordered to move to other areas. This decision was not welcomed by some people and, as such, they opposed the measure. Their grievance was not for Betterment scheme but for the allocation of more land. However, their demand was not met by the government. This left a bitter taste in the mouths of some of the people, which would have dramatic repercussions later.⁵ The Basotho also complained about the Trust bulls and alleged that these bulls were given better camps to graze in, while those of the Basotho were

Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Unisa, Acc 219, Witsieshoek Distrikrekord boek.

⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

given inferior ones.⁶ Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, complained that:

“If one’s cow crossed in one of those camps, you were fined. We started objecting to these camps. As a protest we cut the fences. The Paramount Chief was furious about this incident that he instructed every man in Witsieshoek to repair the damaged fences and ordered that those who failed to heed his call would face severe punishment. Indeed, those who did not show up were fined cows and others were chased out of Witsieshoek and forced into exile.”⁷

The above incident was the beginning of strained relations between the Basotho on the one hand and, their Paramount Chief and the government on the other. The other source of trouble was the preferential treatment that was given to the white people in the Witsieshoek area. The white traders and the Dutch Reformed Church received larger farms despite the fact that they were in the minority.⁸ Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village claimed:

“We, the Basotho, owners of the land received small plots. This was not fair. We were impoverished and had no arable land. The few miserable cattle we posses were all that we had. We wanted the government to treat us equally and provide us with more land rather than reduce our livestock and make us share infertile land.”⁹

⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recoding of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002.

⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Tshepo Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 10/04/2002.

⁸ Lodge, T., Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945, p. 262; The Star, 18 November 1950; Personal collection, tape-recoding of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002.

⁹ Personal collection, tape-recoding of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002.

Plots allocated to the Basotho were too small, besides being infertile.¹⁰ The Basotho complained to the government about the size of the plots allocated to them. Their complaint was based on the fact that the land allocated to the white traders and the Dutch Reformed Church was larger than theirs. They were of the view that as Witsieshoek was their area, they should own more land than the white people did.¹¹ While the Trust found it difficult to allot larger plots to the Basotho, it could give white traders in the Reserve larger farms for their livestock and residence. The Dutch Reformed Church, which was the only church allowed to establish missions in the Witsieshoek Reserve, was given three farms to operate from.¹² The fact that the land belonging to the church was not subjected to the Trust regulations angered the Basotho who were still not happy about the size of the land that was given to the church.¹³

5.3 The cattle culling process

The government instead of providing more land to the Basotho, to accommodate the increasing population as well as land for grazing, decreed that livestock should be reduced because the cattle were far too many for the area. As a result, officials were sent out to give effect to the provisions regarding the control of the livestock in 1939. Their assessment was promulgated in 1940 and the carrying capacity of the Reserve was limited to 12 500 stock units.¹⁴ After this assessment, the Native Commissioner, Mr.

¹⁰ Lodge, p. 262; *The Star*, 18 November 1950; *Personal collection*, tape-recoding of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002.

¹¹ *Personal collection*, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Dibe Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; *Personal collection*, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Tshepo Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 10/04/2002.

¹² NTS, Vol. 8150, File 15/341, Memorandum drawn by the Witsieshoek Vigilance Association, 26 August 1943; Lodge, p. 263; *Personal collection*, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Dibe Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

¹³ *Personal collection*, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; *Personal collection*, tape-recoding of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002.

¹⁴ NTS, Vol. 7335, File 127/327, Government Notice No. 178 of 1940.

K.D. Morgan, had to initiate the counting and culling of the stock. All the stock owners had to produce all stock belonging to them at times and places fixed by the Native Commissioner. The owner who failed to comply with the requirements of such notice was guilty of an offence.¹⁵

In 1939 a general community meeting was convened by the Paramount Chief whereby the issue of stock improvement was discussed. At this meeting the people consented to the process of the improvement of the stock.¹⁶ Holomo Khoarai, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, said:

“We consented to the culling because we had in mind the improvement of the stock and not its reduction. The way the Native Commissioner put the issue of the improvement of the stock to us, at the meeting, and the process that was to be followed convinced us that our number of livestock was going to increase.”¹⁷

The Native Commissioner, Mr. Morgan, was quoted as having said at that meeting: “The Proclamation is in fact intended for the protection of your stock from deterioration and of your commonage from overstocking.”¹⁸ The culling officers were moving around the culling camps that were situated at different villages. At each camp, on the day of the culling, all the livestock’s owners in that area were to bring their livestock to the

¹⁵ NTS, Vol. 7335, File 127/137, Proclamation No. 2721 of 17 December 1948.

¹⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recoding of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

¹⁷ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Holomo Khoarai, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 04/04/2002.

¹⁸ U.G. 6/422, 26/1951. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

camp. The instrument that was used *ho tjhesa dikgomo*¹⁹ was called *tshepe*²⁰ by the Basotho. A different marker was used for goats and sheep. After the marking of the animals, the owners were given a card that indicated the number of cows, goats, sheep and horses each should have. They had to keep this card and produce it whenever it was needed.²¹

As for the marked or branded animals, the Basotho were ordered to sell or slaughter them. If they failed to do so, the government officials would summarily remove or impound their animals.²² On the issue of disposing off culled animals, Mmabatho Kwahela, a retired school teacher from Phuthaditjhaba, described:

“It was worse, if one opted to sell one’s animals. One could not put the price yourselves on your cows, but white farmers who were called to check for themselves were the ones who would put a price on each of these unfit animals they wanted to buy.”²³

The marked animals were sold at an auction. This was what troubled the Basotho because they could not set prices for their cattle.²⁴ Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, in voicing their frustrations with regard to the culling and

¹⁹ “Burning the cattle,” which means branding or marking the cattle.

²⁰ “Tshepe” is a Sesotho word for iron. This was a marker used by the officials to brand the cattle.

²¹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Ephraim Kometsi Bohata, a retired school teacher from Phuthaditjhaba, 25/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

²² Ibid.

²³ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mabatho Kwahela, a retired school teacher from Phuthaditjhaba, 27/03/2002.

²⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

disposing off of the culled stock said:

“What worried us most was why the white people bought those cows if they were not good enough. And why we were forced to either slaughter or sell them if they were going to die any way. What was more funny was the that we were not allowed to buy cattle from the white farmers or any person outside Qwa-Qwa, but we had to sell ours to them. We could not understand that and nobody could give a satisfactory answer to our questions.”²⁵

The intention of the government was to reduce the number of cattle in Witsieshoek as part of its efforts to improve soil conservation. People in other areas were not affected by the conditions that were prevailing in Witsieshoek. What Dibe Mohale was referring to here was an auction where all the culled stock could be sold if the owner had not decided to slaughter them. As a result, the white farmers, who were not affected by the Trust and had plenty of land to keep many cattle, were allowed to buy the Basotho's cattle at an auction.²⁶ However, as it became obvious later, the Trust regulations as well as its aftermath were not well communicated to the Basotho. As a result, the Basotho could not grasp why they had to sell their livestock at the auction even when they did not want to.

Furthermore, what complicated matters further was the allegation that some of the Basotho who worked for white farmers were compensated with cows. But now they had to discard some of these cows because of the Trust. To them this was not fair and felt hard done by the Trust. The Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli, could not provide his people with a satisfactory explanation as he was expected to convince his people to accept the Trust regulations. To his people he seemed to be merely taking orders from

²⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

²⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

the government, which were aimed at undermining their way of life.²⁷ Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho of Mabilela village, described the mood among the people, as follows:

“We could not understand this Trust, as Chief Charles Mopeli, our Paramount Chief, did not understand it either. So how could we obey the law that we did not understand and did not come from our king. We felt that our monarchy had been undermined and, as a nation, we were obliged to do something to protect the institution and ourselves.”²⁸

During the first cull in 1941 the Basotho allegedly consented with the understanding that this was a singular event and would not affect their livestock negatively. The understanding was that only the weak and sick animals were to be culled. The only person who refused to bring her livestock to the culling camp was the Queen regent of the Batlokwa, Mamotunisi Eva Mota. She was subsequently prosecuted and fined.²⁹ Her decision not to respect the order was indicative of the fact that the culling process was flawed. Regent Eva Mota’s action and subsequent punishment, instead of making people adhere to the law prompted them to defy it.

When the second cull was ordered, the Basotho began to doubt the intention of the government. Some started pondering why the Batlokoa regent, Eva Mota, refused to

²⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

²⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

²⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001.

let her cattle be culled in 1939 and began to follow her example.³⁰ Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, recounted the situation as follows:

“We began showing signs of dissatisfaction but the authorities never bothered to address our concerns. Even our request for Commission of Enquiry was rejected. We wanted the Commission of Enquiry because we believed that the officials were not representing the government well and were also not reporting correctly of the happenings in the Reserve.”³¹

During the 1946 cull, Kamohelo Howell Mopeli (hereafter Mopelinyane) and three other men, namely, Libe Mopeli, Michael Molingana, and Khoelinyane Masoeu, deliberately ignored the order and vehemently refused to produce their cattle for culling.³² “They fought for their own livestock,”³³ remarked Chief Setsoto Mopeli. Just as regent Eva Mota, Mopelinyane and these other men were arrested, charged with contravention of Proclamation 31 of 1939 and convicted for refusing to produce their livestock for culling.³⁴ However, they won the case after appealing.³⁵ The final outcome of the case set the precedence for people to disobey culling orders. The Basotho began questioning the validity of the culling law after this case. Reverend Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, said:

“We began asking one another: if this was a real law how come Mopelinyane and others had won the case against them? We enquired from Mopelinyane how he and the others managed to win the case and kept their livestock as we were forced to sell or slaughter

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

³² U.G. 6/422, 26/1951. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in Witsieshoek Native Reserve; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

³³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

³⁴ All South Africa Law Reports, Vol. 1, 6 May 1947, Mopeli and Others v. Rex.

³⁵ LW1, 1/1/1/1, Magistrate Criminal Cases: Case number 171 of 1946, In the matter between Paulus Mopeli and three others versus Rex. Judgement on Appeal.

our branded cattle.”³⁶

People approached Mopelinyane because he was the son of the sub-chief and thus regarded him as their chief. They in fact, trusted him. His strained relations with the authorities encouraged people to approach him because they believed that he would support them. He was also willing to help members of the community, as he viewed them as his father’s nation.³⁷ Reverend Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion from Mabilela village, recalled Mopelinyane as having said to them concerning the culling law: “ha se molao ntho ena, ke bolotsana feela.”³⁸

The stance taken by those four men and their subsequent victory encouraged more Basotho to defy the culling orders. This was the start of a serious confrontation between them and the government. Apparently the Basotho did not really understand the Trust and demanded full explanation, which they alleged was not forth-coming. The only response that they received was that Trust was the law and they had to obey it.³⁹ The Commission of Enquiry that was appointed later in October 1950 reported that it was this kind of response that fuelled resistance to the Trust.⁴⁰

³⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

³⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

³⁸ “It is not the law that thing, it is just a trickery.” Freely Translated.

³⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

⁴⁰ U.G. 6/422, 26/1951. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in Witsieshoek Native Reserve; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

The intransigency of the government in not taking the Basotho's concerns seriously provided dissidents with an opportunity to exploit the situation to their advantage. The Basotho were attracted into taking the law into their own hands.⁴¹ They wanted to force the government to accede to their demands, and were ready to defy the authorities.⁴² Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, described the mood of the Basotho as follows:

"Seeing that the officials were conquering our cattle, we decided to act. At one of the culling camps, in Makeneng village in February 1950, some Basotho who were vocal in opposing the culling and went to the culling station. Their mission was to rescue Chief Charles Mopeli's cattle. On arrival they caused havoc and chased out Charles Mopeli's cows from the camp. The government officials were infuriated by our stance and by this time they were branding cattle at random and no longer choosing the weak ones as was the case at the beginning. To us this was a clear sign of a declaration of war and we had to protect our livestock from these deceitful officials."⁴³

This attempt to cull cattle was a total failure and had to be abandoned as a result of both passive and active resistance. Apart from the group that openly defied the order, very few people submitted their animals to be culled. Ten people who were ring leaders were identified as having refused to bring their cattle to be culled. Thus they were prosecuted and convicted (see addendum F).⁴⁴ But once again, they appealed and the conviction was set aside. A further thirty-two people were summoned on the charge that they obstructed the officials in the performance of their duties. However, these charges were subsequently withdrawn because of a measure of doubt regarding the meaning of the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

⁴³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

⁴⁴ NTS, 6814, File 506/327. First information on crime. Names of the Accused.

Trust regulation under which they were charged for refusing to produce their stock for culling.⁴⁵ Once again, the failure to deal decisively with the dissidents fuelled the intensity of the resistance to the culling. This failure also rendered the Proclamation useless as the Department could not enforce it. The Department also did nothing to rectify the situation or to quickly address the concerns of the Basotho.⁴⁶ Mamokhele Mahanke, an ordinary Mosotho of Mahankeng village, summarised the Basotho feelings towards the culling process as follows:

“We presumed, as a nation, that the whole culling process was just a ploy by the government to weaken us as our cattle were being conquered and we were not prepared to let this happen. If we were going to benefit from this cattle culling, as it was claimed, why was it forced on us? Even when we showed that we needed more clarity and a full explanation, our plea was ignored. In actual fact, we were only informed about stock improvement not reduction. So what was happening did not make any sense to us. The general impression we had was that only the inferior stock would be culled and that would be once. But now good quality stock was also being subjected to culling. Thus we decided to intensify our resistance to the culling.”⁴⁷

Taking the above concern into consideration, it becomes obvious that serious trouble was brewing between the Basotho and the authorities. The opposition to the culling continued on an increasingly impressive scale. On 13 February 1950, one Nehemiah J.R. Motleleng handed to the Assistance Native Commissioner, Mr. H.P. Smit, at the Courthouse, in Witsieshoek, a letter signed by himself in his capacity as Tribal Secretary. This letter stated that the tribe refused to allow the branding of stock, that the police (camp rangers) should be kept away from their stock otherwise confrontation would ensue, and that the Assistance Native Commissioner, Mr. H.P. Smit, was being

⁴⁵ U.G. 6/422, 26/1951. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

⁴⁶ Lodge, p. 269; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002.

⁴⁷ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mamokhele Mahanke, an ordinary Mosotho from Mahankeng village, 27/03/02.

warned for the last time.⁴⁸ Motleleng was at the head of approximately 300 horsemen who were armed with sticks and knobkerries. According to reports received by the Commission of Enquiry, "they were in a dangerous mood and were looking for trouble."⁴⁹

This letter, received from Motleleng and his group, was also forwarded to the Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli. Chief Charles Mopeli in turn requested the Assistance Native Commissioner to immediately appeal to Chief Native Commissioner, Mr. H.B. Myburg, to come and address the Basotho. The Chief stated in a letter that the situation was very serious and that rumours were going around that the Basotho were determined to cause trouble the following day of the culling. He suggested that the Commissioner should immediately get in touch with the Chief Native Commissioner and ask him to come and address the Basotho.⁵⁰

The Assistant Native Commissioner forwarded the letter to the Chief Native Commissioner with the report in which he emphasised that the situation in the Reserve was serious and his advice was sought.⁵¹ On 20 February 1950 a meeting was convened by the Magistrate of Harrismith with a view to restore order. Very few people attended this meeting but a large gathering of the Basotho assembled at the Show Grounds at the same time. Chief Charles Mopeli, who attended the official meeting, voiced his disappointment at the poor attendance and exhorted those who were present to maintain

⁴⁸ NTS, Vol. 7459, File 506/327. Nehemiah Motleleng, letter to the Assistance Native Commissioner. 16/02/1950; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

⁴⁹ Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

⁵⁰ NTS, Vol. 7459, File 506/327. Witsieshoek Unrest Report, 17/02/1950.

⁵¹ Ibid.

law and order.⁵² The low attendance at the official meeting indicated that the majority of the Basotho were opposed to the culling and were not easily going to be convinced to think otherwise.

The Department's reaction to the situation in Witsieshoek did not help to calm down the violence that was brewing. On 8 March 1950 a meeting was held in Bethlehem and was attended by the Deputy Commissioner of Police in Bloemfontein, the District Commandant of Police, the Chief Native Commissioner, the Assistant Native Commissioner of Witsieshoek, the Magistrate of Harrismith and the officer in charge of the police post in Witsieshoek.⁵³ The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the situation in the Reserve. The result was that certain recommendations were made with a view to further cull the stock in the Reserve. Mopelinyane was also singled out as a trouble maker and it was suggested that he should be removed from the Reserve.⁵⁴ In the light of the situation that was prevailing in the Reserve, the outcome of the meeting was an unfortunate one. With the tension rising high, another cull would be catastrophic. A detailed and frank investigation by independent investigators into whether culling was justified or not at that stage was necessary to calm and satisfy the community. That would have prevented the situation from developing in the direction and assuming the proportions which it subsequently did.

On 13 February 1950 approximately three hundred armed Basotho arrived at the office of the Assistant Native Commissioner again and handed him a letter. It was stated, in the letter, that they were returning their stock cards and certificates of land allotments to show their rejection of the Trust regulations. The stock cards were used by the government officials to control the livestock each person possessed. Whenever they

⁵² Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ NTS, Vol. 7459, File 506/327, A letter from Charles Mopeli to Native Commissioner, Review my position, 18/03/1950.

were required to produce their stock for culling, the Basotho had to produce these cards wherein the new number of head of cattle can be entered. Should a stock owner buy or be given a cow, he or she was required to take the card to the government officials so that it can be added if his or her head of cattle has not exceeded the required number.⁵⁵ Bishop Taba Mofutsanyana, a Bishop from Bluegum Bosh, remembered how he argued with the officials when they had to add one more cow that was missing at the time of the issuing of the card:

“I had an unpleasant experience with the stock cards. In one of the days of the culling one of my cattle was missing, thus it was not included in the card. So when I found it I went to the offices to inform the officials so that it could be included on my card. However, the government officials refused and ordered me to sell it or slaughter, if I did not do as ordered, I better go and look for place on the farms. I was hurt by this treatment and refused to do either of the suggestions. I left for home, on arrival I took out a razor and began scratching off the numbers printed on the card and replaced them with my own numbers. On the day when our cards were to be inspected I went there myself. I clashed with the government official and I did not even give the interpreter a chance to interpret for me, as I could make sense of what was happening. The official helped me and at the end he said to me ‘You must be careful, or your education will kill you’. I responded by saying that he was lying because my education has helped me not to go to prison or to go to the farms and has given me life. Before this incident I was one of the loyalists, but after this confrontation I changed and openly supported the Lingangele.”⁵⁶

On 14 March 1950, the Basotho delivered a letter to the Assistant Native Commissioner in which the Basotho demanded the suspension of the culling process. They stated that their demands had not been met as the Trust continues. The people were this time led

⁵⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Bishop Taba Mofutsanyana, a minister of religion at Bluegum Bosch, 03/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002.

⁵⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Bishop Taba Mofutsanyana, a minister of religion at Bluegum Bosch, 03/09/2001.

by a certain Letsie Mopeli, also calling himself a Tribal Secretary, who handed to the Native Commissioner a letter signed by himself.⁵⁷ The group insisted that the Native Commissioner read the contents aloud. The Commissioner refused, whereupon one of them read it. The contents of the letter were:

“We, the Tribe of Witsieshoek whom you see here before you, who want no trouble, hand back to you these your certificates as it is impossible for us to cooperate without regarding them. It will be a good thing for us if you will take back everything that belongs to you so that the noise will stop. You take away your bulls as well as your fences and collect all that belongs to the Trust. We give you fourteen days to collect everything that belongs to the Trust because if we have to help you to collect the same, we shall do so very carelessly.”⁵⁸

These people were as good as their word. Approximately one thousand stock cards and seven hundred land certificates were handed to the Native Commissioner. Thereafter, in April, a group of the Basotho who were engaged in making a road in the Reserve were allegedly warned to cease work with the threat of force if they refused.⁵⁹ Also government officials were allegedly threatened and driven out of certain areas, plantations and fences were destroyed and several veld fires started.⁶⁰

On 2 May 1950 the Chief Native Commissioner convened a meeting and the position of the government was explained to the Basotho. They were allegedly informed that the reduction of the stock was essential, but it would be applied in a sympathetic manner. The Chief Native Commissioner informed them that the carrying capacity would be reassessed. They were also warned against violence.⁶¹ However, those present at the meeting reiterated that they were against the reduction of the stock in any form and

⁵⁷ Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

⁵⁸ NTS, Vol. 7459, File No. 506/327, Culling Ultimatum to Native Commissioner, 16/03/1950.

⁵⁹ Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

⁶⁰ Report on burning of plantations, BOV 1//217 (61) N8/17/2, File No. (55)2/3/31/2, Free State Archives Repository, Bloemfontein.

⁶¹ Minutes of the meeting held at Namahadi on 2 May 1950.

wanted an end to it.⁶²

During July and August 1950, further disturbances occurred. The acting Native Commissioner and the Surveyor were allegedly threatened when they went out to survey allotments and were driven out of the area. The Hlatseng plantation was burnt down and the fences of erosion camps were cut on a large scale. Fires were also started on a large scale.⁶³ Due to these latest Basotho actions, more police reinforcements were brought in. However, very little was done to address the root of the dissatisfaction and the unrest continued.

In the process of all the protests, some of the Basotho were arrested, fined, and released. By this time most of the people believed that Chief Charles Mopeli had abandoned them and their hope was with Mopelinyane.⁶⁴ Amelia Mlangeni, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana, recalled:

“We turned to Mopelinyane, who at this time, was labelled an outcast and instigator by the authorities because of his stance against injustices and the cattle culling. We, nonetheless, bonded with him as we had no alternative as the Paramount Chief seemed to agree with the culling, because he did not want us to react in the same way the Government was treating us.”⁶⁵

⁶² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Amelia Mlangeni, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 10/04/02; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

⁶³ Report on burning of plantations, BOV 1/217 (61) N8/17/2, File No. (55) 2/3/31/2.

⁶⁴ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Amelia Mlangeni, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 10/04/02; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002.

⁶⁵ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Amelia Mlangeni, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 10/04/02.

The reduction of the livestock, according to eyewitnesses, was the major cause of the Namoha Battle. Although the culling process was explained to the Basotho they had problems with its implementation. Furthermore, it affected the Basotho in a way that they could not accept; that is, rendering the kingship ineffective and reducing the number of the heads of cattle. The Basotho loved and cherished their cattle. In fact, they depended on their cattle and would protect them with their lives if they had to. The importance of cattle to them is expressed in this proverb: "Sethelo sa tlala ke kgomo."⁶⁶

Despite the strong opposition to the process, the government pressed forward with its rehabilitation measures. It believed that that was the only option to help prevent the deteriorating economic and social conditions in Witsieshoek. What aggravated matters further was that the stock which was owned by white traders was not subjected to the culling. They were allowed to keep large numbers of stock as a 'Permission to Occupy' was issued to them that specified the number of the stock they were allowed to keep in the Reserve.⁶⁷ Thus they were not affected by the Trust and were justifiably allowed to keep the number of the stock they had. However, the Basotho who did not understand the conditions under which the white farmers settled in the area and why they were exempted from the Trust, felt justified in rejecting the culling. The exemption of white traders' stock from the culling fuelled further the suspicion that the government wanted to impoverish the Basotho.⁶⁸ Josias Nchabeng, a retired teacher from Ha-Nchabeng village, explained:

"We totally rejected the Trust and the fact that white traders were exempted from it. We could not understand why white

⁶⁶ "The container of hunger is the cow; or security against hunger is a head of a cow." Freely Translated.

⁶⁷ NTS, Vol. 7459 File No. 506/327, Report from Chief Native Commissioner to The Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, of the meeting held on 8 March 1950, Stock Limitation: Witsieshoek, 15 March 1950.

⁶⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

people were allowed to keep their stock. That was unfair. We pleaded with the government to immediately suspend its activities and appoint a Commission of Enquiry because the Trust was applied to the Basotho only. We believed that something was wrong about the Trust. However, our request for the suspension of the Trust was ignored.”⁶⁹

Clashes such as these above and the continued refusal of the government to halt its process of cattle culling and investigate the problem increased the intensity of the unrest.⁷⁰ This provided the provocateurs with an opportunity to exploit the situation. Obviously, in the process, this insensitive move by the government widened the schism further and resulted in the loss of lives.

5.4 The role played by Mopelinyane

Many of the people who were opposed to the culling were always seen at Namoha. They gathered there to listen to Mopelinyane, whom they regarded as their Chief. Mopelinyane would always encourage them to stand firm and resist what he described as unjust law.⁷¹ He was described by Lithako Sempe, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, as follows:

“He was a very intelligent and caring man who would do everything for his father’s people. He was vehemently opposed to stock limitation, even though Paramount Chief seemed to have accepted it. He questioned the validity of the law that ordered the culling and wanted to know where did the law come from, as it does not appear in the agreement between Paulus Howell

⁶⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Josias Nchabeng, a retired teacher, from Ha- Nchabeng village, 18/04/02.

⁷⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

⁷¹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Amelia Mlangeni, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 10/04/02; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

Mopeli and President Brand.”⁷²

In discussion with his followers, Mopelinyane was quoted as always saying that when he requested that the person who ordered the culling must come forward and explain where this law came from as it was not part of the *Traktaat*⁷³ (see addendum C), no one came forward.⁷⁴ According to this agreement between President Brand and Chief Paulus Mopeli, if Mopeli could respect the payment of tax, prevent theft and spilling of blood for the next one hundred years, then this area would belong to him, his children and his offspring forever. During Chief Paulus Mopeli’s reign, these peace initiatives were enforced.⁷⁵ This was a general understanding and interpretation of the *Traktaat* by many of the Basotho. To them Witsieshoek belonged to the Basotho and should be ruled according to their tradition.

However, the legal validity of the *Traktaat* had ended in 1907, according to the Orange Free State Patent of 1907, which, *inter alia*, provided: “no lands set aside for occupation by the Natives shall be diverted from the purpose for which they were set apart, otherwise than by the Law passed by the Legislature. Furthermore, in terms of Section 147 of the South Africa Act of 1910 the State was the owner of the land and holds it in trust for the Natives.”⁷⁶ The State, therefore, had the absolute right to effect any change in respect of the land and its administration. Many of the Basotho who did

⁷² Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Lithako Sempe, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, 27/03/02.

⁷³ An agreement entered into between Chief Paulus Mopeli, on behalf of his people and President Brand, representing the Orange Free State government. The Agreement allowed the Basotho to settle in Witsieshoek under certain conditions.

⁷⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabolela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Lithako Sempe, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, 27/03/02.

⁷⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/01; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabolela village, 20/09/2001.

⁷⁶ Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

not understand the legal status of the Reserve and the fact that the *Traktaat* was no longer valid believed that Trust regulations were forced upon them deliberately to provoke them so that they would retaliate and lose the land.⁷⁷ Lithako Sempe, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, explained:

“I suspect, but this was never confirmed as correct, that the union government was aware of the agreement between President Brand and Paulus Mopeli. So they wanted to cause chaos so that we would retaliate and consequently contravene this agreement which would mean we now forfeit this area. What made us come to such thought was the government’s sudden proposal to cull the livestock without involving us, people who would be directly affected by that process. Unfortunately, through our actions we played in government’s hands and the blood was shed in 1950.”⁷⁸

The Basotho did not understand the attitude and the intentions of the government with the Trust. They reached their own conclusions as to why the Trust was introduced. The government also did not explain its intention well and undermined the concerns raised by the Basotho. The misunderstanding that existed did not only led to mutual mistrust between the Basotho and the authorities, but also division between the Chief and his people. People who had a long-standing conflict with the authorities exploited the situation. One such person was Mopelinyane, whose “victory boosted the Basotho and confirmed their suspicion about the intentions and legitimacy of the Trust.”⁷⁹

Mopelinyane was available when people called on him and was ready to assist, as he

⁷⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

⁷⁸ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Lithako Sempe, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, 27/03/02.

⁷⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/03/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Lithako Sempe, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, 27/03/02.

wanted to prove that he was a chief. He bravely stood with those opposed to the culling and encouraged them not to give in to the culling as that would impoverish them. He was, as a result, harassed and accused of inciting and misleading the nation and that he wanted to unseat Morena Charles as Paramount Chief.⁸⁰ In response to his accusers, recalled Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion from Maboela village, Mopelinyane said:

“What should I have done when my father’s people come crying to me about their cattle that are being conquered, I did not go to them they came to me? I will never forsake my grandfather’s nation, and I have a duty to listen to them and help them in any way that I can.”⁸¹

Mopelinyane’s ideas concurred with the feelings of the Basotho. Moreover, he seemed to understand them and listened to them when they complained to him about the treatment they were receiving from the government. To the most disgruntled Basotho, he was their only and last hope.⁸² Mopelinyane was quoted as having said, in a soft but stern voice, at one of the gatherings:

“Banna taba ena eo le e buang ho nna kajeno le re ke lethuse e thata. Hobane le tla nkwenhela ka le leng la matsatsi ha ho ba hobe. Le ha ho le jwalo ke tla ema le lona, mme ke tla siya lelapa laka ke shwelle lona. Etsang hore le setle ka bongata mona haka.”⁸³

⁸⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Lithako Sempe, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, 27/03/02.

⁸¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001.

⁸² Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Amelia Mlangeni, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 10/04/02; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001.

⁸³ “Gentlemen, this matter you put before me today that I should help you is difficult. Because you would disown me one day when things get worse. Nevertheless, I would stand with you and sacrifice my family, but do me a favor, do not come in large numbers here at my house.” Freely Translated.

More and more people joined the *Lingangele* (the group that led the resistance against cattle culling) in opposition to the imposed and forced culling of the cattle. They stood firm that their cattle would not be culled. This group was seen as a group of trouble-makers that was misled by Mopelinyane who was using them to fight his battle for paramount chieftainship. Its stance with regard to culling of cattle was seen as opposition to the decision the Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli, had already taken.⁸⁴

Mopelinyane, because of his association with the *Lingangele* and his stance with regard to the culling of the cattle, was regarded by the authorities as a dangerous person who should be removed from the Reserve. Mopelinyane had been at loggerheads with the authorities over a number of issues, and the culling was the latest. In all this he had distinguished himself to be a shrewd leader.⁸⁵ Notwithstanding the authorities' attitude towards Mopelinyane, his selfless attitude appealed to the masses. He gradually came to be regarded as a hero who had successfully flouted the authorities. Because of Mopelinyane's aggressive lobbying and relentless activism against the authorities he was idolised. He was seen as a person who had proved that the officials of the government were powerless to enforce orders they had issued. The examples cited are his successful appeal against his conviction in 1947 and the failure of the state to arrest him for leading the *Lingangele*. Consequently, the number of his adherents grew overnight and his followers moved through the Reserve with pride. Mopelinyane's stance against the cattle culling earned him the nickname *Morena wa diphoofolo*.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 18/04/02.

⁸⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/01; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mamokhele Mahanke, an ordinary Mosotho from Mahankeng village, 27/03/02.

⁸⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mamokhele Mahanke, an ordinary Mosotho from Mahankeng

The other clash with the authorities happened when Mopelinyane and his father, the sub-chief Moreneng Howell Mopeli, refused to be removed from Boiketlo, their village, in 1940. They were ordered to move because their area was marked as one of the new created grazing camps. Mopelinyane wrote several letters to the Secretary of Native Affairs, in all, appealing against the order for them to be removed. In one of the letters he wrote:

“I am very disappointed to think that after all I must leave my present residence which as I have pointed out before is registered to the best of my knowledge. As my residences have shifted so many times I do not think I’ll be safe any where until a government representative is sent from Pretoria to give me a safe and registered dwelling plot. On a former occasion I was arrested for refusing to leave one dwelling place and served three months. On my release then the Assistant Native Commissioner, Chief Charles Mopeli and his headmen showed me my present site. That is why I want a definite assurance from a head office representative.”⁸⁷

The concern of Mopelinyane and his father is understandable. They were not simply refusing to take orders, but wanted a guarantee that they would not be moved once again. According to informants, this was the third time they were to move from their dwellings.⁸⁸ Despite their appeals on 15 June 1943, a notice to move within six months was served on Moreneng Howell Mopeli and his followers in terms of section 7 of proclamation 186 of 1941 to move to residential areas outside the camp, as approved

village, 27/03/02. “King of the Animals.” Freely Translated.

⁸⁷ NTS, Vol. 8150, File No. 15/341 Removal and Imprisonment of Mopelinyana: A complaint letter from Paulus H. Mopeli to Secretary for Native Affairs, 02/03/1941. Other letters containing similar concerns are dated 24/10/1942; 28/11/1943.

⁸⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

by the Native Chief Commissioner.⁸⁹ Chief Charles Mopeli duly pointed out an area where Moreneng Howell Mopeli and his people could live. All the people were removed except Moreneng Howell Mopeli.⁹⁰ In December 1943 Moreneng Howell Mopeli wrote a letter again to the Secretary for Native Affairs in which he agreed to be removed but also stated his dissatisfaction:

“We wish to express our willingness to obey the orders issued by the government to the effect that we leave our old habitat that of Boiketlo and that we move to a new site pointed out and given to us by the Assistant Native Commissioner. But at the same time we wish to state that we do this with the deepest feeling of the wrong done to us and that we humbly wish to reserve the right to lay our complaints before a general gathering of the tribe. And we humbly wish to request the government to investigate this matter and to put the things right so as to prevent further disturbances and to remove old grievances. This is humble but very urgent request, at the same time we wish to ask the government to postpone the dates when we must have moved from Boiketlo. It will be impossible for us to have built our homes by the end of November.”⁹¹

On 10 January 1944 Howell was charged for failing to move. He was convicted and fined five pounds or one month in prison, suspended on condition that he should move again within one month. He consented and moved from Boiketlo.⁹² Relations between the family of Moreneng Mopeli and the authorities had not been friendly. It is thus not surprising that when the culling of livestock was proposed, Mopelinyane refused to cooperate. He played a major role in mobilising people against cattle culling and in

⁸⁹ NTS, 7459, File No. 506/327: Order to Remove, 1939.

⁹⁰ NTS, Vol. 8150 File No. 15/341, complaint: Howell Mopeli: a letter from Assistance Native Commissioner to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 08/04/1944.

⁹¹ NTS, Vol. 8150 File No. 15/341: A letter from Howell Mopeli to the Secretary of Native Affairs, Pretoria, 28/11/1943.

⁹² NTS, Vo. 8150 File No. 15/341, complaint: Howell Mopeli: a letter from Assistance Native Commissioner to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 08/04/1944.

encouraging them to stand firm against the Trust.⁹³

5.5 The provision of bulls

One other bone of contention was the bulls that were given to cattle owners by the Union government. The purpose of the introduction of these imported bulls was to change the breed of the Basotho cattle from ordinary into quality ones. Even though their cattle looked good, they had no 'meat' and when they were sold at an auction they could not bring enough money for them because they were weak.⁹⁴ The Basotho cattle were indeed not of particularly good quality because of the deterioration of land conditions in the Witsieshoek area. A government intervention was necessary to save the situation in Witsieshoek Reserve, but not in the manner that it intervened. This was far short of what was needed, provision of more land.

Furthermore, the Basotho cows did not produce enough milk. For a cattle owner to be able to have enough milk for his or her family, he or she had to have more milk cows. That meant having many heads of cattle, which, in turn, became too many for the land to carry. Initially the Basotho were happy with the introduction of bulls because they would have good cows to exchange in time of marriages. When the Paramount Chief brought up the idea of government bringing bulls to them, his nation, they welcomed the idea with open hands.⁹⁵ Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village,

⁹³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recoding of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafako Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 05/04/2002.

⁹⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mamokhele Mahanke, an ordinary Mosotho from Mahankeng village, 27/03/02.

⁹⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief

recalled:

“We embraced this idea because now the quality of our cattle would improve, and we will have more milk and a good meat. When we sell them at the auction, they would bring satisfactory profit more than what our normal cows used to bring.”⁹⁶

However, the Basotho were not aware of the danger this was holding out for them. They were impressed at first that they were going to have quality cattle. But when culling was introduced and some of their cows had complications when giving birth, the Basotho began to complain.⁹⁷ The reason for the birth complications was that the Basotho breed was weak and the bulls were producing bigger calves. As a result, the Basotho interpreted the provision of bulls as another way to reduced their livestock. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho of Makeneng village said:

“It appeared that this was just another government’s ploy to have us sell our bulls. The government knew very well what they did to those bulls given to us. These bulls were very lazy and they were not mating as our bulls. Our ordinary bulls were even a hundred percent better than those bulls. It seemed as if they were injected with a medicine that made them lazy and impotent. This thing brought dissatisfaction among us. Even though we initially welcomed these bulls, we now began to regret, and kept our bulls. Some of the cows which conceived after mating with those bulls, could not all give birth to calves as they died as a result of complications. The calves were too big for our cows.”⁹⁸

Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001.

⁹⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001.

⁹⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001.

⁹⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001.

When the government passed a law that stipulated the reduction of livestock, that law fuelled and confirmed fears that the union government wanted to impoverish the Basotho.⁹⁹ Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, said:

“We never had any suspicion why these bulls were made available to us until the introduction of the limitation of the livestock. It seems that the introduction of these bulls was one way of limiting our livestock. When we raised this issue with our king, we were told this was not the case. But we wanted to know why were we given those lazy bulls and all of a sudden we are told to bring our cattle for culling whereby the culled ones are to be disposed. Despite our concerns and pleas to suspend the culling, the government officials continued with the culling. This intransigency aggravated matters.”¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, the government officials who were instructed to assess the carrying capacity of the Reserve were allegedly not seemingly doing their job properly. They only checked few camps and reported back that the Reserve was overstocked and cattle culling had to take place as soon as possible. However, the Basotho claimed that they were aware of the activities of those officials that they were convinced that they were not doing what was expected of them.¹⁰¹ Mafako Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, explained:

“We knew that they were lying because we saw them they failed to check all the camps. Furthermore, we did not understand why all of a sudden our cattle had to be culled and those that would remain be given to the lazy bulls. Therefore, to us it was clear that the government want us to lose our stock so that we could go and work on the farms

⁹⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002.

¹⁰⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

¹⁰¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafako Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 05/04/2002.

for the white farmers.”¹⁰²

The issue of the so called lazy bulls and the limitation of livestock brought a very serious rift between the Basotho, their Paramount Chief and the government. The Basotho started believing that the government had embarked on a campaign to impoverish them.¹⁰³ Moria Tsebela, a retired school principal from Monontsha village, summarised their suspicion as follows:

“We began to understand the government’s motives about these lazy and impotent bulls when the culling of our cattle began. We also decided not to give our cows to those bulls, because it was of no use for our cattle to be with those quality but lazy bulls. We demanded that they be returned to where they came from. These two issues created a lot of uncertainties among us.”¹⁰⁴

A serious tension was brewing in Witsieshoek. The problem arose when the nation questioned the rationale for the provision of bulls and the culling and yet there was no explanation that the Basotho found clear, logical and satisfactory. Their plea for a Commission of Enquiry was rejected and that confirmed to them that there was an ulterior motive behind the Trust.¹⁰⁵ To most of the Basotho, at the beginning, the issue

¹⁰² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafako Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 05/04/2002.

¹⁰³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recoding of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002.

¹⁰⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Moria Tsebela, a retired school principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001.

¹⁰⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafako Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 05/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recoding of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002.

of the culling looked like it would be a singular process, but when it continued again and again they began to resist. Moria Tsebela, a retired school principal from Monontsha village, described why it was so difficult for the Basotho to accept the culling and stood firm until blood was shed:

“You know what, you can do all things to Mosotho and got away with it, but not on his or her cattle. You touch his or her cattle, I am telling you, you are courting trouble.”¹⁰⁶

The Basotho treasure their cattle and could do everything to protect them. For this reason, it was very difficult for them to accept the reduction of their livestock because they depended on it for livelihood.¹⁰⁷ The bulls that were provided to them to improve the quality of stock had no problems. The complications their cattle had on giving birth were caused by the fact that the bulls were producing big calves, which were not easy for the Basotho cows to deliver. What happened was that the Basotho were not happy about the culling process and thought that the bulls were part of alleged conspiracy to reduce their cattle.

5.6 The appointment of the Commission of Enquiry

As the resistance of the Basotho was escalating, in October 1950, the government finally appointed the Commission of Enquiry to investigate the Basotho grievances and the upheavals in the Reserve.¹⁰⁸ The Commission's terms of reference were as follows:

“To investigate the causes of unrest and to suggest steps to be taken to solve the problem; to ascertain whether or not Witsieshoek Reserve was overstocked and overpopulated, and if so what steps should be taken to

¹⁰⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Moria Tsebela, a retired school principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001.

¹⁰⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/01; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Moria Tsebela, a retired school principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001.

¹⁰⁸ NTS, URU 2797, File 2666, Appointment of the Commission of Enquiry into Disturbances in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve, October 1950.

remedy the situation; and to investigate the difficulties concerning the payment of old age and invalidity pensions to blacks in the Reserve.”¹⁰⁹

The Commission was composed of Mr. A. Eyles, a former magistrate; Mr. J.H.J. van Rensburg of Ficksburg and Dr. G.E.N. Ross of Johannesburg (the son of a missionary who had worked in Witsieshoek for a long time) and Mr. CJ van Heerden, who acted as Secretary.¹¹⁰ Interested persons and organisations were invited to give evidence before the Commission. However, it was too late for the Commission and leaders of the *Lingangele* refused to cooperate because they had lost patience. Furthermore, the fact that the Commission was composed of white people only further fueled suspicion and frustration. Moreover, the Basotho had unresolved differences with some members of the Commission.¹¹¹ Chief Setsoto Mopeli recalled, of their attitude towards the Commission:

“We felt that we should have been consulted with regard to the composition of the Commission. Some members of the Commission did not have good relations with the Basotho. Therefore, we did not trust them. We were now clamoring for the total removal of the Trust from our area. We refused to cooperate as the government had refused to listen to our concerns before and continues to do so by appointing some of the people who were not favorably exposed to us to be members of the Commission.”¹¹²

The Commission, despite the opposition to it by the *Lingangele* sat at Witsieshoek from 1 November 1950 to 5 December 1950, and from 15 January 1951 up to and including 26 January 1951. Sessions were also held in Johannesburg from 8 January 1951 to 10

¹⁰⁹ NTS, URU 2797, File 2666, Appointment of the Members of the Commission on Enquiry into Disturbances in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve, 13 September 1950.

¹¹⁰ Cape Argus, 11 November 1950.

¹¹¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafako Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 05/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Moria Tsebela, a retired school principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001.

¹¹² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

January 1951 to cater for the Basotho migrant workers there.¹¹³ At this time every opportunity was afforded for giving evidence to any person who was willing to do so. However, at its first meeting, only Chief Charles Mopeli and about seventy of his followers attended despite the fact that it was well advertised all over the area in a notice dated 6 October 1950.¹¹⁴ This was a clear indication that the Basotho were not satisfied with the composition of the Commission.

After much persuasion from Mr. Basner, the *Lingangele* agreed to give evidence before the Commission. When it was the turn of the *Lingangele* leadership to give evidence, many people converged at the offices where the Commission was sitting. They demonstrated against the composition of the Commission. At this gathering many of them were armed with knobkerries, sickles, axes and assegais. However, they were not displaying them in public but hiding them under their blankets. They wanted to show their total disapproval of government's insensitiveness when dealing with them.¹¹⁵

Their leader, Mopelinyane, demanded that the Commission sit in the open. When the request was rejected, the *Lingangele* refused to give evidence. The *Lingangele* leaders wanted to testify in public so that everybody could hear their evidence. This request was not accepted as the Commission had already started with its proceedings in its own way. After much deliberations the *Lingangele* leaders decided to testify, but it was already too late for any of the Commission's proceedings to start on that day (15 November 1950) and consequently the hearing was postponed to 27 November 1950.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve.

¹¹⁴ NTS, Vol. 9779, File 961/400, Government Notice No. 2454, 6 October 1950.

¹¹⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Masopha Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho of Kudumane village, 28/03/2002.

¹¹⁶ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mantsane Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 01/04/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Masopha Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho of Kudumane village, 28/03/2002.

The protest staged by the Basotho prompted the meeting between the then Minister of Native Affairs, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, and the Commissioner of Police, Major General Palmer. At this meeting it was agreed that the necessary preparations were to be put in place to quell the volatile situation in Witsieshoek. More police reinforcements were brought in case there was a need for their intervention.¹¹⁷ However, the meeting failed to devise a plan that would defuse the explosive situation that was gaining momentum in Witsieshoek.

The Commission was also frightened by what they saw at the last meeting, recommended to the Minister of Native Affairs that he promulgate a proclamation that would prohibit any meeting of more than five people and the carrying of weapons. The government response was positive and such a proclamation was issued and provisions had to be rigorously enforced. According to the provisions of the proclamation, any person who convened, presided or attended such a meeting, or permitted others to hold it at his kraal without the government's permission, would be liable to a fine not exceeding a hundred pounds, or one year imprisonment.¹¹⁸

Before the date the *Lingangele* were to testify, more and more police reinforcements were brought in from outside. Those who were already in the area were allegedly heavily armed and were about two hundred in number.¹¹⁹ This was an indication that the government was continuing to underestimate the urgency of an amicable settlement of the issues in the Witsieshoek area. Significantly, utterances of some members of the police force were interpreted as a declaration of war to the Basotho.¹²⁰ An informant,

¹¹⁷ The Star, 18 November 1950.

¹¹⁸ Unisa, Acc. 219, Proclamation No. 280 of 1950, 23 November 1950.

¹¹⁹ The Friend, 5 July 1951; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Masopha Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho of Kudumane village, 28/03/2002.

¹²⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mantsane Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 01/04/2002; Personal collection, transcript

Masehle Mahanke, a retired school teacher from Mahankeng village, recalled:

“We were also informed by our leaders, who were arrested earlier, that one of the policemen who arrived here was a Major, who was very arrogant. He had been boasting that he had fought serious battles and won them all, and Qwa-Qwa was nothing. That he would be through with it within one day and went back home. Such statements really unsettled us and we understood war was imminent and we just had to be ready for it.”¹²¹

Major Terblanche was quoted by Paulus Mpheteng, when giving testimony during their trial in 1951, as having threatened him and Letsie Mopeli in August 1950. It was alleged that this happened after the Magistrate had discharged the two, before hearing their case. Mpheteng claimed that the words were uttered in the presence of their advocate, Mr. Basner and Senator Ballinger. The words allegedly uttered by Major Terblanche were as follows:

“You two young men are kicking up trouble, and I want to warn you. You have split the tribe into two sections. Go and tell your people not to kick up a row and think they have defeated the government. The government is very powerful and stronger than you people in Witsieshoek, and cannot be defeated. If you do not take care I will come and sweep the whole Reserve with firearms. I have two hundred men and Sten guns, and if you keep on with your trouble I will use them.”¹²²

The appointment of the Commission of Enquiry, even though it was something that people had been asking for a very long time, contributed immensely to the already eruptive situation in Witsieshoek. The point is that the composition of the Commission was a major concern to the Basotho. Apart from the fact that all its members were

interview with Mr. Masopha Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho of Kudumane village, 28/03/2002.

¹²¹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Masehle Mahanke, a retired school teacher, from Mahankeng village, 27/03/2002.

¹²² The Friend, 5 July 1951.

white, two of its members had had unpleasant connections with the Basotho.¹²³ The Basotho were not in good terms with Dr. Ross, whose father had stayed in Witsieshoek for a very long time and had fallen out of favour with the Basotho because he was openly opposed to the *Lingangele*. Then there was Mr. van Rensburg of Ficksburg who was alleged to be not kind to black people. Therefore, from the onset, the Basotho did not think that they would get justice because they did not trust certain members of the Commission. Thus the Basotho felt justified in objecting to the Commission's form.¹²⁴

5.7 Conclusion

The Basotho were prejudiced against the idea of stock control. Witsieshoek was a mountainous Reserve. In this way stock holding was a vital condition of most people's subsistence. The land was ill suited for cultivation and, in any case, there was too little land of arable quality to produce a significant portion of many people's food requirements. Furthermore, cattle were, for the migrants, the crucial means of retaining a stake in Reserve society. Thus they invested in stock purchases, farming their cattle out with relatives and friends. The implementation of the Trust upset the balance of survival, which for many people was at best delicate. The allocation of arable land was taken out of the hands of the chieftainship and was now decided by the officials on whom the community could exert no pressure whatsoever.

¹²³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Dibe Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mantsane Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 01/04/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Masopha Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho of Kudumane village, 28/03/2002.

¹²⁴ The Friend, 5 July 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Lithako Sempe, an ordinary Mosotho from Botjhabela village, 27/03/02; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recoding of interview with Mr. Leuta Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 27/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafako Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoana village, 05/04/2002.

Apart from the fact that Witsieshoek was mountainous and suited for stock holding, the Basotho held the possession of cattle in high esteem. They were opposed to stock limitation in general and the culling of poor quality cattle because of the sentimental value they attached to cattle. According to the Basotho tradition, a cow, if it is weak, has to be aided as long as it can stand. That the Trust simply overlooked such highly held values of the Basotho proved how far the government was ignorant of the culture of the Basotho. What was needed in Witsieshoek was the provision of more land and an encouragement of people to own more cattle. That would have solved a lot of problems.

The long standing-conflict between Mopelinyane and the authorities also had an impact on the developments in Witsieshoek. Mopelinyane used the Basotho's dissatisfactions to fight what he believed was rightly his, the Paramount Chieftaincy. The removal of Mopelinyane's family from different areas until they finally settled at Namoha added tension to the conflict that existed between his family and Chief Charles Mopeli's family. Mopelinyane wanted to exploit the grievances of the Basotho to prove that he was the real Paramount Chief because he cared for the people. Because Mopelinyane was the son of a sub-chief, many people trusted him and after he won the case against him, when he refused to release his cattle to be culled, he became their hero. Again he was willing, and was available to help people in time of need.

The government's stand against the Basotho and its refusal to address their concerns proved tragic as lives were lost. The main causes of the complaints that led to the Battle were shortage of land, the culling of cattle by government officials and impounding of stock by Rangers. The belated appointment of the Commission of Enquiry did not help to stop the bloodshed. Nevertheless, it helped to calm matters after the Battle and pointed out the weaknesses in the government's handling of the affairs.

From the foregoing, it is possible to conclude that the major cause of the Namoha Battle was the misunderstanding that existed between the government and the Basotho over

the Trust. The different interpretations of the Trust were also a major cause for the misunderstanding. In the midst of this mutual suspicion whatever the government did was viewed with suspicion, irrespective of its merits. Even with the Basotho, because of the unpopularity of their leaders the government suspected that they want to dictate terms to them, and thus were not prepared to accede to the demands by troublemakers.

CHAPTER 6

THE COURSE OF THE BATTLE AS TOLD BY THE INFORMANTS

6.1 Introduction

The tension in Witsieshoek, as previously discussed in chapter five continued to rise even after the appointment of the Commission of Enquiry that was to investigate the unrest and disturbances in Witsieshoek. The Basotho, led by the *Lingangele* (the resistant group) continued in their defiance of the law. In direct contravention of the proclamation prohibiting the holding of meetings of more than five persons, the *Lingangele* called a meeting at Namoha. It was this illegal gathering that led to the fight between the police and the Basotho which resulted in the death of sixteen persons, displacement of many people and strained relations between the Basotho of Witsieshoek and their white neighbours. The course of the Namoha Battle, as told by the informants and complemented by the written sources, is the focus of this chapter. This chapter starts with a brief account of the immediate cause of the Battle and of the initial encounter between the Basotho and the police at Namoha. Furthermore, the open clash that followed is portrayed and the immediate results of the Battle are also related in this chapter.

6.2 The Namoha Pitso

On 27 November 1950, contrary to Proclamation 35 of 1950 which prohibited gatherings of more than five people and the carrying of weapons, the *Lingangele* called a meeting at Namoha village.¹ Early in the morning of 27 November 1950, horsemen in large numbers were seen riding towards Namoha, the village of Mopelinyane. Some people were ferried by buses while others walked to Namoha. Some of those who attended the assembly were veterans of the Second World War, and they were still

¹ Rand Daily Mail, 28 November 1950.

bitter that the government had not kept its promise of increasing their land.² It is, however, important to mention that none of the former soldiers played any leading role in the rebellion against the Trust, though they supported and advised the *Lingangele* leaders.³ The meeting was also attended by women, though it was contrary to the Basotho custom for women to go to *pitso* (a traditional assembly), except on special occasions where they could be called to do so. Some of these women were widows, or wives of men who were out working on the mines or farms, and felt that they had responsibility for the land and cattle.⁴

The meeting coincided with the day, 27 November 1950, that the four *Lingangele* leaders, Mopelinyane, Scotland Koloï, Paulus Mpheteng and Letsie Mopeli, were to give evidence before the Commission of Enquiry. The *Lingangele* leaders viewed the stipulations of the Proclamation as the state's plan to weaken the Basotho. Because of the deterioration of law and order in the Reserve more police were deployed. However, when the deployment was taking place the Basotho, led by the *Lingangele*, began to believe that the police were there to attack them.⁵ This belief was fuelled by the leaders of the *Lingangele*, who espoused the paranoia that the Basotho were about to be

² The Star, 30 November 1950; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

assaulted by the police.

The alleged imminent attack by the police caused much fear in the people that they believed that they would be attacked as more and more policemen were deployed in Witsieshoek. However, the government was within its right to assemble more police as the situation in the Reserve was getting increasingly more volatile and the few police, about seven, who were stationed in the Reserve could not manage it. Order had to be brought back into the Reserve and the law-abiding residents protected by the state. But the alleged manner in which the police approached the situation in the Reserve caused much uneasiness among the Basotho. Informants recalled that police threatened them that if they did not stop their action against government they would be wiped out from the Reserve.⁶ Nonetheless, not all policemen were implicated by the Basotho. In the state of tension that was prevailing the deployment of more police force to quell the situation was not a good idea. Although the action was aimed at suppressing the expression of the resentment and bringing order it did not succeed; it only made the situation worse. Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion in Maboletla village, recounted the situation before the Battle, as follows:

“If there was no war why was there so many police who were so heavily armed? And why some of them were saying they would run us over within a short time? To us the action of the government was a declaration of war. We were very scared. Some of us even stopped our children from going to school. The herd boys also were no longer able to follow their flock freely because of the heavy police presence in the area. In defiance of the Proclamation, we decided not to go to the Commission, but to attend the meeting at Namoha, where we were to discuss issues of safety and the protection of those who were subpoenaed to testify before the Commission. At this *pitso* we took a decision not to allow our leaders to go to the Commission and testify until the police were withdrawn from our area. We took this

⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboletla village, 21/03/2002.

decision because we feared for both their safety and ours.’’⁷

The gathering of all those who were openly opposed to the culling of cattle went ahead as planned at Mopelinyane’s kraal at Namoha. Many people had turned up from different villages in Witsieshoek. They came by buses and some on horseback. According to the informants, the gathering was very peaceful and, although they carried traditional weapons, there were no arms of a type the Basotho did not usually carry at such meetings. It is traditional for the Basotho men to carry sticks or knobkerries to a gathering. When they sing and dance they use sticks to support them. In fact, the Basotho were adamant that whatever arms they carried would not be used at all.⁸ Some women carried sickles, but according to informants, it was harvesting time of straw and reeds, and it was not unusual for them to carry sickles. This *pitso* was an exceptional one, for women were allowed to attend, because what was going to be discussed also affected them.⁹

As many people had gone to the Namoha gathering, at the government offices where the Commission of Enquiry was sitting, very few people were in attendance. The reason for the lack of attendance, according to one informant, Koti Molingana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, was that many people had gone to Namoha. Some people stayed away because they feared that there might be a clash between police and

⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001.

⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002.

⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002.

the *Lingangele*.¹⁰ A number of policemen were monitoring the situation around the place where the Commission of Enquiry was sitting. The police had gone there to protect the commissioners as well as the people who were to give evidence, and to prevent any disruptions of the proceedings of the Commission.¹¹

When the four *Lingangele* leaders that were already sworn in, did not show up at the Commission as scheduled, it was decided to serve them with subpoenas. The subpoenas were given to Major Terblanche's contingent that went to serve them.¹² On their way to Namoha, the police passed by the house of Paulus Mpheteng, the *Lingangele*'s secretary. When they could not find him at home, they proceeded to Namoha. When the police left for Namoha, Advocate Basner had already sent out the message informing the *pitso* to disperse as the police were coming to disperse them forcefully.¹³ However, the police were not going to Namoha to forcefully disperse the crowd, but to deliver the subpoenas and dismiss the crowd, as the gathering was 'illegal'. Koti Molingwana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, who carried the message from Advocate Basner to the gathering, recalled:

"I was riding in front of the police because I had just delivered a letter to Basner, which informed him of what was going on at the meeting and the decision taken. He quickly answered the letter and asked me to rush and give the letter to Nthota Mopeli. He was to read

¹⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingwana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboletla village, 21/03/2002.

¹¹ Chronicle, 26 May 1951.

¹² Unisa, Acc. 219, Onderhoud met Mnr. A.J. de Villiers, Sersant in Polisiepatrolie, Witsieshoek, 27 November 1950.

¹³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingwana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboletla village, 21/03/2002.

the letter and inform us to disperse as police were coming to disperse us. But Nthota read the letter to himself and never informed other members of the contents of the letter. I never understood why he decided to keep quiet about the contents of the letter. I think had the people known before, they might have, but not necessarily so, decided otherwise.”¹⁴

At the gathering the informants recalled that the Basotho were singing hymns in a very excited manner, tribal songs and the poems of praise. The women, as usual, were ululating. The popular hymn was *Ke na le Modisa, Ke tla be ke hlokang*¹⁵ (see addendum G). Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, summarized the reasons why the hymn was popular as follows:

“Whenever us Basotho gathers, we sing and dance. The reason why we were singing that particular hymn was that we were praying and we believed that *Modimo*¹⁶ is our only provider. We also honoured our *Marena*¹⁷ who look after us and we did not need any outsider interfering in our affairs and land. Songs such as this and others inspired us to face any obstacle head on.”¹⁸

The tribal songs that were sung at the gathering were composed during the struggle against cattle culling to inspire people not to give up the struggle. These songs were sung all over the Reserve; at parties, feasts, shebeens, tribal dances and even at

¹⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

¹⁵ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002. “I have a Shepherd, and I shall not want.” Freely Translated.

¹⁶ “God.”

¹⁷ “Chiefs or kings.”

¹⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

funerals.¹⁹ Tribal songs like the following, were also sung at the Namoha meeting:

“Lingangele, tlong le re thuseng,
Mmuso wa Trust o nkile borena
Dikgomo tsa rona di jewa

Ba tjhesitse makgomo a rona
Rona le bana ba rona re shwa ke tlala
Lingangele tlong le re thuseng
Naha ya Mopeli e ile.”²⁰

As the people were sitting and singing, the police detachment came through the *neck* forming a half circle line. By this time the Basotho were aware that the police were coming and were ready for them. Suddenly, when the police appeared, somebody shouted “phuthehang ke bao ba etla.”²¹ On arrival the police stopped at a distance. Three messengers, Abia Molaba, Paulus Setai, and Moekwa Makhaola, were sent to meet the police and find out what their mission was. The answer given was that they were looking for Mopelinyane and the other three persons who were to appear before the Commission of Enquiry. The police also informed them that they did not want trouble but they came to deliver subpoenas and to disperse their *pitso* as it was illegal. However, the Basotho pleaded ignorance of the Proclamation and assured the police that they were not fighting and had gathered there as they always do.²²

¹⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

²⁰ Ibid. “Lingangele come and help us, The Trust government has taken away chieftainship, Our cattle have been eaten up(seized), They have burned our cattle, We and our children are starving, the *Lingangele*, come and help us, The land of Mopeli is gone.” Freely Translated.

²¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001. “Let’s gather together, here they come”. Freely Translated.

²² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

After reporting what the police said, the messengers went back again to tell the police what the meeting had decided. When they returned to the meeting, they were allegedly followed closely by police on horseback. The police stopped very close to the gathering of the Basotho, and through an interpreter, the Basotho were told to disperse as the gathering was illegal.²³ However, the Basotho refused to obey the instruction. They argued that they had come to their Chief's kraal as the nation, which was their home. Therefore, they would not disperse until the time comes for them to do so. Then the police ordered them to go to the offices where the Commission was sitting as their gathering was illegal, but still the Basotho refused.²⁴

As it turned out, some Basotho began teasing and, to a degree, provoking the police by questioning them. They wanted to know why the police were carrying guns and some suggested that police gathering was also illegal as they were more than five. They even said that they would leave the place at their own time.²⁵ Their attitude was now starting to become confrontational. Their behaviour in front of the police contradicted their earlier claim that they were completely peaceful and harmless. The words they used to irritate the police pointed to the Basotho's mood.

²³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2002.

²⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

²⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

The police ignored the Basotho's attitude and wanted to know the whereabouts of Mopelinyane. However, they were informed that he was not among the gathered Basotho as he and his council were out somewhere. Thus the Basotho would not disperse until they came back to report to them. The police seemed not to be convinced by this answer and demanded that they disperse peacefully. According to one informant, Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, Mopelinyane was indeed near and had been taken to a place of safety. Because the Basotho, already suspicious of the authorities, believed that Mopelinyane would be the first victim should the police open fire.²⁶ Despite suspecting that the police might shoot them and shoot Mopelinyane first, the Basotho refused to disperse.

The Basotho were adamant that they would not move from the kraal until Mopelinyane had returned. Then the police came closer to the gathering. They were all white policemen except one black constable, Ntsane Mopeli, who came as an interpreter. After the Basotho had refused to disperse and continued to display a negative attitude towards the police, the police had to act. One informant, Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, recalled that Major *Dublanche*²⁷ gave them ten minutes to disperse.²⁸ Chief Setsoto Mopeli alleged that after a few minutes, *Dublanche*'s second in command, Lieutenant Jonker, took over and said to them, dramatically through an interpreter, that they have five minutes to disperse,²⁹ and if they did not,

“Ke tla tsholla madi a lona a tla phalla jwalo ka diphororo
tsa pula, ke mathe mabaleng a lona ke thunye katse, ntja,

²⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

²⁷ This was how the Basotho pronounced the surname Terblanche.

²⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

²⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

kgoho le ntho enngwe le enngwe e phelang.”³⁰

According to Chief Setsoto Mopeli, this statement seemed to have spurred the Basotho to be more rebellious. It provoked them to respond in a similar manner. He went further and alleged that a certain man among the crowd, Abia Molaba, answered the Lieutenant back and said: “ha e ba ho tla ba jwalo, re tla be re se re ena le lona lehodimong, re tsamayang kaofela.”³¹

At that time the Basotho were uncertain as what they should do; that is, whether they should stay or runaway. As time passed on people started coming up with alternatives. One person suggested that they should all pray, but a certain Lekhoahla Matela rejected the proposal and this nearly caused divisions. The reason for this was that others claimed that there was no time to pray and if they do they might be attacked while praying.³² Koti Molingoana recounted that they never thought that the police would actually shoot them as they were neither armed nor threatening the police.³³ Nthota Mopeli, who read the letter from Mr. Basner, which advised the Basotho to disperse, tried to calm the Basotho. He was quoted by an informant, Koti Molingoana, who was present at Namoha as having said loudly, just before the outbreak of the fight: “ba bua feela bana, ntwā e ya saenelwa mos, ba ke ke ba tla etsa ntwā mona empa ho sa

³⁰ Ibid. “I will mercilessly kill you and your blood will run like water after rain, run through your premises shooting cat, dog and everything that moves.” Freely Translated.

³¹ Ibid., “If there will be bloodshed, we will all meet in heaven.” Freely Translated.

³² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2002.

³³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

saenwa.”³⁴

The Basotho believed Nthota Mopeli for the simple reason that he was a World War Two veteran.³⁵ However, he did not play any active role in the activities of the *Lingangele* and was not in the leadership. The reason why the letter was given to him was that he would be able to pass on the message to the Basotho, as most of them could neither read nor write. Therefore, it was believed that he would advise the Basotho accordingly. However, he did the opposite as he advised them to refuse to disperse, because it is alleged that he thought the police would not shoot the people.³⁶ One of the persons at the meeting, Moekwa Makhaola, suggested that it was time for all the cowards to withdraw. This statement prompted some other people to flee, but were rebuked by others from doing so. However, some people managed to escape under the pretext of going round the flanks and behind the police.³⁷

³⁴ Ibid. “They are just threatening us, they would not make war without first signing for it.” Freely Translated.

³⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001, Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

³⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001, Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002.

³⁷ Chronicle, 19 May 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001, Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002.

6.3 The outbreak of the Namoha Battle

Constable Ntsane Mopeli who acted as an interpreter seemingly was there to help to identify Mopelinyane because the white police men did not know him. Ntsane entered the crowd on instruction from Major Terblanche to look for the four men whom the Commission had subpoenaed. This action caused a stir among the Basotho who at that time have become aggressive. When Ntsane was inside the crowd, suddenly there was a great movement; his horse was intentionally struck with a stick, it got frightened, jumped and he fell off.³⁸ In giving evidence in the subsequent trial, Ntsane said he was beaten when he tried to crawl away and his arm was broken. When he got up he saw that a serious fight had started.³⁹ Although Ntsane was beaten, he was allowed to crawl away from the crowd. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho of Poelong village, who was near the incident recounted:

“We could not believe that Ntsane, whom we respected so much as one of our chiefs could allow himself to be used against his people. He was the first policeman who directed his horse on us. Unfortunately, as his horse dashed into the gathering it was struck and he fell from his horse and broke his hand. People wanted to kill him, but Salomone Sera shielded him and pleaded with the people not to harm or kill him as he was their prince. We heeded the plea and let him go, not knowing that the fight was going to follow.”⁴⁰

Immediately thereafter, in the middle of it all, as the women set up a wailing scream of

³⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

³⁹ Rand Daily Mail, 13 January 1951.

⁴⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

the *modidietsane*,⁴¹ the Major shouted ‘fire’ and the attack was on.⁴² It was alleged that the police fired no warning shot.⁴³ The first person to be hit and killed by the police bullet was Sejeso Dhlamini.⁴⁴ Chief Setsoto Mopeli alleged that Sejeso looked like Mopelinyane and was wearing a hat similar to that Mopelinyane used to wear. He claimed that the police mistakenly shot Sejeso because they thought he was Mopelinyane. He assumed that Constable Ntsane Mopeli, the only Mosotho Policeman there erroneously identified Sejeso as Mopelinyane.⁴⁵ However, there was no proof that the police wanted to specifically kill Mopelinyane. As pointed out earlier, the police went to Namoha to serve subpoenas not to shoot and kill anybody. Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Nchabeng village, recalled that:

“As we promised, we had to protect Mopelinyane if we hope to succeed in our endeavour to curb cattle culling and restoration of the traditional rulership in Witsieshoek, which obviously was slipping away. We knew that they would want to silence him because he was the prime suspect and was seen as

⁴¹ Wailing scream or ululating.

⁴² Chronicle, 16 June 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2002.

⁴³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

⁴⁴ The Star, 16 May 1951; Chronicle, 15 June 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

⁴⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

the person causing troubles for the government and *Morena* Charles Mopeli. He was also accused of not cooperating with the Paramount Chief.”⁴⁶

The informants alleged that after the first shot was fired, the police horses galloped into the gathering and police began shooting at the Basotho who were throwing stones, sticks, knobkerries, and sickles at the police. Suddenly, the informants claimed, the Basotho were mixed up with the police who were shooting at them with an assortment of guns; that is, Sten and machine guns. The Basotho claimed to have fought back at the police by throwing stones and sticks.⁴⁷

In the midst of the fight a stone struck Sgt. de Villiers’ horse and another flew past his head. Then more stones followed. He swung his horse around, and saw another man aiming a large stone at him and he fired two rapid shots in the direction of the attacker. Another attacker drew his stick through his hands and aimed at him and again he fired. Then the stone struck Sgt. de Villiers’ hands causing him to drop his revolver. Shortly afterwards, a knobkerrie was thrown at him, but missed. He loaded his gun and fired shots in the direction of his attackers who were also attacking a recumbent policeman. Sgt. de Villiers felt that the police had come out safe only because they were armed and “because the surprise attack was badly organized.”⁴⁸ As the fighting continued the informants alleged that Lieutenant Jonker fell from his horse after he was struck on the head with a knobkerrie, and the Basotho who were near the place where he fell began

⁴⁶ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho of Ha-Nchabeng village, 18/04/2002.

⁴⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002.

⁴⁸ The Star, 15 May 1951.

crushing his body with knobkerries, stones and sticks.⁴⁹

Constable J.W. Peens, who was also a member of Major Terblanche's detachment, in describing his experience said that when the fight started he was isolated and surrounded. He stated that just before the main attack he heard a voice shouting, "kill the damned *Maburu*."⁵⁰ However, he fought his way out on horseback with his truncheon, and used his revolver. He went to the assistance of a man lying on the ground and found out that the man was Lieutenant Jonker. The Lieutenant had been critically injured. Nearby they also found Constable Erasmus who was also badly injured.⁵¹ Sgt. Schalk Visagie explained how he, too, had become isolated. He was armed with a sten gun.⁵² He forced his way out of the huge crowd of the Basotho and then saw a European lying on the ground being battered by about eight to ten blacks. He fired with a sten gun to disperse them and later found that it was Constable Van der Westhuyzen.⁵³

Sgt. Kriel, who spent a long time in hospital with a skull fracture and concussion, stated that he was on his horse when the attack began. He was not paying any particular attention to what Major Terblanche was saying or what was happening until he was attacked. The bridle of his horse was grabbed, a stone struck him on the cheek and another on his neck, and he was then dragged from his horse and struck down four

⁴⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molegoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

⁵⁰ Chronicle, 13 January 1951. "White people." Freely Translated.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 15 June 1952.

⁵³ Ibid., 12 May 1951.

times. He was so busy looking after himself that he heard no orders, and he was badly beaten on his upper body with sticks. He also felt that had it not been the shots that were fired in the direction of the Basotho, he could also have died there.⁵⁴

Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho of Mabilela village, who was in the front when the police began shooting was among the people who were shot first. He described how he was shot during the fight as follows:

“I was among the first to be hit by the bullet. It hit me on the thigh and as I fell down I thought that was the end of my life. To my surprise, as I was lying down I did not feel much pain but I could not move and laid there until the shooting had stopped. After the fighting my friend Buthelezi came and carried me on horseback to my house. At home I felt terrible pain, but was not prepared to risk and go to the hospital. It was for the first time I saw and felt the brutality of the white people toward black people. We were not expecting such a brutal reaction from the police, considering that we were not armed nor provocative and we posed no threat to anybody.”⁵⁵

In the heat of the moment, when the first shot was fired, Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho of Monontsha village, who was present at Namoha, recalled and described the atmosphere from where he was standing, as follows:

“When the first shot was fired we all laid down and there was silence. Immediately thereafter, we rose once and began hopping and running in different directions like a group of ants. As we were running some people continued shouting; ‘attack the police’. As I was running, I felt like I was not running but flying. I hid in the river banks nearby. There I found two old men hiding. As we were hiding, one man passed us being pursued by police. We followed suit as we knew police were after him. As we were running away the two old men were hit by bullets and fell down. Luckily, I managed to elude the bullets until I took cover behind a big rock a distance from Namoha. After taking cover I turned and look back to see whether police are following me or not. As I moved backwards, I bumped into another person’s back, who was also taking cover

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

there and moving backwards. I felt coldness all over my body and thought that I was caught. For a moment, we both remained motionless. After some time I glanced back and discovered that it was someone I know and I felt relieved.”⁵⁶

The other informant, Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, recalled how she was caught by surprise when the police began shooting. She and her friends had just joined the crowd from where they were sitting. Mafokoletsa recalled that when the police began shooting she became confused and did not know what to do. She then ran up the mountain and took cover behind a big rock. She described her experience thus:

“I was terrified. You know when you are in trouble and terrified you cannot even utter words of prayer as you are used to. In trying to pray I only managed to utter just one sentence, *Oho Modimo o re boloke le letsatsing lena, o re pate*⁵⁷. I felt that I was on the brink of death and I was saying my last prayers. But God really protected me considering the number of casualties. As I was hiding there, the sound of guns subsided and finally stopped. Thereafter, when I glanced I saw a white policeman hanging over the horse and covered by the blood all over his body. This frightened me further, and I thought now white people are going to kill us all for what happened to that white policeman. After this I went straight home, but I did not sleep at my house, I went to my sister’s house in Makong.”⁵⁸

As the fighting continued, riderless horses galloped up to the Witsieshoek police station. When the police who were left there saw the horses, they set out immediately to give help to Major Terblanche’s detachment. By the time they reached Namoha, the fighting was over.⁵⁹ At this time the Basotho had scattered, ran into the mountains and

⁵⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002.

⁵⁷ “Oh God, please save us today.” Freely Translated.

⁵⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu, 19/09/2001.

⁵⁹ Rand Daily Mail, 28 November 1950; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal

hid there.⁶⁰ They left behind them traces of blood. Many people were wounded, some died.⁶¹ Some people hid themselves in the nearby house. However, it was alleged by the informants that the police pursued them, shot and killed them in that house. There were bodies that were covered in blood in the house and the doors of the house were broken.⁶² Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, recalled:

“As we were running away other people, like Paramente Motolo, and others took refuge in his house nearby. Unfortunately police saw them as they hid in that house. They followed them, shot at and killed all of them mercilessly.”⁶³

The mountain just behind the scene of the Battle was covered with traces of blood, shoes, clothes and food. Many lay down wounded and the atmosphere was full of gas from the guns.⁶⁴ Fourteen Basotho (see addendum H) died on the scene of the clash.

collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

⁶⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

⁶¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Makhanya Motolo, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 19/09/2001.

⁶² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Makhanya Motolo, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 19/09/2001; The Friend, 29 November 1950.

⁶³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

⁶⁴ Chronicle, 16 June 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti

After forty five minutes of fighting, the police withdrew with their dead and wounded. Sixteen policemen were wounded, including Major Terblanche, who was hit on the face by a knobkerrie, and two were killed: lieutenant Jonker, who ordered the shooting, his body was found by the Major under a heap of rocks, and constable Erasmus who died later in Harrismith Hospital.⁶⁵

After the clash it was alleged that the police never returned to the scene to assist the Basotho who were injured.⁶⁶ The reason given for not helping the wounded Basotho was that the police did not have enough manpower as some members had been incapacitated by the Battle.⁶⁷ As a result, the Basotho had to do something to take care of their own wounded and dead.⁶⁸ The allegation that the police never returned to the scene on the day of the Battle to help the injured Basotho is unproven. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho of Thabana Tsoana village, who claimed to have returned to

Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

⁶⁵ Rand Daily Mail, 28 November 1950.

⁶⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002.

⁶⁷ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

⁶⁸ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002

Namoha after the police had left, recalled:

“When the fighting had stopped and police left, I went down and saw bodies lying down, some moaning with pain while others laid still. I was asked to go to Elizabeth Ross Hospital together with John Mabaso, to report what happened and to request emergency assistance. On arrival at the hospital, we discovered that they already knew, how, I did not know. But there was no driver available to drive the ambulance. However, one of the patients there who had driver’s license was asked by the house surgeon doctor, Dr. Rudolph Herman Stern, to assist us.”⁶⁹

On their way to Namoha Piet Mokoena recalled that an ambulance that was heading to Namoha was stopped by the police and the driver was told to go back as the road was not suitable for the ambulance that day. The police allegedly ordered the driver to try the road the following morning. The driver obliged. The two passengers in the vehicle did not want to argue with the police because they were afraid they might be noticed that they were present at Namoha and, thus, the police would arrest them. Piet Mokoena further alleged that earlier on the same day, the police lorry had proceeded to Namoha without difficulty to offer help to Major Terblanche’s detachment.⁷⁰ This information was confirmed by other informants who recalled that they were taken aback by the police action.⁷¹

6.4 The arrest of the *Lingangele*

On that night following the Battle, Paulus Mpheteng and others allegedly collected corpses and attended to the wounded as no medical assistance arrived until the next

⁶⁹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

morning.⁷² Other dead and wounded were found in adjacent huts. Near the bodies lay a pile of traditional weapons; brickbats, knobkerries, assegais, stick clubs, choppers, claws, hammers, saddles, bridles and hoes.⁷³ Although these weapons were found there, it ought, not automatically imply that these were taken to be used as the Basotho almost always carried them as part of their tradition. The police and doctors only came in the morning. When testifying during their trial, Mpheteng stated that after helping the injured and collecting the corpses, he slept in a hut at Namoha and was awakened the next morning when the police knocked at the door. He said that he was surprised when the police arrested him. He argued that he was not present during the meeting, but came later to help the injured.⁷⁴

Following the Namoha clash, the government immediately issued a proclamation authorizing the summary arrest of the fourteen Basotho who were considered dangerous to public peace (see addendum I). They were to be detained in the Bloemfontein jail as if they were prisoners awaiting trial.⁷⁵ According to the proclamation, this action was taken in the wake of the serious state of affairs that prevailed in Witsieshoek. In motivating the reasons for the issuing of the proclamation, the Governor-General stated that a large number of black people had set the law at naught and defied constituted authority. He went on to indicate that according to the information received from the Commission of Enquiry, the armed gatherings were

⁷² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002.

⁷³ The Friend, 29 November 1950.

⁷⁴ Chronicle, 26 May 1951.

⁷⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002.

organized and instigated by the people who were appearing on the proclamation.⁷⁶ Ultimately, the police arrested eleven Basotho in terms of the proclamation. They were held in custody without trial in terms of a special proclamation.⁷⁷

The eleven Basotho who were arrested alleged that when they were ill, they were refused medicine and were told that they were in jail and not in hospital. They also claimed that they had suffered other indignities.⁷⁸ Two of them, Mpheteng and Mopelinyane, allegedly wrote a letter to Senator Margaret Ballinger, who at that time represented black people of the Orange Free State and Transvaal in parliament, asking her to put their case to other black representatives in parliament and to parliament itself. After receiving the plea of the men, Margaret Ballinger flew to Bloemfontein to consult them, but was refused admission to the gaol and, as a result, she never had the chance to speak to them or see the conditions under which they were held.⁷⁹

The day following the Namoha Battle, early in the morning, two South African Air Force Harvards, which had been placed at the disposal of the police by the Minister of Defense, arrived at Witsieshoek. After a reconnaissance flight that afternoon, it was reported that they could not see any sign of groups, or concentration of the Basotho anywhere.⁸⁰ From the day of the Namoha Battle and the few days that followed, the

⁷⁶ NTS, URU 2824, Minutes 3462, Witsieshoek Native Reserve, Summary Arrest and Detention of certain Natives, 29 November 1950.

⁷⁷ Daily Dispatch, 8 May 1951.

⁷⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002.

⁷⁹ The Star, 17 April 1951.

⁸⁰ The Friend, 29 November 1950; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002; Personal

police helicopters were flying over the Reserve and the police on foot, armored vehicles and on horseback were all over the place searching for the suspects.⁸¹ Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, described how the police used helicopters to trace the suspects:

“The following day the police helicopters came and were flying very low. They were flying so low that they looked like they can even hit our huts. They would fly over the mountains and then come back to fly over our houses. We were very scared and decided to run away. Helicopters were not so successful in identifying where the fugitives were hiding. Many people hid themselves in the caves and the clefts where it was not easy for police to see as the helicopters were flying over. The caves used by fugitives were Oetsi’s and Tshakgolo’s caves. I think the police knew Oetsi’s cave and it was accessible by foot, but did not want to risk to their lives to search the Basotho on foot. They suspected that they might be ambushed by the fugitives.”⁸²

6.5 The consequences of the Battle

From the night following the Namoha Battle, Namoha and many other villages adjacent to it were deserted as most people ran away into the mountains for fear of being killed or arrested. Only the old and the infirm women and men and very small children could still be seen in the area immediately after the clash. The only sign of life was at the camp of about two hundred policemen, who were housed in the tents next to local police station. All the white storekeepers and officials were ordered to leave the Reserve.⁸³ Strange stillness hanged over the Reserve. Some of the Basotho even crossed into

collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

⁸¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

⁸² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

⁸³ The Star, 28 November 1950; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

Lesotho and other neighboring countries. In order to confine the Basotho to Witsieshoek, the authorities contacted the Lesotho administration and asked that all passes leading into Lesotho be closed. However, the majority of the Basotho, especially the suspects, had already crossed into Lesotho.⁸⁴

The following day, as the police continued raiding for suspects, many people remained in hiding. Trails of blood into the mountains indicated that many of the wounded managed to escape with help. Those people who had fresh wounds and those who were suspected of having been present at the Namoha meeting were summarily arrested.⁸⁵ It was reported that when government officials, journalists and photographers came to Namoha on Tuesday, 28 November 1950 to collect evidence and take pictures, the Basotho in nearby houses ran away. That was indicative of the uneasiness which was created by the Battle and an indication of confusion on the side of the Basotho.⁸⁶

On Wednesday, 29 November 1950, the authorities were becoming increasingly alarmed about the plight of fugitives who were wounded in the clash and still hiding in the mountains or had crossed into Lesotho. The chances of recovery of the more seriously wounded ones were rapidly dwindling.⁸⁷ Thus the authorities made an

⁸⁴ The Star, 30 November 1950; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

⁸⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

⁸⁶ Rand Daily Mail, 30 November 1950.

⁸⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002; Personal

announcement to the effect that a moratorium had been declared for that day on hunting down the suspects and arresting them. Following this moratorium about three hundred Basotho came out of hiding from the mountains to bury their dead and to collect some food. The number of those who returned was still small despite the undertaking by the police Commander, J.C. Kriel, that there would be no police interference. A search of the Reserve was to have been carried out by two South African Air Force planes that afternoon. However, this measure was canceled. The moratorium was intended to facilitate the burials as most bodies had not been collected from Namoha.⁸⁸

Some of the deceased, five of them, were taken by their families for burial in their respective villages. The remaining bodies, nine in all, were buried at Namoha and Reverend Ntjee Lecheko, a member of the *Lingangele*, conducted the mass funeral. The deceased were buried along side each other, but not at the local cemetery. Their graves are still separated from the rest of the other graves. It was believed that because the deceased died as a result of the battle, they should, therefore, be kept away from the others.⁸⁹

Many people left immediately after the funeral. Their reason for leaving immediately thereafter was that they were afraid that they would be arrested. Their fear was not justified as only the leaders of the *Lingangele* and those who fought the police were wanted. However, by the end of the week many people began coming out from their

collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

⁸⁸ The Star, 30 November 1950; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

⁸⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

hideout. Lack of food was the biggest problem facing them. To the surprise of many of them, they were not arrested as they thought. That, indeed was a relief to them. Their fear of being arrested stemmed from the fact that they knew that the gathering they attended was illegal. They thus regretted supporting it.⁹⁰

Another informant, Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, alleged that it took almost three months before some people could return home. He also alleged that some people never returned to Witsieshoek, as they feared arrest. Those who never returned were the people who played a major role in the activities of the *Lingangele*. Thus they disappeared for fear of being arrested if they came back.⁹¹

Lieutenant Jonker and constable Erasmus, the only two policemen who died, were buried in Bethlehem and Pretoria, respectively. The Basotho living in Bethlehem were asked by the Paramount Chief of Witsieshoek to attend the funeral of Lieutenant Jonker as a gesture of sympathy and peace. The Paramount Chief of Witsieshoek, Charles Mopeli, extended the request for them to attend the funeral. This was to indicate to the rest of the white community that not all the Basotho were involved in the Battle and they regretted what happened at Namoha. Their attendance of the funeral was the decision taken by the Basotho so as to remain in good terms with their white neighbors whom they relied on for work and other assistance.⁹²

⁹⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

⁹¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion minister at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

⁹² The Star, 30 November 1950; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mary Nkomo, an ordinary Mosotho from Elite, 25/03/2002.

Dr. Gilliland conducted an autopsy on Lieutenant Jonker. In his report he indicated that death was caused by a stab-wound which penetrated the left lung, and that the body was covered with other stab-wounds. The jawbone was broken; there were multiple fractures at the base of the skull, and all the teeth of the upper jaw were loose. Constable Erasmus also had fractures, stab wounds and abrasions. The wounds on the men could have been caused by assegais, sticks or stones. Contrary to the evidence presented later before the court by some policemen that the Basotho fired first in their direction, there were no bullet wounds on the dead police or the injured.⁹³ That could mean that the Basotho were not carrying any fire arms or they did use them but did not hit any policeman. The postmortem examinations on some of the Basotho were conducted on the next day, Tuesday morning, at the scene of the clash by Drs. de Jager and van Berk. All the bodies of the dead Basotho that were examined had bullet wounds. Therefore, these people had died as a result of those wounds.⁹⁴

6.6 The reaction to Namoha Battle

Reactions to the Namoha incident varied from sympathy to condemnation for both the government and the Basotho. Black and white deplored the heavy toll of life. Margaret Ballinger called for a public enquiry into all the circumstances surrounding the clash between the police and the Basotho in the Witsieshoek Reserve. She insisted that the existing Commission should be postponed, pending the holding of a special enquiry. Clearly, it would be impossible for the existing Commission to collect the evidence it needed to fulfill its task, while the unsettled state of affairs continued. Mrs. Ballinger was supported by a number of persons who felt that a special enquiry was necessary, as it would be the only way to establish how the clash happened, and who had to carry

⁹³ Unisa, Acc. 219, Post-mortem Reports, 28 November 1950.

⁹⁴ Chronicle, 26 May 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

the blame.⁹⁵

The appointment of the judicial enquiry along the lines proposed by Mrs. Ballinger would go far to allay the great anxiety which the public felt about what had happened, and what was happening in Witsieshoek.⁹⁶ Though the existence of the first Commission seemed to render the appointment of another one superfluous and unnecessary, it did not, in reality, do so. The existing Commission had been established to investigate the general causes of the unrest which had manifested themselves over a considerable period of time. The Commission that was being called for would have, as its task, the investigation of a specific event.⁹⁷

Many people had wondered what went wrong in Witsieshoek, this was because for many years the residents had proved to be exceptionally cooperative. The change in their attitude, and the ultimate open confrontation with the police called for an authoritative explanation. It was inevitable that the enquiry should cover some of the ground already covered by the Commission that was investigating the conditions in the Reserve generally. But the questions that fell outside its scope would be covered by the special enquiry. It was crucial for the enquiry to include an investigation into relations between Blacks and the police. The reason was that the relations between the two left a great deal to be desired after the Battle, and the time had come for such enquiry so that trust could be established between the police and the Basotho of Witsieshoek.⁹⁸

Another question the proposed enquiry could establish was the use of firearms instead of teargas by the police. It was believed that the police knew of the gathering, and

⁹⁵ Rakometsi, M.S., The Witsieshoek Rebellion (1940-1950): A Community in Crisis. Unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Natal, 1992, p. 67.

⁹⁶ Natal Witness, 5 December 1950.

⁹⁷ Rakometsi, p. 92.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

could have used teargas to disperse the crowd rather than using live ammunition. Therefore, this action of the police had to be probed and the police authorities had to account for the conduct of the policemen at Namoha.⁹⁹

As the support grew for the judicial enquiry, the government in December 1950 indicated its willingness to establish such an enquiry. The decision was welcomed by one section of the population. It served to reassure a shocked public. The cabinet decision was wise and timely. It was hoped that the somber lessons that were brought to light by such a Commission would help to avert a recurrence of similar killings elsewhere. However, immediately thereafter, the government remained alarmingly silent over its pledge announced in December 1950 to appoint a Judicial Commission to enquire into the Namoha incident.¹⁰⁰

There was, however, suspicion that the remarkable promptitude with which the government promised a Judicial Commission was calculated to forestall criticism at home. Furthermore, it was also argued that it was intended to allay unfavorable reaction abroad at the time when South Africa was under discussion at the United Nations Organization. It was suspected that once the purpose was achieved, the government would lose interest in keeping its word. As time unfolded, it proved that, in reality, this was so.¹⁰¹ This was not surprising because even with the first Commission, the government was only forced by mounting pressure to institute it. In actual fact, it did not see any importance of such an enquiry. However, it was possible, of course, that there were real practical difficulties in the way of appointing the Commission and setting it to work. Some section of the public could, however, not think of any genuine difficulty which required so much delay on the part of the government. It was the duty

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 105.

¹⁰⁰ The Eastern Province Herald, 6 December 1950.

¹⁰¹ Natal Witness, 1 February 1951.

of the government to enlighten the country about obstacles, if they existed, but that was never done, and the judicial Commission was never set up. The old Commission continued with its job.¹⁰²

The other section of the population condemned the action of the Basotho and called for tough measures against them. In the neighboring white communities, it was alleged, that feelings were running high after the Battle that resulted in the death of the two white police officers. The whites called for rigorous measures against the Basotho. The feelings were running high among the residents of Harrismith, Kestell and Bethlehem and the farmers of the districts as a result of the death of the two policemen.¹⁰³ Meetings of different farming bodies were held, and in their statements, they unanimously condemned what they called the recalcitrant attitude of the Blacks of Witsieshoek. Featuring prominently among the farming bodies were the Vorentoe Farmer's Association, the Orange Free State Agricultural Union Congress and the Harrismith Central Farmers Association.¹⁰⁴

Bishop Taba Mofutsanyana, a minister of religion at Bluegum Bosch, who joined the police force in 1952, after the Namoha Battle, remembered the feelings of the white community in the neighboring farms and towns. He indicated that they were surprised by the reaction of the white community as there has never been a conflict between the Basotho and their white neighbors. According to him, these two communities had been living peacefully and trading together since the Basotho had settled in Witsieshoek.¹⁰⁵ Bishop Taba Mofutsanyana narrated what he remembered of the feelings displayed by

¹⁰² Chronicle, 26 May 1951.

¹⁰³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Bishop Taba Mofutsanyana, a minister of religion at Bluegum Bosch, 03/09/2001.

¹⁰⁴ Rand Daily Mail, 9 December 1950.

¹⁰⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Bishop Taba Mofutsanyana, a minister of religion at Bluegum Bosch, 03/09/2001.

their white neighbors thus:

“Many of the white people in the neighboring towns and farms were getting ready to offer their assistance to the police. They were seemingly very hurt by the death of Lieutenant Jonker and constable Erasmus. It appeared that the clash between the Basotho and the government had shifted to a clash between the Basotho and white people in the neighboring farms and towns. Meetings of different farming bodies were held throughout the neighboring farms and towns. There was a feeling that Basotho should be made to pay for what they did to two white officers. Nothing was said about the fourteen Basotho who died. What surprised us was that we never had conflict before with the Whites and we relied on them for buying our produce, as we also bought sheep, maize meal and many other products from them. We were not fighting with them but with the government. Their reaction really surprised us. However, fortunately this never developed into a serious confrontation.”¹⁰⁶

The alleged agitation of the white community was also supported by one of the informants, Mmakamoo Mazibuko, an ordinary Mosotho from Matshediso village, who at that time was living on one of the neighbouring farms. She alleged that they did not know what happened in Witsieshoek, but were surprised by the behaviour of their employers who suddenly became very strict and treated them harshly. Mmakamoo Mazibuko claimed that they only knew later what had happened. Because of the treatment they received from their masters, they decided to relocate to the other farm.¹⁰⁷ She recalled what she experienced; as follows:

“At the time of Namoha episode we were staying on the farm in Golden Gate. We heard about the incident. We also saw our white masters heavily armed and converging in a meeting. From there they drove away and we later learned that they were approaching Witsieshoek because they wanted to offer their assistance to the police, but they were returned. Our master was very upset about the incident and would not communicate with us as he used to do. His son was worse because he was now treating us badly as if we had anything to do with the killing of white policemen in Witsieshoek. Due to the treatment we were receiving, we decided to leave his farm and settle

¹⁰⁶

Ibid.

¹⁰⁷

Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mmakamoo Mazibuko, an ordinary Mosotho from Matshediso village, 12/04/2002.

on the other farm. We moved to and settle in Witsieshoek in 1974.”¹⁰⁸

At the farmers’ meetings a number of resolutions were passed and the government was expected to consider them. Among the resolutions passed, one said that such outbreaks deserved no mercy, all rebels should be traced and suitably punished, and if possible, deported from the Reserve. It was also agreed that the government should be encouraged to apply laws relating to soil improvement and conservation in the Reserve by force. If necessary, two armoured vehicles be kept in Witsieshoek permanently for use whenever needed.¹⁰⁹

There was also a feeling that the Basotho should be made to pay for the dependents of the two policemen.¹¹⁰ In another meeting the members demanded that every citizen be provided with a rifle and a hundred cartridges at cost price, and that a training depot for citizen forces be established in Bethlehem.¹¹¹ In another meeting the people strongly urged that the government should take all the Basotho away from Witsieshoek because, they claimed, the Basotho were spoiling the streams that fed their farms and were polluting the water they drank. It was claimed that the Basotho were no longer agriculturalists and had become industrial workers, and could, therefore, use reserves merely as breeding ground for more labour. The meeting also agreed that the Basotho had violated the conditions under which their settlement had been established at Witsieshoek. They insisted that the Basotho should be forced to leave the area in the same way that Oetsi was forced to leave.¹¹²

The line of thinking of the Whites in the neighbouring towns was shared by the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Rand Daily Mail, 9 December 1950.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Natal Witness, 14 December 1950.

Afrikaans press. The *Die Vaderland* carried articles condemning the action of the Basotho that led to the loss of lives. In one article it was stated that it was almost unbelievable that the bloodshed was the result of the steps that were taken to improve the living conditions of the blacks. The paper maintained that the good relations between the Whites and the Basotho, which had survived many tests, had been shattered. It argued that the intervention of the United Nations in the government's Black policy was the cause of the bloody clashes. This was because for over eighty years peace and prosperity had prevailed at Witsieshoek.¹¹³ The Afrikaans press was in total agreement with the attitude of the government towards the Basotho. The white community seemed to think that the use of plain force would be a remedy for the Black troubles and disturbances. Admittedly, the white people in the neighbouring farms and towns met in a state of high emotions after the Namoha episode. It would, perhaps, be unreasonable in such circumstances to expect them to have advocated a well balanced policy. But the Basotho of Witsieshoek had not declared themselves to be anti-white. According to them, they were just fighting for what they considered to be the government's meddling in their affairs.¹¹⁴

It might be wholly natural for the white farmers in the adjoining areas to react the way it was alleged they did, and offer their armed services to the authorities. On the other hand, nothing should be more obvious that calamitous clashes could easily ensue, should undisciplined forces largely animated by the spirit of revenge, be permitted to have a hand in such a delicate affair. The situation following the Namoha incident was obviously one that called for coolheaded, careful and disciplined handling on the part of the authorities. This was to be achieved with both a firm policy and the total

¹¹³ Die Vaderland, 7 December 1950.

¹¹⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabolela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu, 19/09/2001.

exclusion of any organisations which were represented by civilian volunteers.¹¹⁵ The government managed to achieve this as it never allowed civilian volunteers and organisations to dictate to it how it had to handle the Basotho's behaviour.

Many Basotho of Witsieshoek, following the Namoha incident and the attitude displayed by their white neighbours, were now living in fear. According to them, they were even afraid of going to do shopping or conduct their businesses in neighbouring towns lest they be attacked by the White people. Even those who had nothing to do with the violent resistance against the Trust were also affected by the situation because they were not sure how they would be differentiated from the rest of the "troublemakers."¹¹⁶ The Basotho alleged that they were looked at with suspicion and that the farm workers were advised not to mix with the Basotho of Witsieshoek as they were very dangerous. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, who was negatively affected by the above situation recalled:

"We were even refused to sell our products to our black people who were living on the farms or in towns. If you were from Witsieshoek you were chased away. Even the Basotho on the farms also were afraid to even speak to us or buy from us lest they be labelled traitors. When you visited your relatives outside Witsieshoek, you would not divulge to other people that you come from Witsieshoek. If you did, you would immediately be advised to leave."¹¹⁷

During the struggle against the Trust, not all the Basotho supported the *Lingangele*

¹¹⁵ Rakometsi, p. 102.

¹¹⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Bishop Taba Mofutsanyana, a minister of religion at Bluegum Bosch, 03/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion minister at Mabolela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

¹¹⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho Makeneng village, 19/09/2001.

actions as it was alleged, although they were all against the Trust.¹¹⁸ To the Paramount Chief and the government, those people were loyalists as they tried to raise their concerns through peaceful means. But this group of people was labelled *Mahlabaphio*,¹¹⁹ by the *Lingangele* members. They were seen as sellouts because they disapproved of the *Lingangele*'s methods of fighting the Trust. Thus, when the confrontation with the police exploded at Namoha, it was not surprising that *Mahlabaphio* became very excited when they noticed what was happening at Namoha.¹²⁰ It was alleged that some women in Monontsha village were at the peak of their voices ululating as a way of appreciating what the police were doing to the *Lingangele* at Namoha. They were seemingly enjoying the suffering of the *Lingangele* at the hands of the police.¹²¹ This action was a clear indication of a division brought about by the Trust and the reaction it provoked among the Basotho. A former member of the *Lingangele*, Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, recalled the mood of those who were opposed to their action, as follows:

“*Mahlabaphio* were very excited by the actions of the police against us. They remarked *kgale re le jwetsa, halala!*¹²² Even after this incident these people continued passing

¹¹⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Dibe Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho Makeneng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion minister at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

¹¹⁹ “Traitors or spies.” Freely Translated.

¹²⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

¹²¹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Piet Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 10/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002.

¹²² “We have long been warning you.” Freely Translated

remarks, saying ‘they said they will die with him, where is he now?’ They were referring to Mopelinyane who was banished from Qwa-Qwa after this incident. What truly happened after the war is expressed in the Sesotho expression which says that *Ha bo boi ha ho lluwe, empa habo mohale ho phelwa ka dikgapha*.¹²³ *Mahlabaphio* benefited from our toil despite the fact that they were laughing at us.”¹²⁴

Indeed in all the houses of those people who acted as *heroes*, families were crying for their loved ones who died while fighting for the retention of their cattle. Many people were traumatized by this incident and many became displaced. Many children became orphans as in other families both parents were killed or had run away or got divorced. Some couples divorced because of the disagreements over the activities of the *Lingangele* and because of the imprisonment of some people. Many people lost their jobs, their livestock, loved ones and a famine followed this incident as people were afraid to come back from their hiding for fear of victimization as now the number of the police presence in Witsieshoek had double.¹²⁵

Some of the people who were shot and injured never received professional medical attention. As a result, they died of those wounds.¹²⁶ One such person is the father of Reverend Thabo Mpotla. Reverend Mpotla is still bitter about what happened to his

¹²³ “At the house of cowards there is no moaning, heroes’ house there is always moaning. This means that if you are a coward you would have less challenges, but if you are a hero you would always be faced with difficult challenges.” Freely Translated.

¹²⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2005.

¹²⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboletla village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Bishop Taba Mofutsanyana, a minister of religion at Bluegum Bosch, 03/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

¹²⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboletla village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu, 19/09/2001.

father and blamed the government for his death. Thabo Mpotla, a minister of religion at Tseki village, described how his father lost his life, as follows:

“My father was badly shot and refused to go to the hospital because he was afraid that he would be arrested. He stayed at home with that degenerating wound and my mother had to look after him. The wound became so worse that the whole house was smelling, but my father still refused to go to the hospital and opted to die of this wound. He passed away in early 1952. Seeing my father going through that pain hurt me so bad that even today I still blame the government for his death and they must compensate us now.”¹²⁷

The remonstrance of the Basotho against the cattle culling can only be understood when judged against the value they attached to their cattle.¹²⁸ The Basotho value the cattle so much that they would rather die defending their cattle than just letting them go. Despite the fact that it was alleged that they were the most peaceful of the blacks, the Basotho refused to accept the government’s measure to halt land deterioration in Witsieshoek.¹²⁹ The main problem was that the measures involved reducing the number of head of cattle a person had to own. The culling of the cattle was unacceptable to the Basotho. The great Paulus Howell Mopeli, the Paramount Chief who brought Basotho to Witsieshoek, once described how important cattle are to the Basotho nation, as follows:

“Cattle are my bank, and money is useless to me for it does not give birth as cows do, every year; it cannot confirm marriage; it cannot serve at any ceremony. From cattle I get meat, hides to make blankets and I would rather have my beast

¹²⁷ Personal collection, transcript interview with Rev. Thabo Mpotla, a minister of religion at Tseki village, 20/09/2001.

¹²⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu, 19/09/2001.

¹²⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Tsebelo Morie Joas, a retired school principal from Monontsha Village, 11/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu, 19/09/2001.

on its own than to slaughter it.”¹³⁰

The government unfortunately did not understand how deeply rooted the value the Basotho attach to their cattle and to their tradition of authority. Even to this day the Basotho still have a great respect and love for their cattle, hence expressions such as *Kgomo tseo le manamane a tsona*,¹³¹ *Re boka dikgomo Morena*,¹³² *Kgomo modimo o nko e metsi*¹³³ and many other such expressions.¹³⁴

Cattle ownership gives meaning, purpose and substance to the existence of people steeped in an agrarian tradition. Historians and anthropologists have written extensively about the significance of cattle to the African, in this case the Mosotho. Their conclusions frequently suggest that it is a matter of cattle avarice, which they believe is inherent among the Africans.¹³⁵ However, this view does not take economic, religious and social factors into account. To this day, cattle have a religious significance for the African because when a person dies, a cow is slaughtered and its blood is spilled to accompany the deceased. Furthermore, cattle serve as a link between the living and the dead. And a cow is also slaughtered for the purposes of cleansing after one has lost a partner or has experienced misfortunes. African Traditional Religion devotees offer cattle in ancestral worship as a sacrifice to appease the spirits of the dead. Furthermore,

¹³⁰ Wits, Acc. A947, Mopeli-Paulus, ‘The Cattle and the Land’, as quoted by M. S. Rakometsi, The Witsieshoek Rebellion, unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Natal, 1992.

¹³¹ “Those cows and their calves.” Freely Translated.

¹³² “We honor the cattle my lord.” Freely Translated.

¹³³ “God with the watery nose.” Freely Translated.

¹³⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu, 19/09/2001.

¹³⁵ Matli, M., Native Policy, Management and their Impact on Tribal Society: The Witsieshoek Native Reserve, 1907-1951, Unpublished Master’s Thesis, University of the Free State, 1998.

in traditional courts, those who were found guilty were fined heads of cattle.

Socioeconomically, the possession of many cattle, regardless of their pedigree was and it is to many Basotho, in rural areas, a sign of wealth and social position. In most traditional, and even some modern African societies, cattle change hands between in-laws as *mahadi*.¹³⁶ Therefore, any attempts to reduce the number of cattle an individual possesses, is tantamount to asking someone to surrender his or her wallet or bank account. The Basotho trust and cherish the cow, for to them it is *kgomo kopanya ditjhaba*.¹³⁷

6.7 Conclusion

What happened at Namoha was, what can be called, a spontaneous tragedy. It was not planned by any person or group. The government or the police never declared or planned to attack the Basotho. Likewise, the Basotho never planned to attack the police. The build-up to the Namoha clash and the clash itself were as a result of a misunderstanding between the Basotho and the government. At Namoha the police were merely doing their duty, which was to deliver the subpoenas and disperse the crowd as the gathering was illegal. The Basotho's insistence that they would only disperse after their leaders had returned was unfortunate as they expected that the police will leave them alone. Their leaders also ill-advised them that the police would not shoot them if they refused to disperse. That, as it turned out, proved to be tragic as they were shot at and some people were killed.

Regardless of what happened at Namoha, some of the Basotho claimed to have felt vindicated and victorious, despite all the losses. Their voice was heard at the price of their blood. Those who died were seen as martyrs by those along whom they had

¹³⁶ The term implies a "marriage dowry." Freely Translated.

¹³⁷ "Cow brings nations together, meaning joining different families in marriage." Freely Translated.

fought. Following the Battle nothing was said about the cattle culling. The government's silence on this issue confirmed in the Basotho eyes the earlier suspicions that the government's intention was to dispossess them. The argument which was put forth was that if the Trust was necessary, then it should have continued even after the Battle. If this was not the case, as it happened, then Witsieshoek would have experienced serious soil erosion. This perception was not entirely correct as the government could have abandoned the plan because it was not worth pursuing, following the unrest and disturbances.

The reaction of the white community in adjacent areas was understandable. The strained relations between the Basotho and their white neighbours did not last long, according to the informants. Even before the completion of the trial of the *Lingangele* members, the relations had returned to normal. This showed that the reaction of the white community was based on emotion of the moment and was aimed at the action and not at the Basotho as people. The imprisonment of some of the *Lingangele* members played a big role to reconcile the Basotho and the white people. It was understood that those people who were responsible for the Namoha incident had been arrested and would pay for their actions. However, to some Basotho the conviction of the *Lingangele* was an unfair act on the side of the government as they believed that they did nothing wrong.

CHAPTER 7

THE TRIAL AND CONVICTION OF THE *LINGANGELE*

7.1 Introduction

This chapter revolves around the course of the trial and the sentencing of the *Lingangele* as told by the informants and supported by written sources. The chapter describes how some of the accused were arrested and how they felt during the course of the trial, especially after some of them turned state witnesses. The evidence presented by some of the policemen and some of the accused is recounted in this chapter. The Judge's remarks and decision on the case are also related in this chapter. The impact of the trial on the life of the Basotho in general and how the Paramount Chief dealt with the aftermath of the trial are as well captured later in the chapter.

7.2 Preparations for the trial

Following the Namoha confrontation the police began hunting down the suspects and arresting them. More police reinforcements were also brought to Witsieshoek. One hundred and forty arrived on Tuesday, 28 November 1950 after an all night race from Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and other surrounding towns.¹ It took the police three weeks to arrest the suspects. Because of the large number of suspects and the seriousness of the case, the suspects were taken to Harrismith cells where they waited for the trial to begin. It took the state six months to prepare for the trial.² An informant, Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, who claim that he was not a member of the *Lingangele*, but was arrested and sentenced to a prison term, recounted how he was arrested as follows:

¹ The Eastern Province Herald, 29 November 1950.

² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabolela village, 21/03/2002.

“I was present at Namoha, though I was not there to attend the meeting. When the police arrived, I stood at a distance from where the gathering was and watched what would happen when the police confronted the crowd. I did not know how the clash happened, but when the first shot was fired I ran away leaving behind my bicycle. *Ke ile ka hla ka matha la Ntshwekge, etswe ha bo boi ha ho lluwe.*³ I arrived home safe and thought everything was right. However, the next day on my way to work I met a group of policemen who asked me to unwrap the white cloth I was wearing to protect my hairstyle. I did as I was ordered and when they could not find any wound or a fresh scar, they took out a long list of names of people. Those were the names of the people who had been seen at Namoha and those who were known members of the *Lingangele*. Unfortunately, my name was on the list and I was arrested on the spot. The reason why my name appeared on that list was because I was spotted at Namoha by the police, although I had gone there after attending the Commission’s hearing. In the police van I found other people, and the police moved around with us as they searched for more suspects.”⁴

Another informant, Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, who also served time in prison and was an active member of the *Lingangele* recalled how he landed in custody after the Namoha Battle. His arrest took place two days after the Battle at his own house after he refused to go to hospital to receive medical attention for the wound he sustained during the Battle:

“I was shot on the thigh at Namoha. After the fighting had stopped, I was helped by a friend who carried me home. First, I wanted to run away, but I changed my mind as I thought I would not be arrested. I did not want to go to the hospital either because I thought if I went there I would be arrested, so I stayed at home. Unfortunately, the police informers reported me to the police. Soon thereafter the hospital staff came to my house to take me to the hospital, but I refused. A few moments later they came with the

³ “I ran Ntshwekge’s race, because in the coward’s house there are no cries. This means to run very fast from an incident, because if you are a coward you will always run away from the issues, thus you would always be safe.” Freely Translated.

⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

police and forcefully took me to the hospital. At the hospital, the nurses just applied cream on my wound and dressed it. Thereafter, I was sent to Harrismith prison cells. In prison nobody cared for my wound, but fortunately it healed in due course. I was very bitter about the treatment I received in the prison cells and to those who informed the police about me. But what annoyed me most was those who betrayed us. My arrest and what transpired during the trial made me never to trust a human being again.”⁵

After a number of people had been arrested, the state began with the preparation for the trial. Before the trial could begin, as early as January 1951, Mr. H.M. Basner, representing the accused, reported in the Harrismith magistrate’s court that he was receiving death threats from anonymous whites. Consequently he applied for a change of venue to either Witsieshoek, where the Basotho lived, or to Bloemfontein, where proper facilities existed. He indicated that he had applied for police protection but he had up to that far received no reply.⁶ The application to change venues was refused on the grounds that Witsieshoek did not have either a gaol large enough to accommodate the prisoners or a court room bigger than that at Harrismith. As regards Bloemfontein, it was claimed that the available court rooms would be in full use, and no alternative arrangements could be made.⁷

During the preparatory examination of the allegation of public violence, the suspects were granted bail of twenty pounds each, with the exception of those who were labelled dangerous to public safety.⁸ When they had to appear in court, the accused, together

⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 29/08/2002.

⁶ The Star, 12 January 1951; Rakometsi, M.S., Witsieshoek Rebellion (1940-1950): A Community in Crisis. Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Natal, 1992. p. 114.

⁷ Rakometsi, p.114; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 29/08/2002.

⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 29/08/2002.

with their supporters, were ferried from Witsieshoek to Harrismith by busses and lorries. Kama Twala, who was a businessman and a member of the *Lingangele*, and was fortunate not to be arrested, provided the buses.⁹ Everyday of the trial many people would gather around the court. The large gatherings of the Basotho outside the magistrate's court every time the court was in session, showed the amount of curiosity and solidarity they were prepared to pledge with the accused. Those people could not be accommodated in the court room because all the available seating accommodation in the court were taken up by white people. The security was always very tight.¹⁰

Furthermore, during the trial preparation more and more people were being arrested while some were released. Some of the leaders who were not arrested disappeared and those who were arrested did not mention them.¹¹ But Abia Molaba, Abraham Makabate and Phillip Moteka handed themselves to the police against the advice of the attorney. According to one informant, Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Nchabeng village, these people did not want to be outside while their colleagues were languishing in prison.¹² Some of the suspects amongst the accused turned state witnesses and helped

⁹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Nchabeng village, 18/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 29/08/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Morie Joas Tsebela, a retired principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

¹⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Morie Joas Tsebela, a retired principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Maabia Molaba, an ordinary Mosotho from Matsieng village, 19/09/2001.

¹¹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Nchabeng village, 18/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

¹² Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Maabia Molaba, an ordinary Mosotho from Matsieng village, 19/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection,

the police in identifying all those who were present at the assembly or took part in the activities of the *Lingangele*. Those who turned state witnesses pointed out only those who were arrested and did not inform the police of those who had escaped arrest.¹³

Harry Mothibi, who was a member of the *Lingangele*, blamed their conviction partly on those who turned state witnesses, because they wanted to avoid punishment. He felt that it would have been difficult for the state to convict them had it not been for the help of those who turned state witnesses. He and others could not understand why those men turned against them when they were all members of the *Lingangele* and had fought side by side during the Battle. What angered them more was that the state witnesses were never punished.¹⁴ He related his feelings as follows:

“Those people who turned state witnesses were the ones who cost us the case. Had we stuck together as we had during the resistance, we would have won the case with ease. We were sold out by the very same people we were condemned with. In exchange for selling us out, they were pardoned. For identification purposes, we were paraded outside for the state witnesses to point out those who had took part in the proceedings of the meeting or were active members of the *Lingangele*. Most of us were sentenced because of those sellouts. But, surprisingly, they received nothing except pardon from the government and they remained as poor as they were. So what they did to us did not benefit them any way. When the trial started we all entered a plea of not guilty to all the charges because we believed that we were innocent as the police were the ones who had attacked us in our own backyard. If there was justice, the police should have been the ones accused of violence and murder of innocent men and women

tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

¹³ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Nchabeng village, 18/04/2002.

¹⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 29/08/2002. Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

of Witsieshoek.”¹⁵

7.3 The proceedings of the trial

The trial of the accused Basotho began on 1 May 1951, six months after the Battle had taken place. Only ninety-seven¹⁶ of those accused (one hundred and nine), stood trial and the rest were released. The accused faced three charges. First, the contravention of the provisions of the Proclamation that there should be no assembly of more than five people; second, they violently clashed with the police and people lost their lives; and third, they refused to obey the Paramount Chief.¹⁷ A separate charge was laid against Mopelinyane for having allowed an illegal meeting at his kraal.¹⁸ All the accused pleaded not guilty to all the charges. The state had lined up ninety-two witnesses, among them was the Basotho Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli.¹⁹

Mr. Justice E.M. de Beer, the then Judge President of the Orange Free State, popularly known to the Basotho as Judge *Tibere*²⁰, presided over the case with Messrs. P.H de Villiers and B.J.G. de Swardt, both former magistrates and assessors. Messrs. B.G. van der Walt, senior professional assistant to the Attorney-General, and N.J. de R. Kotze,

¹⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

¹⁶ Chronicle, 10 May 1951.

¹⁷ Unisa, Acc. 219, The Charge laid by the Public Prosecutor, 1 May 1951.

¹⁸ Unisa, Acc. 219, The Charge laid by the Public Prosecutor, 1 May 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

¹⁹ Chronicle, 5 May 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong Village, 25/09/2001.

²⁰ This was how Basotho pronounced the surname of Mr. Justice De Beer.

professional assistant to the Attorney-General, conducted the prosecution. Advocate L.O. Miller, advised by Mr. H.M. Basner, both of Johannesburg, appeared for all the accused.²¹ According to the informants, they trusted Mr. Basner and found him to be a very intelligent lawyer who had successfully helped them with many cases in the past. Therefore, with Mr. Basner once again representing them, the Basotho expected to win the case against the state.²²

The delay in starting the trial was also as a result of the accused not having enough funds to pay their legal fee. The accused claimed that they did not have enough money as their stock had been culled and the season had been bad.²³ When the trial was in its sixteenth week, the defence council requested the postponement of the trial to enable the accused to accumulate enough funds for their defence. They pointed out that the instructing attorney, Mr. Basner, had expected that the trial would last ten weeks.²⁴

However, the request was rejected on the grounds that at the beginning of the trial the Judge had given the accused and their council a month's postponement to raise the necessary funds. The Judge completely rejected all the allegations by the accused that they had been intimidated by the rangers when they had tried to sell their cattle to raise

²¹ Harrismith Chronicle, vol. 49, No. 2459, 5 May 1951.

²² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

²³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 28/08/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong Village, 25/09/2001.

²⁴ Rand Daily Mail, 15 August 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 28/08/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

the necessary funds. He made it clear that no further postponements would be granted to raise funds.²⁵ The *Lingangele* supporters and a number of the Basotho and a few sympathetic whites, who had shops in the Reserve, contributed funds to pay for the accused legal fees. Funds were also sought from the Basotho who were working in the mines in Johannesburg.²⁶

During the proceedings of the trial, a number of policemen, who were present at Namoha, were called in to give evidence. Major Terblanche, who led the police to Namoha stated that he moved into the Reserve in November 1950 with reinforcements numbering about fifty-eight men and three officers.²⁷ He indicated that he undertook to serve four subpoenas to the concerned persons on the morning of 27 November 1950. Major Terblanche explained that he had, throughout the time before the clash, cautioned his men to avoid anything that might lead to bloodshed. He also said that he instructed his men that they should under no circumstances use live ammunition unless ordered to do so by himself. Major Terblanche further stated that when they approached the gathering there was no singing at all; that the singing only started when the Basotho saw them. According to him, the Basotho were the first ones to fire shots in the direction of the police and the police merely reacted in defence.²⁸

²⁵ Rand Daily Mail, 15 August 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 28/08/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Morie Joas Tsebela, a retired principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001.

²⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Morie Joas Tsebela, a retired principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001.

²⁷ Harrismith Chronicle, vol. 49, No. 2459, 5 May 1951.

²⁸ Harrismith Chronicle, vol. 49, No. 2459, 5 May 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Morie Joas Tsebela, a retired principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 28/08/2002.

Under cross examination by Mr. Miller, Major Terblanche said that he had been a major since 1946 and had never before ordered policemen to open fire on other people. He also denied that he had at any time threatened to sweep the Reserve with firearms, but admitted that he had used the following words to Mr. Basner, “you are going to talk to those people. Tell them to stop their nonsense. You know me well, I am a police officer who has never lost a battle.”²⁹ The Major further stated that the attack of the Basotho came as a complete surprise to him as they had hitherto treated him with the greatest possible respect.³⁰ Under cross-examination by Mr. Basner, Major Terblanche said that Witsieshoek was an exemplary reserve, and that he could not recall any case of assault on Europeans before that day.³¹ In his evidence Major Terblanche blamed the *Lingangele* for the bloodshed at Namoha, but under cross examination he admitted having used words that were very sharp and provocative. The evidence by other policemen were almost similar to that of the Major’s and all put blame on the Basotho, specifically the *Lingangele*, for the clash.³²

In the process of the trial, the court heard that the Basotho were the ones who fired the

²⁹ Harrismith Chronicle, Vol. 49, No. 2459, 5 May 1951.

³⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 28/08/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Morie Joas Tsebela, a retired principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001.

³¹ The Star, 12 May 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

³² The Star, 12 May 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 28/08/2002.

first shot.³³ Constable J.J. Kotze, in giving evidence said that he heard Major Terblanche giving the order to charge. But before they could move, a native pulled out a revolver and fired several shots at Lieutenant du Plooy.³⁴ However, there was no evidence presented that the Basotho fired shots at the police. Constable Kotze went on to say that another native spoke to the Major in a threatening manner. He stated that the Basotho had long prepared themselves for the confrontation with the police and there was a talk of war among the Basotho. He further stated that at the gathering, the crowd was sullen, hostile and were armed with traditional weapons.³⁵

The only black policeman at Namoha, Constable Ntsane Holomo Mopeli, in giving evidence said that he was a sub-chief of the Mopeli tribe, of which all the Blacks appearing were members. Ntsane Mopeli said that he had lived in Witsieshoek for all his life and has never experienced what happened at Namoha. He further said that it was not customary for either men or women bearing arms, such as guns, to attend a *pitso*³⁶. Thus the Namoha *pitso* that led to a bloodshed was not a tribal meeting but a political gathering. He stated that he was beaten and his arm broken after entering a crowd on his superior's orders. The intention was to look for four men for whom the police had subpoenas and to identify any others whom he might know. When he got up, he saw that a serious fight between the police the Basotho had started and he ran away from the scene of the fight as he was unarmed.³⁷

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Chronicle, 12 May 1951.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Traditional gathering." Freely Translated. Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Morie Joas Tsebela, a retired principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 28/08/2002.

³⁷ The Star, 12 May 1951.

Under cross-examination by Mr. Basner, Constable Ntsane said that he heard no shooting until after he was attacked and the general fight had started. He also said that he did not approve of the Trust. He indicated that he owned 500 sheep, 30 heads of cattle and 28 goats, and his wool cheque last season was four hundred pounds. Therefore, he was not prepared to lose any of his livestock. However, he always tried to protect them through peaceful means. Constable Ntsane also denied the charge that there was hostility between him and the tribe because of the special privileges that were granted to him by the Additional Native Commissioner.³⁸

Constable Ntsane's testimony showed that the Trust was not welcomed by all livestock owners in Witsieshoek. He also admitted, contrary to testimonies by other policemen, that the first shot came from the police side.³⁹ Whether some of the Basotho were armed with guns or not, the post-mortem revealed that none of the dead policemen had bullet wounds, and also the injured policemen had no bullet wounds.⁴⁰ Moreover, none of the documents consulted reported that guns or ammunitions were discovered either at the battle scene or in the houses of the *Lingangele* leaders after the police had searched their houses. Furthermore, according to the informants, stories of gun running and use during the struggle against the cattle culling and the subsequent battle, were incorrect. They used, even though the possibility of gun owning could not be ruled out, sticks, stones, and sickles.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ The Star, 12 May 1951.

⁴¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong Village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Morie Joas Tsebela, a retired principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 28/08/2002.

Harry Mothibi recalled that Constable Ntsane Mopeli and many others, although they hated the *Lingangele*, were pleased that the government halted the cattle culling after the Battle. He further stated that from the way Ntsane presented his evidence, it was obvious that he was happy that the *Lingangele* would be locked up, and that his position would not be threatened.⁴²

Several more witnesses gave evidence of what occurred at Namoha. Paulus Setai stated that he was one of the messengers sent to meet Major Terblanche when he came through the 'neck' with the police. He described how Major Terblanche was alleged to have followed closely on their heels when they returned to the meeting. He then described how Major Terblanche drew his revolver and shot Sejeso Dhlamini, who was sitting on a three-legged stool.⁴³ Cross examined by Mr. B.G. van der Walt, Setai stated that he had thrown stones himself. He had, however, only done that when he realised that he was in the fighting crowd. He denied that they knew of the arrival of the police and averred that the *setjhaba*⁴⁴ had sent them to meet the policemen and find out what their mission was. Setai also alleged that they intended dispersing after they had, as usual at meetings, said their last prayers.⁴⁵ Harry Mothibi remembered that Setai said several times that his head was in a whirl, as he was cross-examined, and he could not remember. However, the cross examination continued and Setai collapsed later during

⁴² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

⁴³ The Star, 16 May 1951.

⁴⁴ "The nation." Freely Translated.

⁴⁵ The Star, 16 May 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

the day due to fatigue causing the court to adjourn.⁴⁶

One of the accused who gave evidence was Paulus Mpheteng, a secretary of the *Lingangele*. In giving testimony he said that Chief Charles Mopeli had appointed him secretary of the tribe. He said again that he had never heard Mopelinyane, Atwell Mopeli or Albert Mopeli say that Mr. Basner had told them to cut fences and burn plantations as the Paramount Chief pointed out earlier.⁴⁷ Mpheteng further stated that while he and Letsie Mopeli were appearing in the Harrismith's magistrate Court on 9 August 1950, Major Terblanche said to them:

“You two young men are kicking up trouble, and I want to warn you. You have split the tribe into two sections. Go and tell your people not to kick up a row and think they have defeated the government. The government is very powerful and cannot be defeated. One day it will sweep the whole Reserve with firearms. I have 200 men and Sten guns, and if you keep on with your trouble I will use them.”⁴⁸

Major Terblanche reacted to the accusation by saying that he does not remember threatening any residents of Witsieshoek. He indicated that he lived peacefully with the Basotho, and if he did say such words they were aimed only at deterring the two from continuing to undermine the government.⁴⁹ According to some informants, Mpheteng's evidence was so powerful that the accused believed that they would walk free.⁵⁰ He was

⁴⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

⁴⁷ Chronicle, 15 June 1951.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Chronicle, 15 June 1951 Harrismith Chronicle, Vol. 49, No. 2459, 5 May 1951; The Star, 12 May 1951.

⁵⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of the interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2004; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

allegedly showing that the police, who were led by Major Terblanche, must carry the blame as they allegedly planned the attack long before the incident at Namoha.⁵¹ Harry Mothibi, one of the accused, recalled:

“As Mpheteng was giving evidence and stating how the Major had planned to wipe out Basotho in Witsieshoek, we felt very strong that we were winning the case. Those words which were stated by Mpheteng were the same as he and Letsie had told us before the Namoha battle. However, the harder we tried the harder it became for us to win the case. The sellouts played a major role in us losing the case. As the trial progressed it became clear that the state and our paramount chief wanted to see us locked up at all costs, hence the long trial. I do not think the trial should have lasted that long. But the truth of the matter is that we were also fighting hard to win the case, and I think that was what made things difficult for the judge to reach the verdict easily.”⁵²

Some of the people who were arrested and convicted felt hard done. According to one of such persons, Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, he was never part of the whole campaign against the cattle culling. He felt that he was arrested just because he happened to be spectator at the scene and was spotted by the police. Kalibe Kele still regrets that day he went to Namoha against his wife's advice. During the trial he alleged that he tried to put his case that he was not at Namoha to attend a meeting, but was looking for his lost horse. His plea that he was not part of the Namoha meeting, however, was not entertained and fellow accused never bothered either to confirm or deny his *Lingangele* membership.⁵³ Kalibe Kele described how restless and

⁵¹ Chronicle, 12 May 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of the interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabolela village, 21/03/2004; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Morie Joas Tsebela, a retired principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001.

⁵² Personal collection, tape-recording of the interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabolela village, 21/03/2004.

⁵³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

regretful he was during the trial:

“I was arrested and accused of being the *Lingangele* spy just because I was at the offices where the Commission was sitting and happened to leave for Namoha thereafter before the police. During the trial when some people were released, I hoped that I would too. However, I was one of the unlucky ones who remained because the evidence against me was very strong, even though it was a fabricated one. I had nothing to do with the *Lingangele* and its activities. During the trial I stood up and tried to defend myself. I explained to the judge that I was wrongful arrested, that my reason for being there at Namoha was that I was looking for my lost horse and I thought I would spot it there. I tried to explain that I stood at the distance and watched, and that I had no part in the assembly. However, my plea was ignored and what angered me further was the fact that my co-accused who knew very well that I had nothing to do with the activities of the *Lingangele* did not even try to help me. I finally gave up and accepted my situation, after all *motswalle wa leshodu ke leshodu* and *leshodu ke le tshwerweng*⁵⁴. These Sesotho expressions were true to me. I could not prove my innocence and had to serve a prison sentence.”⁵⁵

In the fifth week of the trial, thirteen of the accused were released. On 8 June 1951, Mr. B.G. van der Walt, senior council for the Crown, informed the Court that he intended to withdraw both charges against thirteen of the accused on the grounds of lack of evidence against them. These were M. Mofokeng, William Ndaba, P. Hlatswayo, Amon Ngubeni, S. Moteka, Papinyane Buthelezi, Daniel Mabuya, M. Koma, F. Maboya, Sergeant Mafisa, R. Makapa, Ngosi Peete, and M. Moeketsi.⁵⁶ This left eighty-three men and women still appearing.

⁵⁴ “A friend of a thief is a thief, and an apprehended thief is a thief.” Freely Translated.

⁵⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

⁵⁶ Chronicle, 10 June 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of the interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabolela village, 21/03/2004; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

Testifying in defence, Mr. Basner argued that the Basotho were a very peaceful people. At previous gatherings and at Namoha the crowd was cheerful. That was obvious because women were singing, dancing, ululating and the men would normally shout *pula, pula, kgotso, nala*.⁵⁷ He emphasised that it was completely untrue that the crowd was ever sullen, hostile and armed. Continuing in his defence, Basner further stated that there had never been a threat of bloodshed from the anti-Trust Basotho. The threats which they made were merely meaningless and flowery language.⁵⁸ However, as pointed out earlier, just as the Basotho had accused Major Terblanche of threatening them, they were also accused threatening the authorities. Their actions at culling camps, at the Commission's hearing and at the Namoha meeting were provocative and not as innocent as their defence claimed.

Furthermore, from the time the Judge-President, Mr. Justice de Beer, began summing up his judgement on the Witsieshoek trial, he allegedly received death threats. Acting on the information received, the police provided the judge with an armed guard every night at his railway coach. It was claimed that one of the telephone callers, speaking in Afrikaans, but obviously a black, said: "You are now dealing with the tribe, but when this case is over the tribe will deal with you."⁵⁹ The threats made to the Judge showed how serious the situation was in Witsieshoek, and that the Basotho, contrary to the reports that they were peaceful, were also contributing to the tension in the Reserve.

Chief Charles Mopeli was also called to testify against the accused. He told the court that as a Paramount Chief he ordered his people to comply with the law and avoid

⁵⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of the interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2004; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001. "Rain, rain, peace and prosperity." Freely Translated.

⁵⁸ Chronicle, 12 May 1951.

⁵⁹ The Star, 7 November 1951.

confrontation at all costs. He further indicated that he did not intend to fight the culling if the government does not agree to halt it. In fact, he welcomed and accepted the idea of cattle culling for a better future for his people. However, according to him, his people were led astray by instigators who were opposed to the culling. Thus his father's people died because of those instigators and, therefore, they should be punished accordingly.⁶⁰ Chief Charles Mopeli was very adamant that the accused should be found guilty and punished accordingly as that would deter others from doing the same thing in the future. According to him, it should be proven beyond doubt that crime does not pay.⁶¹ One informant, Harry Mothibi, who was present when the Paramount Chief gave evidence said that he cannot recall all the Chief's exact words, but he surprised all of them when he disowned them.⁶² The Paramount Chief was quoted as having said before the Judge:

“Bana ke bana baka, mme ke a barata, ke lekile ka makgetlo
ho ba kgalemela, empa ba hana ho mamela ka ha ba dumetse ho
kgeloswa. Jwale ke ba lahlela letsohong la mmuso, o tla bona o
etsang ka bona, bona ba lokelwa ke kahlolo. Kahlolo ya bona e
lokela ho ba mohlala ho ba bang hore ho se ikobele molao ha ho
thuse letho, ho lebisa ntlwana tshwana. Le ha ho le jwalo, ba
fositse, ke ba kopela kahlolo e seng boima haholo. Mme ke re ho
bona ke tla ba amohela kaofela mona hae ha ba phethile kahlolo
ya bona, ka ntle feela ho baetapele ba *Lingangele*.”⁶³

⁶⁰ *Chronicle*, 12 May 1951; *Personal collection*, tape-recording of the interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2004; *Personal collection*, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

⁶¹ *Chronicle*, 12 May 1951; *Personal collection*, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2004; *Personal collection*, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

⁶² *Personal collection*, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2004.

⁶³ *Ibid.* “These are my children and I like them, I tried several times to call them to order but they would not listen as they allowed themselves to be misled. Now I hand them over to the government to decide their fate. Nevertheless, I ask you to be lenient with my children who have erred, because most of them had been misled. Therefore, I would welcome them back in the Reserve after completing their sentences, except the leaders and the dissidents.” Freely

The final comments of the Paramount Chief disappointed all of those who were convicted. They were disappointed and alleged that as the Basotho they knew that the Paramount Chief was opposed to the culling and had earlier told the court that he was not in favour of the cattle culling.⁶⁴ However, the Paramount Chief had no means of refusing as the instruction came from the above and was afraid to openly object to the Trust. The Paramount Chief's testimony and the comments he made during the trial were influenced mainly by two things: his strained relationship with Mopelinyane, whom he wanted to see driven out of Witsieshoek, and they were also an attempt to impress the white people at the expense of his people.⁶⁵

7.4 The passing of the sentences

Before the Judge could pass the sentence, he commended the manner in which Chief Charles Mopeli had cooperated with the law and how he tried hard to protect his subjects.⁶⁶ The Judge said:

“Never before in my many years of experience, first as an advocate and later as a judge, have I heard such a sincere, such a well worded and such a dramatic appeal for his

Translated.

⁶⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2004; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001.

⁶⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Morie Joas Tsebela, a retired principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Nchabeng village, 18/04/2002.

⁶⁶ The Friend, 17 November 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2004.

people from a man who has, throughout the trial and before it, been slandered, betrayed, attacked and lied about by these people he is now appealing for Paramount Chief Mopeli is an honest and honourable man, whose integrity I think nobody will ever again, after his appeal, be able to question.”⁶⁷

These utterances were confirmed by District Commandant of police, A.L. Clarke, who had been Commandant at Witsieshoek for more than twenty years. He said: “a greater man, and a finer gentleman, of any colour, I have ever met.”⁶⁸ However, according to the informants, the comments of both the Judge and the Commandant were only made because the Paramount Chief recommended harsh punishment for the *Lingangele*. The informants further claimed that the general tendency was for the officials to commend people only if they seemed to support their cause, without questioning its relevance and importance.⁶⁹ However, on the other hand, the Chief could have been sincere about what he said and not saying it to impress. According to Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, the Paramount Chief was against the Trust and, yet he always tried to raise his concerns through peaceful means and never condoned the actions of the *Lingangele*. This was obvious in 1947 when he sent a delegation and sponsored a petition to Minister H.F. Verwoerd, the then Minister of Native Affairs.⁷⁰

The Judge also admitted before passing the sentence, with respect to the proceedings

⁶⁷ The Friend, 17 November 1951.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2004; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Morie Joas Tsebela, a retired principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001.

⁷⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

of the case, that the case was the most complicated and longest in his career that he had ever dealt with.⁷¹ What added to the complication of the case was the way in which the defendants claimed to have acted in self-defence.⁷² Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, recalled:

“Rona re ne re ituletse re sa senye letho, ho fihlela mapolesa
a fihla a re lwantsha. Ke nnete re hanne ho tsamaya, hobane re
ne re dutse ha bo rona, jwale re ne re tshwanetse ho ya ho kae?”⁷³

The accused recalled that they did not think that they would lose the case. They claimed that the Trust was not a law sanctioned by the Paramount Chief. Before the Trust, the Paramount Chief had control over the land and if there was something to be done that would affect the community, he would call a *pitso*⁷⁴. But, according to the informants, the Trust had disregarded the powers of the Chief.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, the *Lingangele* lost on account of the meeting contravening the proclamation. Again, some informants who were opposed to the *Lingangele* claimed that they had contravened Paulus Mopeli's *Traktaat*⁷⁶ which stipulated that they had to keep peace, pay tax and there should be no

⁷¹ Unisa, Acc. 219. The Witsieshoek Trial, Judge's Remarks in passing sentence, pp.8-9.

⁷² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

⁷³ “We were sitting peacefully, until police came and started the fight. It is true that we refused to disperse as we were at our home where we always gather, where were we supposed to go?” Freely Translated.

⁷⁴ “A traditional gathering.” Freely Translated.

⁷⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2004; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

⁷⁶ An agreement entered into between Chief Paulus Mopeli, on behalf of his people and President Brand, representing the Orange Free State government. The Agreement allowed the Basotho to settle in Witsieshoek under certain conditions.

bloodshed. However, the fact that there had been an illegal gathering at Namoha, which resulted in the loss of lives, the *Lingangele* were guilty and, as such, they had to be punished. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that the Basotho had ignored the police order to disperse.⁷⁷

The prison sentence was passed on 7 November 1951 on the seventy-five Basotho who were found guilty of public violence and attending an unlawful meeting. Before passing the sentences, the Judge remarked that out of the accused only three had previous convictions and had not committed serious offences. He also advised them that they should return to the Reserve as the Paramount Chief had told them, after serving their sentences and start a new life. The accused received varying prison sentences from six months to four years.⁷⁸

The sentencing caused a huge dissatisfaction among the accused. Some of the accused could not understand why others, especially the leaders of the *Lingangele*, received shorter sentences.⁷⁹ Kalibe Kele, who claimed that he was wrongfully arrested and convicted complained:

“What surprised and infuriated me was the fact that some of the *die voorbok*⁸⁰ got very light sentences. They argued that they were not at the meeting but in Lesotho when the gathering and the the fighting took place. Their testimony was accepted, especially

⁷⁷ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Dimakatso Masamsone Sethunya, an ordinary Mosotho from ha-Sethunya village, 05/04/2002. Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Michael Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Namahadi village, 01/04/2002.

⁷⁸ Unisa, Acc. 219. The Witsieshoek Trial, Judge's Remarks in passing sentence, pp. 8-9.

⁷⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

⁸⁰ “The leaders or the frontrunners.” Freely Translated.

Mopelinyane who faced just one charge, that of allowing a meeting to take place at his kraal. Most of the leaders received sentences ranging from six months and one year together with those whose evidence against them was not that strong. Those who were spotted and identified of being present at the assembly were given three years and those who acted as ‘messengers’ between the Basotho and the police before the violent confrontation were handed four years imprisonment with hard labour.⁸¹

After passing the sentences the Judge commented that the light sentences were due to the statement made by the Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli.⁸² The convicted were sent to different places. Those serving six to twelve months were sent to Bethlehem while those who were sentenced to three years were sent to Bloemfontein. Those who were sentenced to four years were sent to Pietermaritzburg.⁸³

Mopelinyane, the leader of the *Lingangele* and organiser of the illegal gathering, was found guilty of allowing an illegal *pitso* at his kraal in contravention of the provisions of the Proclamation. The Judge found that by this action Mopelinyane had to carry the blame for the Namoha tragedy. However, he was merely convicted for contravening the provisions of the Proclamation and was sentenced to twelve months’ imprisonment with hard labour. According to the Judge, the contents of the stipulations of the Proclamation prohibited a longer sentence. After passing the sentence, the Judge remarked that the maximum sentence he could impose was totally inadequate, but had to adhere to the law and carry it out.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

⁸² Unisa, Acc. 219. The Witsieshoek Trial, Judge’s Remarks in passing sentence, pp. 8-9.

⁸³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002.

⁸⁴ Unisa, Acc. 219. The Witsieshoek Trial, Judge’s Remarks in passing sentence, pp. 8-9.

After serving his sentence, Mopelinyane together with other thirteen persons who were declared dangerous to public safety were banished. They were sent to Nebo which was far away from Witsieshoek. Mopelinyane was never allowed to come back home. In fact, he was not allowed even to visit his family.⁸⁵ The main reason for his banishment was based on the allegation that many people were supporting him and were also beginning to prefer him to be the Paramount Chief. As a result, he thought himself as a rightful incumbent to the throne of Charles Mopeli. He wanted to unseat him because of the support he received from the people. Chief Charles Mopeli was upset about the behaviour of Mopelinyane and had to recommend his removal from the Reserve. His persistent undermining of the authority and the part he played during the cattle resistance now justified his dismissal from the Reserve.⁸⁶

While Mopelinyane was in exile in Nebo he got entangled in the local affairs. This involvement was characterised by activities such as his advice to the local people whenever they contravened the law. Mopelinyane was accused of stirring up troubles in Nebo.⁸⁷ As a result of his actions in Nebo Mopelinyane was transferred to Mafikeng. His people who made contact with him while in Nebo never saw him again or heard anything from him until he passed away on 21 September 1971.⁸⁸ Mopelinyane was buried at his kraal at Namoha in Witsieshoek. His burial service was just an ordinary

⁸⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

⁸⁶ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Nchabeng village, 8/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001.

⁸⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

⁸⁸ Letter of Authority No. 1015/2001, from the Department of Justice, Free State, issued to Tsita Joseph Mopeli, 25/04/2001.

service and some people were even still nervous at his funeral. Most of the informants felt that they would never forget him; how he had sacrificed both his life as well as family comfort for their own sake. Mopelinyane was described as a very friendly person, but very bold and never backed off from what he believed was right. To those who supported him, he was a father, a hero, a champion and a true leader of the people.⁸⁹

The only leaders of the *Lingangele* who received longer prison sentences were Paulus Mpheteng and Phillip Moteka, who were sentenced to four and three years, respectively. They were found guilty of public violence and instigating the people of Witsieshoek to rebel against the government. The reason behind this could have been the fact that Mpheteng was arrested at Namoha a day after the battle, while guarding the corpses.⁹⁰ Indeed this could only mean that he was present at the gathering the previous day, although he denied that he was at the meeting. Therefore, the Judge said that Mpheteng had played a leading role in the affairs of the Reserve and his conduct was responsible, or partly responsible, for the fracas with the police. As for Moteka, who was more than seventy years old and had handed himself to the police and confessed proudly that he was part of the leadership and was present at the meeting. In view of his age, the Judge indicated that he had problems with sentencing him. He nevertheless, did not ignore the fact that Moteka had played a very active role in undermining the government in Witsieshoek.⁹¹

⁸⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

⁹⁰ The Friend, 17 November 1951; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

⁹¹ The Friend, 17 November 1951; Unisa, Acc. 219. The Witsieshoek Trial, Judge's Remarks in passing sentence, pp.8-9; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee

The life in prison was very difficult for most of the *Lingangele* members. To most of them, it was a shock as they never expected to be found guilty. Kalibe Kele, recounted his experience in prison as follows:

“In prison we were treated just like any other prisoners. But in most cases whenever you wanted something or you complained, you would be reminded that you were not in Witsieshoek ‘where you mercilessly killed Lieutenant Jonker’. If one had committed any mistake unintentionally, one would be harshly admonished and reminded that one was doing this because one thought that it was Witsieshoek. We really had a tough time in prison. Another frustrating and painful thing was that we were not allowed to receive food from our visitors and they could not see all of us at one time. We were not even allowed to kiss or shake hands with our partners. There was a fence in Pietermaritzburg prison, which separated us from our visitors and we were given a very short time to speak with them. Fortunately for us we did not spent full duration of our prison sentences but were released earlier, depending on the individuals’ term.”⁹²

After serving their sentences, the *Lingangele* leaders experienced further troubles. They were seen as outcasts and troublemakers, especially by the ‘loyalists’. In fact, some people did not want to be associated with them. The main reason for this was that people feared that if they could be seen in the company of ex-prisoners they might be labelled as such.⁹³ Nonetheless, according to Kalibe Kele, the people still held the

Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

⁹² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Keele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

⁹³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

Lingangele leaders in high esteem. However, he alleged that people were afraid to openly express their support for the *Lingangele*. The Paramount Chief was now in control and had threatened to drive out any person who would start any trouble in Witsieshoek.⁹⁴ Harry Mothibi described his experience after he was released from prison as follows:

“After we were released from jail, life became difficult. We were despised, insulted, mocked and labelled. People were trying to dishearten us and keep us down, but we did not allow this. We managed to make something of ourselves and some of us even lived better than our detractors, despite the fact that we could not be employed anywhere. As people continued taunting us, Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli intervened and rebuked them and said that we fought for everyone. We should, therefore, be respected. This helped a great deal as even our children could now attend schools without being ridiculed.”⁹⁵

7.5 The impact of the trial on the Basotho

The Namoha Battle together with the subsequent trial drained the Basotho's resources. It left them impoverished as most people lost their cattle through theft during the time they were on the run. The Basotho who lost their livestock alleged that they were afraid to report their stolen cattle for fear of being arrested. Thus they decided to give up on their lost livestock. Their horses, too, disappeared because the sound of guns scared them away. Informants alleged that very few people managed to get their horses back.⁹⁶ Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, described the impact the

⁹⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Keele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

⁹⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002.

⁹⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

Battle had on them:

“We sold our cattle in order to cover fees for the lawyers and also to pay for the travelling expenses, as we had to travel to and from Harrismith every day for the entire duration of the case on busses. In other instances other people were sent to Johannesburg to look for more funds, I was one of those people. Fortunately, every time one was sent to Johannesburg, on his return he would bring some money which was collected from those who supported our case.”⁹⁷

Some people were not able to assist financially to the course of the struggle, especially during the trial of the *Lingangele*. This was understandable considering the fact that majority of the people did not have the money. Those who were able to help did so, and that helped the accused to pay for their legal fees. Nonetheless, Mopelinyane complained about the unwillingness of some people to help.⁹⁸ But some people, such as Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, did all that they could to assist. They sold their cattle and travelled to Johannesburg to request for donations.⁹⁹ As not all the people were financially contributing to the trial of the *Lingangele*, Mopelinyane was very angry. He was quoted by Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho of Poelong village, as having said to them when they went to see him in his cell about the situation:

“Ke le fatetse sediba mme le ya nwa ho sona, empa le
ya senya. Banna rekisang diphoofolo tsa lona di nthuse
re lwaneng ntwana ena Jwale le ne le le bonolo le di ntsha
le di fa baditjhaba. Jwale kajeno tjena ha e se e le tsa lona
le bona di le ntle, nna molwanedi wa tsona a di ntshitseng

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001.

⁹⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 21/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

melomong ya ditau, ha di sa nthusa ka letho. Se le di bona e le tsa lona le bana ba lona feela, nna ha le sa nkgopola ka letho. Ke re kare tsietsi ya ka tsietsi ya ka ha le sa na taba le nna. Pelo ya ka e bohloko, le lokela ho nthusa.”¹⁰⁰

The words of Mopelinyane inspired those who heard them to do everything in their power to assist him and the other accused.¹⁰¹ The Battle was also followed by a scarcity of agricultural products because many people were in hiding and still afraid to come back for fear of being arrested. Furthermore, people were mostly concentrating on giving moral support to all those who had been arrested.¹⁰²

The Namoha episode, starting with the resistance to the culling process until the conviction of the *Lingangele*, also created a split among the Basotho people of Witsieshoek. People no longer trusted one another. Those who were for the *Lingangele* were undermining those who were not and vice versa. The Basotho nation in Witsieshoek was filled with paranoia. They were treating each other with suspicion and mistrust. It was now up to the Paramount Chief to use his authority to bring mutual

¹⁰⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2004. “I have dug you a fountain and now you are drinking from it, but you are spoiling it. Sell your cattle and help me fight this battle. You were willing to give them up to the foreigners. Now you are reluctant to help me, their protector, who saved them from the jaws of the lions. You now consider them as belonging to you and your family and you have completely forgotten about me. I have tried several times to put my case but you ignored me. My heart is bleeding, you have to help me.” Freely Translated.

¹⁰¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2004; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001.

¹⁰² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Maboela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

respect and unity among his nation.¹⁰³ Chief Charles Mopeli was aware of the prevailing situation. For this reason, he called a *pitso*. The Paramount Chief's assembly did much to help ease the tension.¹⁰⁴

At the gathering he rebuked all the people and assured those who were members of the *Lingangele* that they would never be discriminated against.¹⁰⁵ At the same gathering, the Paramount Chief informed the Basotho that the sentences received by those arrested were justifiable as they were found guilty of public violence and of organising an illegal gathering. He beseeched his nation to go on with life and develop themselves and their area and keep peace as the great Paulus Mopeli (the Paramount Chief who brought the Basotho to Witsieshoek) had ordered them. The people listened to him and followed his advice, as there was nothing they could do then as those they called their leaders were in prison.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

¹⁰⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2004; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

¹⁰⁵ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Sello Josias Nchabeng, a retired school principal from Ha-Nchabeng village, 18/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

¹⁰⁶ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Banyana Miriam Nchabeng, a retired school principal from Ha-Nchabeng village, 18/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

Chief Charles Ntsane Mopeli now had to rebuild the trust of his people after the Battle of Namoha. That was not an easy task.¹⁰⁷ After the Battle, he was considered by some of the people to be a traitor, a person who sold their brothers and sisters to the white government.¹⁰⁸ The Paramount Chief had lost a lot of respect of many of the people by agreeing to the culling of cattle and by sanctioning the conviction of the *Lingangele*. He was seen by many as a Paramount Chief who no longer ruled according to the wishes of his people and was no longer serving his people's interests but those of the white government. But that attitude did not come into the open after the Battle allegedly for fear of sparking off another confrontation.¹⁰⁹

According to some of the informants, they never forgot what the Paramount Chief did to the course of the struggle against the cattle culling. Reverend Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, said that their obedience to the Paramount Chief after the Battle did not mean that they were now embracing him. But there was a lack of leadership among them as their leaders were in jail and others had run away from the Reserve. Moreover, he claimed that they were afraid to publicly oppose the Paramount

¹⁰⁷ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kaisara Molaba, an ordinary Mosotho from Kgatleng village, 03/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Nerea Mologoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

¹⁰⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Kalibe Kele, an ordinary Mosotho from Mangaung village, 01/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

¹⁰⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Nerea Mologoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

Chief because they feared that they would be victimised.¹¹⁰ Most informants still blamed Chief Charles Mopeli for the conviction of the *Lingangele* and the banning of Mopelinyane. It seemed that their acceptance of peace initiatives was not driven by the fact that they had a change of heart, but that it was due to the position in which they found themselves. For them to have peace they had to suppress their feelings towards the Paramount Chief.¹¹¹ Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, pointed out that it was very difficult for them, but reminded themselves that “a peaceful person remains peaceful.”¹¹² Ntjee Lecheko, who was an active member of the *Lingangele*, said of the Paramount Chief:

“Despite the attitude some of us had towards him and the things he did we all agreed that he was our only paramount chief and we had to respect him for that. We had to somehow agree that the *Lingangele* misled us for the sake of reconciliation, and for the fact that we were afraid that if we denied that they misled us then we might be arrested or we would be denied ‘benefits’ or banished, so we had to agree for the sake of peace. By adopting that attitude, reconciliation was made easier.”¹¹³

The sub-chiefs were also divided on the issue of the culling and the support for the *Lingangele*.¹¹⁴ However, their differences did not come into the open as they were the

¹¹⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

¹¹¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

¹¹² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

¹¹³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

¹¹⁴ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from from Ha-Nchabeng village, 8/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with

leaders of the people and they had to care for both groups. The other reason was that they were afraid to come out to openly defy the Paramount Chief's orders. They did not want to be seen as opposing him. It was only Mopelinyane who openly defied the orders.¹¹⁵ According to the informants, Mopelinyane claimed that the Paramount Chief had agreed to the process of the culling because it was coming from the white government and that the Paramount Chief was afraid to oppose it strongly. He did that because he was afraid that he would be demoted or would be distrusted by the government.¹¹⁶

According to Reverend Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, Mopelinyane's contribution to the struggle against the cattle culling was appreciated by many people. They believed that if it was not for him, they would have lost their cattle. Unlike the other sub-chiefs who kept quite, he was very vocal and that made him to be seen as a trouble-maker by the authorities.¹¹⁷ Kaisara Molaba, an ordinary Mosotho

Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong Village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2004; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kaisara Molaba, an ordinary Mosotho from Kgatleng village, 03/04/2002.

¹¹⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kaisara Molaba, an ordinary Mosotho from Kgatleng village, 03/04/2002.

¹¹⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Tsebelo Moria, a retired school principal from Monontsha village, 11/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, 23/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Nchabeng village, 8/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong Village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Molingoana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2004; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kaisara Molaba, an ordinary Mosotho from Kgatleng village, 03/04/2002.

¹¹⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

from Kgatleng village, said in acknowledging Mopelinyane's contribution:

"Despite all those bitter things, I still believe that had it not been the brevity of Mopelinyane and those who supported him we, Basotho, could not be having the kind and number of livestock we have now. The process of the culling was leading to the point where the government would decide and control how much each person must own and what he or she must own. That could have led to a total destruction of the Basotho's traditional way of life."¹¹⁸

What confirmed that suspicion to him and others was the fact that after the Battle the government never said anything concerning the culling. The Basotho continued to have as many cattle as they wished. The things that were cited as compelling reasons for the culling, such as the idea that the area was overstocked and the soil erosion would destroy the land, never materialised.¹¹⁹ However, this thought could have been inaccurate as the government could have abandoned the betterment measures as it saw no point in pursuing them given the circumstances that were prevailing in the Reserve. After the conviction of the *Lingangele*, in making sure that what happened was not repeated, the Namoha Village was disbanded and the residents were relocated to other areas.¹²⁰ Mmantshepeng Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, who was a resident at Namoha village, remarked:

"We never knew the reason behind this, but we could only speculate that, maybe the government wanted to disperse us

¹¹⁸ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kaisara Molaba, an ordinary Mosotho from Kgatleng village, 03/04/2002.

¹¹⁹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001.

¹²⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief of Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kama Twala, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Nchabeng village, 8/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Rev. Ntjee Lecheko, a minister of religion at Mabilela village, 20/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Koti Mologwana, an ordinary Mosotho from Poelong village, 26/03/2004; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Kaisara Molaba, an ordinary Mosotho from Kgatleng village, 03/04/2002.

so that we should not meet and begin to oppose it again. Or maybe they wanted to protect themselves, as they did not want to remember the name again. It is even possible that they wanted us to forget both about the whole incident and the name Namoha. The other reason could be that the government wanted to end *borena ba Namoha*¹²¹ completely. If the latter was the case, I believe it succeeded.”¹²²

7.6 Conclusion

After the Battle and sentencing of some of the *Lingangele*, the Basotho of Witsieshoek understood that they had lost the battle, and they were not sure now what was going to happen thereafter. They allegedly felt that they had to respect the victors. As the Basotho people, they understood that *ngwana kgotso ha a le bale tsa kgotso*¹²³ and they had to pursue and align themselves with measures of peace. Because of their nature, that was easy to achieve. As a result peace soon returned to Witsieshoek.

The trial of the *Lingangele* brought an end to a stand off between the Basotho of Witsieshoek and the government over the Trust regulations. The trial also signalled the end of the Trust as, thereafter, nothing was said about the continuation of the Trust. In this way, the researcher can, therefore, agree that the government became aware of the mistakes they made in the implementation of the Trust, and therefore, had to abandon it. Unfortunately, that came very late when lives had been lost and some people had been arrested and convicted. In the process the mistrust between the government and the Basotho of Witsieshoek had been created.

The trial further brought division among members of the *Lingangele* as others turned

¹²¹ “Namoha chieftainship.” Freely Translated.

¹²² Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mantshepeng Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 28/03/2002.

¹²³ “A child of peace never forgets matters of peace.” This means a peaceful person would remain peaceful no matter what happened. Freely Translated.

state witnesses. Therefore, this meant the end of the *Lingangele* group because after the trial, members never met in groups as the *Lingangele*. In actual fact, it ceased to exist. The causes of the disappearance of the group were, firstly, the division caused by those who turned state witnesses. Secondly, the varied sentences handed to those convicted sowed dissatisfaction among members. The third reason for the disappearance of the *Lingangele* organization was the discontinuation of the Trust. The fourth reason was the manner in which the Paramount Chief handled the situation in Witsieshoek; that is, he managed to relatively reconcile both the supporters and non supporters of the *Lingangele*.

The banishment of Mopelinyane and other leaders of the *Lingangele* did a lot to contribute to the reconciliation in Witsieshoek. However, that did not make people to forget about him, as even today some people still praise him for what he did for them. The destruction of the Namoha village succeeded only in silencing the people for a time being, but they never forgot what happened at Namoha on 27 November 1950. To some of these people, Namoha is still their home and some still go to the grave of Mopelinyane to pay their respects.

EVALUATION

The thesis is aimed at showing how important oral history is in providing a balanced picture of a community's past. It has argued for the importance of interlinking both written and oral sources. The use of oral sources, as discussed in this study, is valuable. Countless untold topics of historical interest, such as the Namoha Battle in this case, could be fruitfully pursued if the people's memories are tapped. Without the use of orally communicated information, the task of researching these topics can never be successfully undertaken.

The memories and experiences of the Basotho on the Namoha incident would not have been successfully recorded had it not been for the application of oral history methodology. Oral history has provided the researcher with an opportunity and the tools to interact with all people and elicit from them valuable information about the Namoha Battle. The information that was not recorded in the available documents and, which would have disappeared after the old people had died, has been recorded.

Oral history had not only provided the researcher with a deeper understanding and knowledge about the Namoha Battle, but had also given eyewitnesses a chance to share their stories. The eyewitnesses felt esteemed that an historian could be interested in their stories. One informant, Bennett Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, who was a member of the *Lingangele*¹ and took part in its activities, remarked in response to the interview conducted with him, as follows:

“My child, what you are doing is very important, and I feel very honoured to be speaking to you about this. Please go on and speak to other people; do not let anything stop you. We need people like you who are possessive about their tradition. You see we, the Basotho are ashamed of our traditions and we are easily attracted to other people's

¹ “The Agitators.” This was an organisation of people who were opposed to cattle culling in Witsieshoek and was led by Mopelinyane.

traditions because they stick to them and are not labelling them old fashioned. We need not be ashamed of who we are and where we come from. You must encourage other young people also to speak to their elders and record their experiences. This would assist them in times of need. Now I would die a happy man to know that I have shared my knowledge and experience with the future generation.”²

Despite the question of its reliability and availability, oral history remains an additional source for historians in their attempt to construct a more comprehensive picture of the past and as such, is a vital supplement to the official records. Many of the published sources were based solely on reports as reflected in newspapers. All the newspapers that recorded the events in the Witsieshoek Reserve were written and edited outside the Reserve by persons many of whom had spent little time in the area if any. Furthermore, some documents were based on the reports by the Department’s officials who, as a rule it seems, always reported positively about the government’s activities in the Reserve, but negatively about the behaviour of the Basotho. This information, when put together with oral evidence that is gathered from the interviews, provided the writer with a comprehensive picture of what happened in Witsieshoek between 1936 and 1951.

The use of oral history has also provided the writer with the possible cause of the clash between the Basotho and the Union government. From the foregoing discussion, it has become clearer that the whole tragedy was in large part due to a misunderstanding, and poor communication between the government and the Basotho people on Betterment measures.³ To the Basotho it was as if the culling of the cattle was a singular event and it was intended to improve their livestock. Thus when it appears that it would take place

² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Bennett Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 29/08/2001.

³ The Betterment measures, were measures introduced by the government and were aimed at improving land conditions in the Reserves. These included culling of livestock, fencing of the grazing camps, the provision of bulls and the making of contour and diversion banks and prevention of felling of trees.

periodically, they began objecting.

The government seemingly did not properly communicate with the community of the Witsieshoek Reserve its intention to improve the conditions in the Reserve. It did not explain the motivations for the culling of the cattle clearly or in detail. For example, it did not explain what the effects of the cattle culling would be in practice and in the long run. Moreover, the government did not try to rectify its 'careless' communication early on when the Basotho began showing signs of dissatisfaction about the culling process.

A contributing factor to the misunderstanding was the fact that every time the government officials communicated with the Basotho, an interpreter was used. In most cases it appeared that interpreters failed to communicate properly the intentions and implications to the people. It is correctly reported that there was evidence of the acceptance of the initial plans for the fencing of the grazing camps, the provision of bulls and the making of contour and diversion banks. These measures, however, were accepted by the Basotho because they could understand why they were introduced. The culling of the cattle was the major concern.

It is correct that when the Betterment Areas Proclamation was promulgated, the provisions thereof were explained to the chiefs by the Local Native Commissioner. Consequently, the resolutions approving thereof were taken, first, at the meeting with chiefs and sub-chiefs and, at a later stage, at the meeting of the Basotho people. However, as stated earlier, the Basotho allegedly had a wrong understanding about the implementation of the measures. The practical as well as the long term effects of the cattle culling seemingly were not clearly articulated at the meetings held with the Basotho. This oversight by the government proved tragic as at a later stage lives were lost.

The explanation given to the Basotho was understood by them to mean that their stock would be improved and that the culling would involve the disposal of their inferior livestock. This would lead to a better quality of livestock. They did not interpret the culling of cattle as an attempt of the Department to reduce their livestock so that the carrying capacity of the land could be maintained. Bearing this in mind, the study assumes that the Department acted on a false assumption in so far as it was satisfied that the Basotho fully understood its position and the need for betterment measures.

The Basotho, according to the conclusions based on the interviews, on the other hand, did not understand the attitude and actions of the Department. Viewed in this light, the reactions and actions of the Basotho after the second cull in 1946 were understandable. To them, the culling was meant to singular matter but when it had to happen repeatedly, they objected and wanted the government to halt the process and to explain to them what the measures really entailed. With the initial objection to the cattle culling, it was clear that there had been a communication breakdown between the Basotho and the government.

Despite the apparent poor communication and misunderstanding, the government went on with the implementation of Betterment measures. In its endeavours to improve the general conditions in the Witsieshoek Reserve, the government ignored the concerns of the Basotho. Moreover, it overlooked the very important factor, which was the involvement of the people in the design and accomplishment of the Betterment schemes. Given that the damage had been done to the environment already, the individual cattle owners who had caused the damage themselves in the first place, were supposed to take part in every stage of its rehabilitation. Noting that the Basotho were used to the traditional rule by the chiefs, the chiefs could have been utilized to be in the forefront of the implementation of the betterment measures. In this way, the Basotho could have been, though not necessarily so, obligated to follow their chiefs, because it is believed

that they would have been convinced that the chiefs backed the Betterment measures.

Nevertheless, the government decided to take most of the important decisions for the conservative community instead of shifting a major part of its responsibilities to it or at least co-opting them. By limiting the involvement of the community, the government missed an opportunity, for it would have made it easier for itself to deal with the peasant farmers and to canvass the support for its policies. Instead, the community was alienated. Thus the radicals took advantage of the dissatisfaction of the Basotho and took over the control of the Reserve. Their argument was that the powers of the Paramount Chief had been undermined. The argument emanated from the fact that the Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli, had personally requested the government to halt its activities in the Reserve and to institute a Commission of Enquiry.

The absolute power and authority of the legislative body is not disputed here. It is, nevertheless, a fundamental aim of a responsible government to obtain, as far as possible, the concurrence, if not the actual cooperation of the citizens, in connection with all matters which might affect communities. The government, it is believed, had undermined the capabilities of the Basotho and did not anticipate that they would object and that their resistance could reach the proportion that it finally reached in 1950. Instead of encouraging the individual to undertake to work for his or her own good, of his or her children, and of the Reserve, the authorities forced their policies on the conservative community. To worsen matters, the government also ignored the Reserve Board which was dominated mainly by the Basotho.

From the interviews conducted it was alleged that one other most important aspect of the rebellion of the *Lingangele* was the attempt to reinstate traditional rights and obligations of the kingship. They felt that the institution under Paramount Chief Charles Mopeli had lost authority and there was a need to restore it. Although the *Lingangele*

accused the Paramount Chief Charles Mopeli of allowing the government to do as it wished in the Reserve, no protest was ever directed against him. This issue points out that the *Lingangele* had respect for the institution and never rejected it.

A common feeling among the Basotho who were interviewed is that the cattle culling, as it was applied, would have brought poverty to the Reserve and it would also made it a reservoir of labour for the farms and the gold mines. Because of the fear of being impoverished, the Basotho became suspicious of everything that the government was doing, irrespective of how beneficial that was going to be. The provision of the subsidised bulls, for example, which, according to the eyewitnesses' accounts were not mating enough, was a correct idea by the government, as that would have improved the quality of the Basotho's breed of cattle. However, this action was interpreted by the Basotho as one way of the government's strategy to limit the livestock. Consequently, this idea was rejected and, thus, the cattle the Basotho owned remained the same. The Basotho's claim that the bulls were lazy and had been injected in order to kill their cattle was fallacious. They only wanted to make their case against the cattle culling strong.

The establishment of camps was also done to protect certain areas from overgrazing. However, the Basotho tore down the fences in anger and protested that their cattle had nowhere to graze as they were not allowed to occasionally graze in those camps. Their action was uncalled for and the Paramount Chief's reaction to this was swift and strict as he informed the government that he will take action against the perpetrators. All the males were instructed to repair fences and those who refused were fined one cow each. In fact, others were expelled from the Reserve. Many people responded positively to the call of the Paramount Chief and repaired the fences. This was an indication that had the government involved the Paramount Chief and sub-chiefs in the planning and implementation of the Betterment measures, the outcome could have been different.

It must be noted that the government's Betterment measures were, as discussed earlier, necessary. The diminishing fertility of the soil had to be curtailed. By the 1930s both the deterioration of the veld and soil erosion were extensive in their effect on animals. Any prompt action was essential. This is because while the human population and the livestock had increased, the land was becoming smaller. Thus the culling of the cattle by the government was done out of necessity as the land had deteriorated badly.

Given the state of the land in the Witsieshoek Native Reserve, the authorities were justified in introducing the Betterment measures that included the culling of the livestock. The land in the Reserve was becoming too small for the growing human population as well as the number of livestock. Overgrazing was taking place and that was resulting in soil erosion. Action had to be taken to prevent further deterioration of the land. It was, therefore, the duty of the government to intervene with control measures, otherwise some Basotho would have taken their cattle to graze on the neighbouring farms. This might have resulted in a clash with the neighbouring White farmers. Therefore, in order to prevent the deterioration of the land and to avoid a possible clash between the whites and the Basotho, the government intervened with the Betterment measures. But as pointed earlier the government did so unilaterally and that led to the undesirable results. The manner in which the betterment measures were introduced and carried out caused much controversy that culminated in the Namoha Battle in 1950.

According to some reports, it was Mopelinyane who had instigated the people to revolt against the government. They said that he was also undermining the Paramount Chief. On the other hand, this was correct to some extent as Mopelinyane claimed that Chief Charles Mopeli had stolen Paramount Chieftainship from his father. He was, therefore, using the dissatisfaction of the Basotho to fight his own battle. But on the other hand, according to the informants, Mopelinyane did not go out to recruit people to support

him, but people came to him for assistance after he had won the case against him in 1947. Because he was opposed to the cattle culling and his family relations with the Paramount Chief were not cordial he agreed to fight alongside the people. Moreover, he was also in conflict with the authorities. In 1938 Mopelinyane had clashed with the authorities when he refused to relocate to Namoha. Thus he was still bitter and would use any opportunity to get back at the authorities.

There was a general agreement that the Reserve was overburdened with livestock to an alarming extent. But that overstocking was merely the result of the shortage of the land. Overstocking was the direct result of overpopulation because as the size and number of families increased so did the number of livestock. Each family, because it depended on cattle for milk, wanted to have as many cattle as they could. Therefore, the government had to find the means of reducing the human population and overstocking would no longer be a problem. The possible way this could have been done was through the provision of more land to the Witsieshoek area. This would also have meant that those environmental disasters would have been avoided. The complaints of the Basotho about the shortage of the land were ignored by the government.

Notwithstanding the obvious need for more land, nothing was done to increase the land. The stumbling block was the government's policy of segregation with its grossly inequitable pattern of land distribution. The very placement of the Blacks in the Reserves, which were inhabitable, indicated the biases of the government in land distribution. The Betterment measures were motivated less by care for the land, and more by its determination to try and make the inequitable land policy work by making the Reserves viable. The failure of the government to put things right when there were indicators that the Betterment measures were unpopular indicated its intention to confine the Basotho in the small mountainous Witsieshoek area.

Stock farming was the most important means of livelihood for the Basotho in Witsieshoek, apart from sentimental value which they attached to their cattle. It is understandable that in these circumstances, the Basotho were very dissatisfied about the fact that the Department wanted to compel them to reduce their stock. Without their cattle, it would have been difficult for the Basotho to provide for their families. Therefore, more land was needed to accommodate the growing population and the number of livestock.

The Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli, was also aware of the long term effects of the cattle culling. As a result, contrary to what had been portrayed by most informants, he was also opposed to the culling of cattle throughout. Yet in fear of the government and seeking to gratify himself with the Native Commissioner, the Paramount Chief was willing to accept the imposed measures. When testifying in court, after the Battle during the trial of the *Lingangele*, he pointed out that when he was first asked for his approval for the cull in 1939, he gave it. However, it was only later when the law was brought into practical application that he realized that the object was not culling, but the reduction or limitation of stock, of which he was opposed to. In trying to bring this concern to the authorities, he sponsored a petition to the Minister of Home Affairs, asking for the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry. Furthermore, he also sent a delegation to Cape Town to further request the intervention of the Minister. But in all his endeavours, he always tried to work within the law. This indicated that the opposition to the stock reduction was not only by the *Lingangele* but by the majority of the Basotho. The only difference between the *Lingangele* and the Paramount Chief was the manner in which the opposition was displayed and carried out.

It is of great importance to point out that the *Lingangele* organisation, although it was popular amongst the Basotho during the resistance to the cattle culling had no place in the normal tribal life. It was established and supported by the Basotho because they

believed that the Paramount Chief and the Reserve Board had been disempowered by the government. However, because of its manner of resisting the Trust it had repeatedly been condemned by the Paramount Chief and his sub-chiefs. To indicate that it was not the way the Basotho were voicing out their concerns, the *Lingangele* organisation ceased to exist after the Namoha Battle.

The *Lingangele* organisation, contrary to their claim that they had no external backing, had external linkages in the form of the Witsieshoek Vigilance Association, which was based in Johannesburg. It was also supported by the *Lekhotla la Bafo*⁴ which was based in Lesotho. However, it was alleged by the informants that while the Witsieshoek Vigilance Association advised the *Lingangele* leaders, it did not influence them. Moreover, at the trial, both the *Lingangele* and the 'loyalist' supporters of the Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli, placed more faith in the activity of the *Lingaka*⁵ than they did in their respective legal council, something contrary to what the Witsieshoek Vigilance Association subscribed.

Constable Ntsane Mopeli, who was part of the police detachment that dispersed the people at Namoha was also opposed to the culling. In giving evidence at the trial of the *Lingangele*, he said that he did not approve of the South African Native Trust and Land Act of 1936. He pointed out that he owned 500 sheep, 30 heads of cattle and 28 goats⁶ and would be sad if he had to lose some of them. This shows that the manner in which the culling was carried out was not accepted even by the people who were government employees.

⁴ "Council of Commoners." Freely Translated

⁵ "Traditional Doctors." Freely Translated

⁶ The Star, 12 May 1951.

There is no doubt that the government's intervention in the Witsieshoek Reserve was necessary considering the state of the land in the Reserve. However, the significance of the Betterment measures was clouded by the controversial manner in which they were implemented. To the people the Betterment measures aimed to help led to them feeling a sense of dispossession. The apparent rejection of the Betterment measures by the Basotho people who occupied the degraded and eroded Reserve might seemed naive and shortsighted. Commonsense would suggest that attempts to halt erosion, overstocking and degradation of the land was a necessity. Because without such Betterment measures the people would maintained even fewer livestock in the long run and cultivate even less land. Nevertheless, the pressing need for the Reserve was not the Betterment measures, but more land that would accommodate the ever increasing population.

ADDENDUM A
INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Please briefly tell me about your life in Witsieshoek.
2. How did it come about that the Basotho settle in Witsieshoek?
3. Why was this area given the name, Witsieshoek?
4. How was it ruled before the Homeland system was introduced?
5. What kind of relationship existed between the Basotho and the white government of the Free State then?
6. How were you relating to your white neighbours in the towns and on the farms before 1950?
7. I am very much interested in knowing how did Namoha village came about. What can you remember about the village?
8. Why was there a battle in Namoha in 1950?
9. Why were you fighting?
10. What would you say was the major cause of the Battle?
11. Why did the battle took place in the Namoha village?
12. What was the outcome of the Battle?
13. Who were killed during the course of the Battle?
14. What impact did the Battle have on the community in general?
15. What role did you play during the Battle?

ADDENDUM B

THE FIELD REPORT¹

1. Interview details

- 1.1 Name and surname of the interviewer:
- 1.2 Name, surname and title of the interviewee:
- 1.3 Date and time of the interview:
- 1.4 Length of the interview:
- 1.5 Physical address of the interview venue:

2. Preliminary contacts

Outline all the contacts made with the interviewee prior to the interview, whether by phone, through intermediaries or by way of preliminary visits. For each visits, even an unsuccessful visit, give the date, duration and object of the contact.

3. Interview process

- 3.1 Description of the venue:
- 3.2 Technical problems (if applicable):
- 3.3 Interruptions (if applicable):
- 3.4 Movement of people during the interview (if applicable):
- 3.5 Exchanges after formal part of the interview (if applicable):
- 3.6 Attitude/body language of the interviewee during the interview:
- 3.7 Feelings of the interviewer during the interview:

4. After the interview

- 4.1 Date and object of contacts made with the interviewee after the interview:
- 4.2 Feelings of the interviewer after the interview:

5. Any other comment

¹ Working draft: Training manual; Oral History Project, pp. 36-37.

TREATY BETWEEN PAULUS MOPELI AND THE ORANGE FREE STATE REPUBLIC.

Whereas the Volksraad has taken cognizance of the various applications to the President by the Basuto Chief Paulus Mopeli, since the Ordinary Session of the Raad in 1866, to be accepted, with his subjects, as subjects of the State and to receive an area of land for residential purposes, which applications His Excellency promised the said Chief would be submitted to the Raad; considering that a former objection to the granting of the application, namely the non-settlement of the claim by the Natal Government against the Basuto Nation for damages caused during the raid into Natal in 1865, has apparently fallen away for the present; considering that the Raad in the previous year had reserved the right to accept one or more Basuto Chiefs and their people as subjects, when such was deemed desirable by it.

It resolves by these presents:

Article I. The Chief Paulus Mopeli with his subordinate Chiefs Rhalitokwi, alias Afrika, Ligaan Rhamontseng, Rhamafking, Moleka, Latila, Mapatso, Mofu, Taili, Motjoli, Rhampakili, Kelly Ralintsa, Nathaniel, alias Simpi, Rhamalape and Quatlali, and their people are accepted as subjects of the Orange Free State.

Article II. To Chief Paulus Mopeli with his subordinate Chiefs, mentioned in Article I, and their people is granted for occupation the vacant Government land situate in Witzaishoek. Chief Mopeli promises and agrees to see to it that his Chiefs do not encroach upon the farms which are the property of private persons and which will be indicated by a Commission to be appointed by the President. Should it appear at any time that Paulus Mopeli or his people have settled on any private property, he will have to vacate same upon first notification to do so.

Article III. A person under the designation of Commandant shall be appointed by the President to reside among the people of Paulus Mopeli and to carry out or cause to be carried out such orders as may be given by the Government.

Article IV. Until such time as the Volksraad considers it necessary to make other provisions, Chief P. Mopeli and his people will be governed in the same manner and in terms of the same provisions as those laid down for Chief Molapo and his people and contained in Act No. 3 of 1866.

Article V. Chief P. Mopeli and his people are solely liable and responsible for the due rendering of payment of such portion of the claim of the Natal Government referred to above as may be demanded from them and shall see to it that, on the expiration of the period of deferred rendering or payment granted, according to Paulus Mopeli, by the Natal Government, such rendering or payment is promptly made.

Article VI. In the event of the provisions contained in the previous article, not being complied with, the portion of the claim referred to therein shall be recovered from Chief Paulus Mopeli and his people in such manner as the Government may deem fit.

Article VII. This also applies if it should appear that the Natal Government has granted no such deferred period for payment, as stated by Paulus Mopeli, and if, as a result thereof, a demand for settlement is made before the expiration of such period.

Signed by me, Paulus Mopeli, at Bloemfontein on the 1st June, 1867, in the presence of the undermentioned witnesses.

J. H. BRAND (State President).

A. J. ERWEE (Member of the V.R.).

J. N. O. CHANQUION.

PAULUS MOPELI.

As Witness:

A. R. MOPELI.

Mark of X MAIBI.

MOPELI AND OTHERS v. REX

[ORANGE FREE STATE PROVINCIAL DIVISION; (Fischer, J.P. and van den Heever, J.), March 13, 1947.]

Criminal procedure—Charge—Discloses no offence—Setting forth the offence and particulars—Section 127 of the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act (Act 31 of 1917).

Interpretation of Statute—Section 10 (1) (a) read with Section 6 (1) of Proclamation 31 of 1939.

Where certain executive acts and determinations have to be performed, made and notified to the person concerned before any obligation on the person arises to carry out the terms of a statutory enactment, the enactment taken by itself cannot be said to create an offence for the purposes of section 127 (2) (a) of the Criminal Procedure and Evidence Act (Act 31 of 1917).

A charge that the accused "did wrongfully and unlawfully fail to produce his stock as required by section 6 (1) of Proclamation 31 of 1939 and did thus contravene section 10 (1) (a) of the said Proclamation" discloses no offence as it does not adequately set forth the offence intended to be charged and it does not do so with sufficient particularity.

Ex parte Minister of Justice: In re Rex v. Masow and another (1) applied.

Case referred to:

(1) *Ex parte Minister of Justice: In re Rex v. Masow and another*, (1940) A.D. 91.

APPEAL against conviction and sentence by the Native Commissioner, Witzieshoek, before whom the accused had been tried jointly on a charge of contravening section 10 (1) (a) read with section 6 (1) of Proclamation No. 31 of 1939, to which they had pleaded not guilty. The accused appealed, and the Court allowed the appeal on the ground that the charge was defective in two respects: it did not set forth adequately the offence intended to be charged, and it did not do so with sufficient particularity.

F. S. Smuts for the appellants.

P. J. van Blerk for the Crown.

VAN DEN HEEVER, J.: At the request of the accused a joint trial was held in this case; they appeared before the Native Commissioner, Witzieshoek, on a charge of contravening section 10 (1) (a) read with section 6 (1) of Proclamation No. 31 of 1939 in that

"upon (or about) the 9th day of October, 1946, and at or near Qua Qua store in Witzieshoek Reserve, Dist. Harrismith, the said accused being the owner of stock who reside in a betterment of stock area, to wit, Witzieshoek Native Reserve, Dist. Harrismith aforesaid as declared in Government Notice No. 1573 dated 12-10-37, did wrongfully and unlawfully fail to produce his stock as required by Section 6 (1) of Proclamation 31 of 1939 and did thus contravene Section 10 (1) (a) of the said Proclamation."

The accused pleaded not guilty but were convicted and sentenced. Against this judgment they appealed on several grounds, of which it is necessary to mention only one, namely that the charge as framed discloses no offence.

Section 6 of Proclamation 31 of 1939 reads:—

"6 (1) Every owner of stock shall produce all stock belonging to him at the time and place fixed by the culling officer, in order that it may be inspected for the purpose of culling.

"(2) If the owner of any stock fails to produce it in accordance with the provisions of sub-section (1), the Native Commissioner may, after due inquiry and in the absence of a satisfactory explanation of the failure, declare the stock or any portion thereof forfeited to the Trust."

O.P.D.] MOPELL AND OTHERS v. REX (VAN DEN HEEVER, J.)

Section 10 in so far as it is relevant provides:

"Any person who, being the owner of any stock, fails to produce it in accordance with the provisions of sub-section (1) of Section 6 . . . shall be guilty of an offence and liable to a fine not exceeding twenty pounds, or in default of payment to imprisonment for a period not exceeding three months."

A The Proclamation is an exceedingly drastic measure; it may result in the proscription of grazing rights; in the limitation of pastoral activities and in the forfeiture of livestock. It is true that before the Minister can declare an area to be a betterment area, he is obliged to consult the residents of that area—but he is not obliged to accept their unanimous advice or that of the majority. They merely have suasive powers.

B I have no doubt that such extraordinary powers were conferred and assumed for very sound reasons. It is a matter for surprise, though, that legislation which may affect the subject so seriously and irrevocably should have been conceived and drafted in such haphazard fashion. Not only is the general scheme of the measure sketchy to a fault—it contains glaring mistakes and omissions. In the English version of section 2 the word "determine" is used as an intransitive verb. Consequently it can only mean "to come to an end, to cease." In the Afrikaans version, on the other hand, a transitive verb is used and the Minister becomes the subject; the result is that in the English version a matter, which follows automatically and *de jure*, according to the Afrikaans version, depends upon the Minister's discretion.

D I am obliged however to interpret this piece of light-hearted legislation on a serious subject. The very seriousness of the consequences persuades me that section 6 (1) cannot possibly be held to mean that the culling officer could merely in his own subjective consciousness determine the time and the place for inspection. Such an interpretation would be absurd. The Proclamation is silent as to how the time and the place fixed by the culling officer are to be brought to the notice of those who are to be subjected to its uplift. It follows that section 15 of the Interpretation Act, 1910, comes into play and the culling officer may give notice of the day and place fixed by him for inspection by publication in the *Gazette*. We are dealing with Native reserves; why not publication in the *Paris Soir*?

F *Mr. Smuts*, for appellants, contends that in the circumstances the charge does not disclose an offence; it does not aver the essential elements that the culling officer did in fact determine a time and place at which stock should be produced for inspection and culling.

G To this *Mr. van Blerk*, for the Crown, replied by invoking the provisions of section 127 of the Criminal Procedure Code as interpreted in *ex parte the Minister of Justice: in re Rex v. Masow and another* (1).

H Not only am I bound by the decision in this case; with respect, I agree with it as far as it relates to this issue. But I think the ruling itself is often misconstrued. Sub-section 1 of section 127 provides in general terms how the offence must be *set forth* in a charge. Sub-section 2 (a) provides how a statutory offence may be *described*. I take it the legislature must have had sound reason for using different expressions in close juxtaposition to each other. In *Masow's* case (at page 91), *CENT-LIVRES, J.A.*, said: "In each particular case, therefore, the draftsman of a charge must enquire firstly what are the essential elements of the offence and secondly what are the particulars as to time, place, person and property. As regards statutory offences the draftsman need not enquire what are the essential elements of the offence if he follows the provisions of sub-section (2) (a) of section 127 which enacts that the description of

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any offence in the words of any statutory enactment *creating the offence* or in similar words shall be sufficient."

But the question still remains: when does a statutory enactment by itself create an offence? We frequently find a drag-net clause: "any person contravening any provision of this ordinance commits an offence and shall be liable on conviction to a fine . . ." I take it that merely to follow the words of such an enactment would not be a compliance with the provisions of section 127, for the enactment taken by itself does not create an offence.

We have a similar position here. Merely to say "You have not produced your stock as required by section 6 (1) of Proclamation 31 of 1939," does not describe or set forth an offence, for section 6 (1) does not categorically require the production of cattle. The requirement is conditional upon certain executive acts and determinations having been performed, made and notified to the person concerned. Where essential elements of an offence are provided for *dehors* any particular enactment, that enactment taken by itself cannot be said to create an offence.

In this case every word of the imputation may be true without the accused having committed an offence. I am satisfied therefore that the charge sins in two respects: it does not adequately set forth the offence intended to be preferred and it does not do so with sufficient particularity. In my judgment the appeal succeeds and the conviction and sentence I set aside.

FISCHER, J.P. : I agree.

Appeal accordingly allowed; conviction and sentence set aside.

Appellant's Attorneys: Goodrick and Franklin.

BOTHA v. VAN NIEKERK

[TRANSVAAL PROVINCIAL DIVISION; (Neser, J. and de Villiers, J.), March 19, 1947.]

Negligence—Collision between motor car and cyclist at robot intersection—Damages.

Onus of proof—Defendant's offer after collision to pay plaintiff's expenses—Such an offer and subsequent denial not amounting to unequivocal admission—Substratum of evidence not creating prima facie case.

In Vereeniging at the intersection of Rhodes Avenue and Voortrekker Street, which was controlled by a robot, a collision occurred between a motor car driven by appellant from north to south in Voortrekker Street, and respondent, who was riding a bicycle from west to east in Rhodes Avenue. There was no direct evidence in support of respondent's allegation that the green light was in his favour when he entered the intersection, but it was established that shortly after the collision the appellant offered to pay the respondent's expenses. At the trial the appellant denied that he had made such an offer, but the magistrate did not accept his evidence, and held that his denial afforded strong probability that he knew he was in the wrong by disregarding the traffic light.

Held (per NESER, J.): Under the circumstances, to justify a finding that respondent had discharged the onus, the statements made by the appellant must amount to an unequivocal admission that he entered the intersection against the robot. The fact that appellant

ASAMOMA village,
P. O. WITZLISHOK,
ORANGE FREE STATE,
SOUTH AFRICA.
First, August 1950.

the right honourable,

at. Try give me,

General secretary,
United Organisation, (nations)
L.A.F. SUCCESS,
NEW YORK;

hionourable sir,

It is with due respect that we beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter no. SOA 31/02/IC, of 29 May 1950 from the Director of the Division on Human Rights together with copy of the resolutions attached thereto. We again learn that a copy of our recommendations on the subject of the Union of South Africa, was forwarded to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Now in reply we beg to state that before we could receive any reply from the government of the Union of South Africa, on the 14th July 1950, there was published an Act of Parliament both in Cape Town and "Windhoek, South West Africa" called "THE SUPPRESSION OF COMMUNISM ACT OF 1950" under this act the Minister of Justice is at liberty to put us in the same position as the communists because of the wide definition of the word communism which allows the Minister of Justice to call any person or organisation, communist or communist organisation so that he may be in a position to impose whatever punishment he thinks fit while such persons has no power to seek for redress in the courts of law.

Now as the commission on human rights has no power to take any action on the complaints submitted to it concerning human rights. We have the honour and respect to have to ask you to leave our hands or ours in the hands of the trusteeship council so that it may take steps into this matter before the government of the union of south Africa could we in a position to kill us, we are determined to keep people and massacre us under the pretext that it restores law and order in the suppression of acts of communism. The culling of cattle is a measure calculated to bring about the extermination of our people through starvation and other subsidiary causes, and this was the carrying into effect the same policy which was applied on the Tasmanians in Australia when they were exterminated by the European.

P

Colonists in that Colony. In the Book called the South African Commission Minutes of Evidence 1904 - OX, there is the following question and answer :-

41578 Have you had any occasion to study the history of the process of the extinction of the Tasmanian and Australian aborigines; do you think your remarks apply equally to them so far as the question of protection and so on is concerned?

"I recollected very well one instance that I read of that is where the aborigines were placed on an Island to the North of Tasmania between the Tasmanian Coast and the Australian Mainland, where the Government did everything they humanly could do to preserve those people; clothed them, fed them, kept Europeans away from them, kept liquor away from them, and yet they died."

Swaziland by the Government. The extermination of 1904-05. Now these Tasmanians had been deprived of the means of subsistence in the same way as we are being put under a Police order which we are deprived of our cattle and land. For this reason before we put under a policy to exterminate our people under the pretext of combatting communism we pray you to have mercy with us and put this matter before the Trusteeship Council, we pray you as such because even our rights here are taken away from us and a swindle power so called a Trust Administration, so that Trusteeship Council may take steps and put a stop to this measure by which British Government empowered the Union Government to explore ways and means by which the extermination of our people may be achieved as was done to Australian aborigines.

We shall be very thankful to you to extend a helping hand to us the defenseless people and save our people from the intended measure of extermination until three commissions be sent.

We humbly beg to inform you that we have sent the copy of this letter to both the right honourable Dr Acland, Prime Minister of Union of South Africa, and to the right honourable British Foreign Minister for their information.

we have the honour to be,

and the services of the

Your most humble servants,
Guth, Waples & Waples

Philip A. Botwin & Co.
ON BEHALF OF THE EDITION.

ADDENDUM G
THE POPULAR HYMN SUNG AT THE PITSO-27 NOVEMBER 1950.
KE NA LE MODISA.

Ke na le Modisa	I have a Shepherd
Ke tla be ke hlohang	I shall not want
Ke ya ipitsang Jehova	He is called Jehovah
Modimo o phelang	The living God
O nkisa botaleng	He leads me to green pastures
Dijong tse mphedisang	To the food of life
O nkalosa, dinokaneng	He leads me to streams
Metsing a nkgodisang	To the satisfying waters
Ha ke lahlehile	When I am lost
O nkgutlisetsa hae	He brings me home
o nkisa tseleng ya nnete	And leads me to the right path
Ka lerato la hae	By his love
Ha ke se ke feta	When I am passing
Kgohlong e lefifi	Through the dark valley
Ha nka ke ka tshaba tsela	I will not fear the path
E tjehilweng difi.	That has traps

ADDENDUM H
THE NAMES OF THE FOURTEEN BASOTHO WHO DIED DURING THE
NAMOHA BATTLE.

1. Gesu Dlamini.
2. Palamente Motolo.
3. Setlhareng Mabote.
4. Sejeso Dlamini.
5. Thabang Mopeli.
6. Davida Milingoana.
7. Padson Tshabalala.
8. Totoma Maholeho.
9. Molato Tshabangu.
10. Sediane Motshweneng.
11. Mocheku Dinala.
12. Tente Mmoko.
13. Moditsoane Mothibi.
14. Mohlolo Buthelezi.¹

¹ Personal collection, interviews with informants, 09/08/2001 to 19/04/2002.

ADDENDUM I
THE NAMES OF THE PEOPLE WHO WERE DECLARED
DANGEROUS TO PUBLIC SAFETY

1. Paulus Howell Mopeli (Mopelinyane).
2. Paulus Mpheteng.
3. Scotland Koloi.
4. Nehemiah Motleleng.
5. Phillip Moteka.
6. Letsie Mopeli.
7. Makabate Mopeli.
8. Albert Mopeli.
9. Matela Mantsoe
10. William Mantsoe.
11. John Mabaso.
12. Atwell Mopeli,
13. Pereko Setai.
14. Josiah Mokhomo.¹

¹ Unisa, Acc. 219, The Union of South Africa, Government Gazette. Vol. 293 of 1950, 29 November 1950.

ADDENDUM J

MEMORIES AND EXPERIENCES OF THE EYEWITNESSES

Introduction

The Namoha Battle came and passed. It affected the Basotho of Witsieshoek in many ways. The Battle left many bitter memories and feelings among those it affected. This part focuses on the reminiscences and experiences the Battle had on the Basotho of Witsieshoek. It brings different perspectives to the impact the Battle had both on individuals and collectively. The portion first narrates stories and experiences of those who were directly involved in the *Lingangele* struggle against the cattle culling and were also present when the clash occurred. Second, this part focuses on the stories of those who were involved in the struggle but were not present on the day of the clash and those who were still young at that time. Third, the stories of those who were opposed to the *Lingangele* activities are examined. It would be seen that in these stories there are some lighter moments and very touching experiences. In response to questions put to them, such as what they can remember of the Namoha Battle; how the Battle influenced their lives as well as how they would describe their experiences, these stories are what the informants recalled.

Eyewitnesses' stories

Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, who was a staunch member of the *Lingangele* and served a prison sentence after the Battle, is still bitter about some of the co-accused who turned state witnesses. He blamed those who turned state witnesses for their arrests and conviction. He believed that had such people remained loyal to the cause of fighting the Trust, it could have been difficult for the state to convict them. Mothibi, because of what happened at Namoha and during the trial, has seemingly developed a distrust of all the people. He now feels strongly against sharing ideas with other people or doing things together. He said, in describing his experience of the Battle:

“I feel proud today that I fought in the Battle of Namoha. I do not have any regrets. Those who betrayed us did not receive anything and some of them died poor as they were. One thing I still regret is that had I noticed that Mopelinyane was whisked away just before the clash at Namoha, I would have walked away too. It was not fair that he should have left us there, because *nonyana tsa siba leng ke tse fofang mmoho*.¹ What I learned from that incident was that one should never trust a human being. If you want to do something, do it alone because a human being is untrustworthy. Look at those who turned state witnesses, they sold us and walked free even though we were all fighting together with one voice. I would never put my trust in people again, *etswe monna ha a bone ha bedi*.² Had we stuck together or were armed we could have killed all those policemen, and again had we remained united at the trial we could have won the case easily, as nobody would have identified us.”³

Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, who was not yet a chief at the time of the Namoha Battle, was directly involved in a campaign against the Trust. He attended the Namoha meeting as part of his contribution to the struggle against the cattle culling. According to him, they were not expecting any trouble with the police on that day, but were ready to defend themselves if they were to be attacked. He alleged that they were all aware of the stipulations of the Proclamation and the large number of policemen deployed in Witsieshoek. He also admitted that they were also aware of the fact that their action was provocative, even though they did not want to admit. In giving his side of the story, Chief Setsoto Mopeli began by describing his understanding of the cause for the disturbances as follows:

“We had no special animosity towards the white people, but our white rulers here played us a dirty game. The chiefs had no power. The real ruler was the Assistant Native Commissioner.

¹ “Birds of one feather fly together.” This means those who are alike or agree, go together. Freely Translated.

² “One bitten Twice shy.” Freely Translated.

³ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabolela village, 29/08/2001.

The chiefs were mere figureheads that must dance to his fiddle. What the Commissioner wished, the chief must give his assent to without question, and that becomes law. The Board that was instituted was not for the convenience of the people, but for the convenience of the Assistant Native Commissioner. People were never consulted. They were always dictated to, and they thereafter dare not question. I joined the *Lingangele* not only to fight the culling of the cattle, but also to bring back the dignity of our chiefs. Had the culling order come straight from our Paramount Chief, I personally would have supported it, because he had authority over us. But that was not the case. What happened in Witsieshoek was that the authorities undermined the intelligence of the Basotho and took advantage of the ignorance of the masses of the people by dictating things to them. But the cattle culling was the last straw. We felt that until the chiefs were given back their respectful status and not the position of servants of the Assistant Native Commissioner, and until people were given the freedom to direct their grievances to the proper authority, we will continue to defy orders from the government.”⁴

Therefore, on the basis of his feelings towards the treatment that was meted out to the chiefs, Chief Setsoto supported the *Lingangele* and attended the Namoha *pitso* (a traditional gathering). He believed that the only way left for them to restore the dignity of the chiefs was to forcefully make the government aware of their grievances. That made them to go all out in sensitising the people about the situation, and how their chiefs were going to lose their power. He still feels very strongly against what the government did, and believes that the whole attack at the Namoha was planned. As he was at Namoha gathering, he recounted his experience there as follows:

“I was among the people who were in the front when the police confront us. I cannot really recall exactly what happened after the first shot was fired. But what I remember is that I tried to run away like anybody else as nobody was trying to assist anybody as we were all running away and throwing stones back at the police. I remember picking up a stone and throwing it at the police as I was running for cover. I saw Lieutenant Jonker, with my own eyes, fell from his horse after he was struck by a

⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong Village, 25/09/2001.

knobkerrie and people rushed to him, but I ran away as I did not want to waste any time and wanted to be at home as soon as possible. I managed to escape with minor injuries and went back home. At home I acted as if nothing had happened, but I was very scared and did not want my father to find out that I was at Namoha when the clash broke out. As I was trying to make sense of what actually went wrong, I saw one person on horseback coming to pass my house. I called him, *hela motho weso ha ba sa le yo bo, ba ile, pota le kwano*.⁵ He was very scared, he literally jumped off the horse, left it and ran away on foot. Even though I was hurt by what happened earlier I found myself laughing at that man's act. I began to understand that if you are in hurry, and are frightened of something you would find that even the horse you are riding runs slowly, you better get down and run on your feet. Until today I never knew who that man was and why he acted the way he did. Fortunately for me, I was not arrested. I believed that that could have been the fact that my father was a chief and I was about to take over from him, so those people who were arrested did not want to implicate me."⁶

Another informant, Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba Bosiu village, who also experienced the Namoha Battle, was very close to Mopelinyane. He alleged that he looked after Mopelinyane's livestock and was also his messenger. Chief Disala Mopeli claimed that he was whisked away with Mopelinyane into the mountains when the police arrived. After the clash, they crossed into Lesotho. However, Mopelinyane was arrested on arrival in Lesotho and was brought back to South Africa to stand trial. After Mopelinyane was banished, he was visited by Chief Disala Mopeli regularly. Chief Disala Mopeli recalled how committed he was to Mopelinyane and how that affected his family:

"After Mopelinyane was banished I secretly visited him after he had written home. He stated clearly in the letter that he wanted me and nobody else even family members. I secretly collected the money from his people to give him something on

⁵ "Hi my brother, come over here, they are no longer around." Freely Translated.

⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

my arrival so that he can buy some food, as he stated that he refused to eat the food provided to him by the government. For me to get that money from his people, I had to see them secretly so that I could not be found. I applied for the permit and it was granted. I left to Pretoria where I took a bus to Marishana. I neither knew anybody, nor the place I was going to. I had only the address. On arrival toward sunset, I met people who knew his whereabouts. One of them gave me a lift at the back of his bicycle and took me to Mopelinyane's place in the bushes. I met him and he was very excited to see me. I gave him all the money I had collected. Since that day I was always on the road visiting and bringing him gifts from his people. As a result of my absence from home, my family suffered a lot. I lost my cattle and goats through theft and I had to sell some of them so that I could be able to give Mopelinyane some money."⁷

Chief Disala Mopeli's only daughter had to drop out of school to look for work so as to support herself and her mother as her father was always on the road. She recalled:

"I was suffering even though I was the only child at home. I had to drop out of school to assist my mother in making ends meet. We had one blanket that we shared with my mother. My father was not always at home, but on the road to check Mopelinyane. We could not even plough our fields, we had to rely on our neighbors for help, who were not always available to assist. As a girl it was also difficult for me to look after my father's livestock. As a result most of his cattle and sheep disappeared. We really struggled to make ends meet. But we understood his loyalty to *Morena wa Diphoofo*⁸ and had to accept his commitment to him. When he finally came back home, he was very worried that he would no longer see Mopelinyane because he had been moved to Mafikeng. But he remained hopeful until we heard the news of his death. It was then that my father began concentrating on us his family. However, it was late and most of his cattle had disappeared and I could also not go to school as I was already old."⁹

⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

⁸ "King of the Animals." Freely Translated.

⁹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mathabo Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Matebeleng village, 23/09/2001.

As pointed out, Chief Disala Mopeli spent much of his time on the road to look after Mopelinyane. As a result, his family suffered. Chief Disala Mopeli described what happened one day on his arrival at Mopelinyane's place:

"One day on my arrival, Mopelinyane asked me to go to the Nebo offices and tell the officials that I am his son, and humbly request them to release him in my care and I will take him to Lesotho. I did as I was ordered but the authorities refused and dismissed me. As we were wondering what we will do next, we were joined by Mmalei, one of Mopelinyane's friends from Qwa-Qwa. Therefore, there were four of us there, with a certain boy, Mokgotle, who took care of Mopelinyane in my absence. Mopelinyane had written several letters to the authorities in Pretoria, requesting them to release him just for a few days to go and see his children in Qwa-Qwa. However, none of the letters was answered. After he had written those several letters to the authorities but got no answer, he decided to do things his way. He ordered me to look for a car that will take us to Johannesburg. I found the car that took us to Mzimhlophe, in Johannesburg at my uncle's house. After two days we then hired the other car that drove us to Witsieshoek. By that time the police in Nebo had noticed that he had disappeared and were frantically looking for him. The police were also looking for him in Johannesburg. But they could not find him. On arrival in Witsieshoek, he went to see his family and came back to report to the police that he was around to check on his family and he will go back to Nebo soon. But they did not allow him to go back home. He was sent straight back by train at government expenses. I left with him and one policeman who was guarding him. A few weeks later after our return from Witsieshoek, I went back home to get him some money again. When I came back, I found out that he had been removed from Nebo and taken to Mafikeng. The reasons for his removal were unclear, but I believe it was because of his intelligence, as the local people were coming to him for advice when they clashed with the authorities. One of such advice was given when some people were accused of the fact that their cattle had grazed at the wrong place. I learned that he advised them to ask the authorities to provide an evidence of how much grass had each cow grazed, failing to provide that then they could not be held responsible for the grass that was grazed by their cattle. Therefore, taking him to Mafikeng was one way of silencing him. After he was moved to Mafikeng, I tried to contact him but in vain,

until he passed away “on 21 September 1971”.¹⁰ We buried him at their family burial ground at Namoha in Witsieshoek. I will never forget that man; how he sacrificed both his life as well as family comfort as well as his decision to die for us. To us, and me in particular, he was a father, a hero, a champion, and a true leader of the people.”¹¹

Women were also present at Namoha as they were also affected by the Trust. Some of them went as widows, while others attended the *Lingangele* meetings as representatives of their husbands who were working outside Witsieshoek. At the Namoha meeting women, as usual, were singing and ululating. Normally when their women ululate, the Basotho men get spurred on and face any difficulties head on.¹² On this particular moment, this was done to impress their women and to show their brevity. That was why they fought with the police even though the police were armed with guns. The outcome of the Battle affected the women as it did to the men and children. An informant Mmafako Mohale, ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tsoana, who was still proud of her contribution to the struggle against the cattle culling, recalled what happened at Namoha:

“As women, we were also concerned with the culling of cattle just as men were, and as such we went to the gathering at Namoha. I left with two other ladies who were my friends. We arrived a bit late at the assembly and people were already sitting there. On arrival we went to a nearby rock and started praying before we could join the crowd. Suddenly I heard a man shouting *phuthehang, ke bao ba etla*,¹³ referring to the police. We then went down and joined the group. When the police began shooting at us, we became confused and not knowing what to do. I ran up the mountain and took cover behind a big rock. I was terrified. I tried

¹⁰ Letter of Authority No. 1015/2001, from Department of Justice, Free State to Tsita Joseph Mopeli, 25/04/2001.

¹¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Disala Mopeli, a sub-chief at Thaba-Bosiu village, 23/09/2001.

¹² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001.

¹³ “Gather, here they come.” Freely Translated.

to pray, but words could not come out. As we were hiding, there was no privacy. We hid there together with men and some women had lost their dresses as they were running away.”¹⁴

Another informant, Mafokoletsa Ketsoletso Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu, who was also present at Namoha, and had gone there representing her husband, recalled what happened to her after the Battle. The incident happened to her after the passing away of her husband and had gone to the government offices to attend to some paperwork:

“I do not regret my involvement with the *Lingangele* activities. I attended the Namoha meeting and was prepared for anything. When the police opened fire on us, I was very scared, but with God’s grace I escaped unhurt and went home. Like many other women, I was lucky not to be arrested. After this incident my husband passed away, and I had to attend to other family matters and responsibilities that were his. I went to Welkom to attend to other matters, when I came back I went to the Commissioner’s office to sort out other things. On my arrival, I met people that I know who introduced me to the Commissioner. Hearing that I was one of the *Lingangele* supporters, the Commissioner asked me a very unexpected and tricky question: “between Chief Charles and *Morena wa Diphoofolo*, who is the Paramount Chief?” I kept quiet for a moment, and I thought I have escaped prison now what is going on, I asked myself? He repeated the question again. I responded by saying that it was Chief Charles Mopeli.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mmafako Mohale, an ordinary Mosotho from Thabana Tsoana village, 05/04/2002.

¹⁵ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu, 19/09/2001.

At that time the informant indicated that she was very scared and thought that she was going to be arrested. She decided not to show the Commissioner that she was frightened and answered back with arrogance. Mafokoletsa further described what happened between herself and the official:

“After I had answered his question he said, ‘how come you say this, because your name appears on the list of names of people who were saying Chief Charles is not a Paramount Chief, but *Morena wa Diphoofo* is? I said yes, because in 1950, to us the Basotho women, and our men we resisted the culling of our cattle and Mopelinyane stood with us. The Commissioner quickly stood up and put his right foot on the chair and said ‘now you are changing. Do you know that in 1950 the government’s policemen died and your own black people died too?’ I said yes. He went on and said: ‘Now what do you want?’ I said to him: ‘yes, all prisoners have been released and are serving their sentences outside except *Morena wa Diphoofo*, now ‘I make a request on his behalf to be released too and come back home to his children.’”¹⁶

By that time the Commissioner was getting more angry because of Mafokoletsa’s arrogance. According to her, had the Commissioner had the power to order her arrest, he would have done so immediately. She continued narrating her altercation with the Commissioner as follows:

“Commissioner now, *a hlahisa mmala o ka mpeng*¹⁷. He looked at me and said: ‘do you know that the person who is saying *Morena wa Diphoofo* is the Paramount Chief stinks before the government?’ I kept quiet. He went on and said: ‘now what kind of Paramount Chief you have and where is he now?’ I responded by saying that I did have a Chief who stood with us during the hard times of the culling of our cattle. The Commissioner again said to me: ‘woman, I tell you the truth, from today you will never see or hear anything concerning cattle culling. And from today you must never ever join

¹⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

¹⁷ “To show the colour of one’s stomach.” This means to show one’s true self or true colours. Freely Translated.

these groups that are against the government, as for *Morena wa Diphoofolo*, he stinks and you shall never see him again.' I usually say to people I meet that what the Commissioner said that day to me that we will never see Mopelinyane was true, because we never saw him again except the day we were going to bury him. After all these I really felt bad. I wished I could reverse all that had happened and have *Morena wa Diphoofolo* back with us."¹⁸

Another informant, Ntswaki Morobi, an ordinary Mosotho from Namahadi village, who was also present at the Namoha Battle and supported the campaign against cattle culling recounted her experience thus:

"I was present at the Namoha meeting with my three friends. We did not join the group but sat aside. When the shooting started we ran away and never looked back. When I arrived at home, I was so terrified that I took my children and ran into the bush with them to hide. We slept there that night. I was afraid that the fight was coming to our village also. The following morning I went back home. On arrival I found my uncle, Makhoba, also at home. He was also present at yesterday's meeting at Namoha. As I was getting ready to run away to Lesotho, we heard the sound of police lorries coming. I had no chance to run away. As for my uncle, he forced himself into an assembled river reeds and hid in it until police cars left. They did not find him as they never suspected that any person could hide in the bunch of reeds. I was also not arrested. Seemingly the police were looking for men, because they asked me where my husband was. Fortunately, he was not in Witsieshoek but at his work place in Johannesburg. After the police had left, I decided not to leave any more seeing that I was not going to be arrested."¹⁹

The *Lingangele* were also supported by people who were working outside Witsieshoek. One such person was Pusetso Mofokeng, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, who was on leave and had just arrived home, went to the Namoha meeting. According

¹⁸ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Mafokoletsa Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Thaba Tshoeu village, 19/09/2001.

¹⁹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Morobi Ntswaki, an ordinary Mosotho from Namahadi village, 03/04/2002.

to him, he was not briefed about the latest developments in the Reserve and went there thinking that that was one of the meetings. He never suspected anything. However, when the police arrived, he began getting worried and regretted his attendance of the meeting. He recalled:

“I attended the Namoha meeting just to show my support of the resistance against the Trust and to see some of my friends whom I had not seen for some time. When the police arrived and were armed, I became very worried and wanted to leave. However, I was afraid that I would be labelled a coward. But when the fighting broke out I ran away until I hid behind a big rock. In the process I lost my new shoes as I could not run fast when wearing them. Seeing that we were not followed, we then took a good look at the developments at Namoha. The white horse which was riding by Lieutenant Jonker was taken by a certain young man who took it to Lesotho and it was never recovered. I was very fortunate not to have been killed, wounded or arrested on that day and after. The next day while still at home the police came and wanted to arrest me. But I lied to them that I was not at Namoha, I only came home yesterday from my work place. When I showed them my identity document, they believed me. However, I lost the wood that I had gathered at home when the police took it without my consent. I did not try to stop them for fear of being arrested. I was so frightened that I did not waste any time, and I went back to Johannesburg the following day where I was working even before the expiry of my leave days.”²⁰

Bennett Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho of Mabilela village, recalled that on the day of the gathering he could not attend the *pitso* because of various reasons. He was a supporter of the *Lingangele* and had approved their action. He regretted that he was not at Namoha on the day of the Battle. Bennett Mothibi felt that he could have prevented the police from shooting those who attended the *pitso*.²¹ However, considering what happened at Namoha, there was nothing that he could have done. He

²⁰ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Pusetso Mofokeng an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 26/03/2002.

²¹ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Bennet Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela, 29/08/2001.

only felt that way because of anger. The only way that his help would have been useful would have been to advise the Basotho to disperse as they were ordered by the police. He illustrated how he saw the happenings at Namoha from his house:

“I was still at home when all those things were happening. So I saw most of what happened at the distance, as Monontsha and Namoha were very close. I saw how people who gathered ran in different directions at the sound of a gun. I was very furious and wanted to go to Namoha, but could not because I was not sure of actually what was happening. Some of my neighbours were ululating, seemingly excited and enjoying what they see happening at Namoha. Those people were clearly showing their hatred to the *Lingangele*. The way they were ululating, dancing and singing it really was clear that they were expecting what they saw to happen. Other people (as they ran away) came to pass by my house in Monontsha and requested water to drink as people in some of the houses refused to give them water. They were very tired and thirsty. One person as he was drinking water, I did not know what scared him, he jumped threw the water jug away and hit the road again. His action left me astonished. I never knew what got into that person.”²²

Stories of the Basotho directly affected

Mmakhanya Motolo, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha, her husband Paramente Motolo was shot and killed by the police at Namoha while hiding in the hut. She cried hysterically as she recounts how she jumped over the body of her husband while carrying a baby. She was running away. She said:

“I did not approve my husband’s involvement in the campaign against the Trust. But as a woman I could not do anything, but to support him. When the fight broke out I was not at home, and only came later after police had left. I just had had a baby. I went home to fetch some money and clothes for the baby as I intended to go to my husband’s parents in Tsheseng village. However, on arrival at home I found bodies of people in a pool of blood and my husband’s body was also there. I nearly fainted. I went into the house picked up some clothes and money and left for Lesotho. I left everything in the hands of my father-in-law who also was at Namoha.

²²

Ibid.

I became a widow and my children became orphans because of the government's Trust. Life has been very difficult for me, and many other women like me, as I battled to make ends meet. But because I know God is on my side I managed to raise my children until they grew up to become men and women. But I am healed now, and as a peace-loving Mosotho, and because *ngwana kgotso ha a lebale tsa kgotso*,²³ I have forgiven and forgotten."²⁴

Some people suffered the pain caused by the cattle culling even before the start of the Battle. Some people were not ready to part ways with their hard earned possessions and thus decided to end their lives. However, according to some informants, only one person, Rabotswa Tsomile, committed suicide. The reason for that, according to informants, was that he did not want to oppose what seemed to come from the authorities. His death was used as an example of how cruel cattle culling was. As for the family members, they were devastated by the death of their loved father and grandfather. Lefa Tsomile, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha and a grandson of the deceased lamented:

"During the time of cattle culling I was still at school. I had a grandfather, Rabotswa Kapari Tsomile, who loved his livestock, especially his cows, and was a very quiet person whom you would not find in arguments or in activities aimed at undermining the authorities. He did not like the culling of cattle at all. Yet he did not come out openly to declare his detest for the Trust. After the first cull, my grandfather was very upset that he had to lose some of his cattle but did not want to talk about it. After the second cull he had to dispose of six of his cows. He was once again very distressed and as a result he committed suicide by hanging himself, rather see more of his hard earned possession just disappeared. I was very grieved by that action and I was angry. I blamed the authorities for his death. I felt so irked towards the authorities that I became an active member of the *Lingangele* because I wanted

²³ "A child of peace never forgets matters of peace." Meaning 'a peaceful person always remains peaceful. Freely Translated.

²⁴ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mrs. Makhanya Motolo, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 19/09/2001.

to see justice being done. The *Lingangele* leaders used his funeral service as a platform to encourage people to resist cattle culling at all costs.”²⁵

The death of Rabotswa Tsomile was confirmed by a number of informants and all attributed his death to the process of the cattle culling.²⁶ The informants felt very strong that Rabotswa’s death was a result of the cattle culling. Following that incident, some people also tried to commit suicide, but failed because they were spotted before they could carry out their plans.²⁷ Mantshepeng Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho of Monontsha village, remarked:

“Many were hurt by the culling to the extent of taking their lives. One such person was Rabotswa Tsomile who committed suicide because of the love he had for his cattle. He chose death rather than to live and see his livestock vanished. Some other people in protest only tried to commit suicide but were not successful. That was an indication of the seriousness of the issue of the cattle culling in Witsieshoek. But the government ignored all these and pressed forward with its policy. I believe that the intransigency of the government was responsible for the deaths of the people at Namoha. Had our demands been considered, we would not have to come to the point where people had to lose their lives. The government should have carried the blame for the Battle and looked after orphans and widowers created by the Namoha Battle. I was

²⁵ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Lefa Jethro Tsomile, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 28/03/2002.

²⁶ Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Lefa Jethro Tsomile, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 28/03/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mantsane Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 01/04/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mamphutlane Tshosane, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 28/03/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 29/08/2001.

²⁷ Personal collection, tape-recording interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Maboela village, 29/08/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Lefa Jethro Tsomile, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 28/03/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mantsane Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 01/04/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mantshepeng Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 28/03/2002.

also arrested but released later. The police were very brutal and mishandled us. Before they arrest you, they would beat you first regardless of whether you were a woman or man. The day they forced us out from Namoha after battle, they also beat us and harassed us. In the process of relocating our fields were taken away and we lost some of our possessions as we were removed without being given enough time to prepare. At our new places we had to start afresh building mud houses and no assistance was given to us. We were starving as we could not reap anything since our fields were taken away and we were not allowed to go back to Namoha.”²⁸

Another informant, Dora Mopeli, a retired nurse from Monontsha village, was totally unaware of what was happening in Witsieshoek because she was at a Nursing College in Durban. However, the Battle affected her in that her fiancé was involved and that delayed their marriage. She indicated that she was worried that she would lose her future husband and she might not get married again. When she heard of the Battle and the subsequent imprisonment of her fiancé she came home and went to look for him. But she encountered problems that dismayed her further that she would no longer see her fiancé. She recalled:

“During the Namoha incident I was a student-nurse in Durban, My husband, Nthota Mopeli, was very active in the *Lingangele* activities and always updated me of what was happening. But suddenly there was no longer any correspondence from him. That worried me a great deal. But I was later informed by my in-laws that he was arrested. I was devastated. I tried to locate him but failed in my first attempt. I only managed to see him three months after he was jailed. Sometimes when I went to visit him, I would be refused permission to see him. That action angered me a lot because I came from far but police would not let me see him. He was however, well looked after and given minor duties. I think the reason for this was his complexion, he was light in complexion. After his release, he worked at Lefika Theological school until he became a Minister in the new cabinet of the former Qwa-Qwa homeland government. We got married

²⁸

Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mantshepeng Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 28/03/2002.

two years after he was released from prison.”²⁹

Mantsane Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, who at the time of the Namoha Battle was a resident of Monontsha village, which is closer to Namoha, recalled that she did not attend the gathering on the day of the fight. Like many other people who ran away after the clash, Mantsane Mopeli also did the same. She recalled:

“We heard the sound of guns and a few moments thereafter, my father-in-law, arrived covered with blood. But fortunately for him he was not arrested. We ran away during the night into Lesotho and remained there for a long time. During all that time I did not know the whereabouts of my husband, Kgomo Raymond Mopeli. I later learned that they were hiding in the mountain and only came out later after everything had subsided. In their hiding place they were always in fear and alert to anything, and that made them to even run away at every unusual sound. A painful life indeed. He once told me that one day they sent some boys to go and fetch water for them from the river. Those boys took some time, and one of them went out to check the boys and saw them coming. He alerted others and said ‘they are coming’. That frightened others and they began running away. He also joined them. They misinterpreted him and thought that he was referring to the police. That showed the effect the Battle had on those men.”³⁰

The Namoha Battle as pointed out earlier also created orphans. That meant some people would have to take care of such families. In the Basotho culture, when one’s brother passes away, the remaining one takes over the responsibility of looking after the family. That was the case with a number of families after the Namoha Battle. Thulo Mopeli, a retired school teacher from Kudumane village, who was faced with such a responsibility described his experiences as follows:

“I did not go to Namoha on that but my brother went there. Unfortunately, he was fatally shot in the head and died later

²⁹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Dora Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 28/03/2002.

³⁰ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mantsane Mopeli, an ordinary Mosotho from Bolata village, 01/04/2002.

at Harrismith Hospital. The bullet penetrated through his right ear and came out on the left-hand side. I was very hurt by that and wanted to avenge his death. But nothing came out. Now I had to look after his family. He had a wife and two children. I also had a family of my own. Life became very difficult as I had to support two families while still struggling with my own. But with God's grace, I managed. I still feel that we should have been compensated for the losses we suffered. But that never happened and life goes on."³¹

Some informants alleged that they fell victim to police mistreatment after the Battle. Every male person, according to informants, entering Witsieshoek was subjected to interrogation by the police to establish whether he was present at Namoha on the day of the fight or not. The interrogation would sometimes end in some people being beaten up. A case in point was the experience of one informant, Nthute Mokhachane, an ordinary Mosotho of Makeneng village, who had just come home from Johannesburg. He alleged that he fell victim of the police interrogation and whipping. He recounted his memories and experience thus:

"When I came home for leave in 1950 I arrived in the midst of Namoha confusion. I took a bus from Harrismith to Witsieshoek. In the bus there were four of us. As we were talking one man asked me where Namoha is and I showed him where it was and what I heard happened there last week. The following day I was woken up by a strange person who told me I am wanted at police station. I did not suspect anything and, innocently, I went to the police station. On arrival I found three white policemen who were not friendly at all. They asked me where I come from, and I explained to them. The other one asked me why I ran away from Namoha. Before I could explain that I was not at Namoha, he hit me on the face and I fell down. They started beating and kicking me. My face was swollen and covered with blood and I could not see clearly where I was going. They then sent me away after they had attacked me. I could not walk straight as my vision was blurred because of the swollen face. I was in terrible pain. After bathing I went to report the matter to Chief Charles Mopeli. He was startled to see how I was assaulted. I explained everything to him and what happened, but I could not provide him with their names as I did not notice them.

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Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Thulo Victor Mopeli, a retired school teacher from Kudumane village, 22/03/2002.

He became even more upset when I reported that I was assaulted without being asked to produce my identity document. I then left for home. I later learned that two of those policemen were dismissed. This Battle brings painful memories to me. It left us in afflictions. I lost four relatives in this Battle and we had to take care of their children which meant an extra burden for us. And I was assaulted for no reason at all. I was full of anger and wanted to avenge but I did not know how.”³²

The happenings and impact of Namoha were also seen and felt by the children, who at that time were stopped from going to school. The Battle had long term effects on them as it traumatised those who were playing not far from where the clash took place. According to some informants, the children did not understand what was going on until they heard the sound of guns and saw people ran in different directions. Ntshepeng Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, who was a child at that time related her experience as follows:

“I was still a child during the Battle and on that fateful day we did not go to school and were playing outside my uncle’s house. at Namoha. When the shooting began we ran into the house of my uncle, Paramente Motolo. A few moments later, my uncle entered the house with other men and asked us to cover them with blankets. Some of them were already covered in blood thus we were afraid of the blood and wanted to run away. When we left the house, we met with the police entering the house. As we were children, they let us leave. We ran away together with other old people until we crossed the border into Lesotho. In Lesotho we were housed by certain Mr. Moqhodi who really looked after us very well. Our parents came a few days later to collect us, after frantically looked for us. My aunt who was pregnant gave birth to a baby girl and named her *Madithunya*³³ because of the battle. The sound of guns, the bodies that I saw lying down and the blood traumatised me. Sometimes when it was quiet I would hear the sound of guns and when I was sleeping I would see those bodies and sometimes I would jump out of bed because of nightmares. I could not finish my schooling

³² Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Mokhachane J. Nthute, an ordinary Mosotho from Makeneng village, 05/04/2002.

³³ “Mother of Guns.” Freely Translated.

because I was giving teachers problems in class and my parents kept me home. I did not receive any professional help. However, by God's grace the time healed me. But the sad thing was that since I was withdrawn from school, I never went back. I am suffering today because of what happened that day. I believed that had I had a chance to finish schooling I would be a better person today."³⁴

The other people who were children at that time saw everything that took place at Namoha from a distance. When the clash occurred they heard the sound of guns and also saw people running in different directions. That experience terrified them as they were children and their parents had attended the same gathering. To them it looked like the end of the world had come. Mamphutlane Tshosane, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, said that her main concern was her father who had attended the meeting. She had just lost her mother and losing her father was going to make life difficult for her and her siblings. She remembered:

"I did not go to school on that day. When the fighting broke out I watched from home. I saw the mountain covered by people who were running away. I became worried about my father who had attended the gathering. I started asking myself lots of questions, but convinced myself that he was alive. At home two old men, Abia Motikwe, who was crippled and Jan Moloi, who was blind, tried to run away from home to hide when they heard the gun shots. I stopped them and kept them in our house until I accompanied them back to their houses. My father, Timotia Twala, fortunately escaped unhurt and ran away. He did not come home and remain in hiding for one month. We were very worried by his absence and that affected us badly emotionally. We thought the worst has happened to him. Life lost meaning to us, for without him we thought we would not make it in life as we had just lost our mother. However, amidst that frustration a message was delivered to us informing us that my father was still alive. We felt relieved. During his absence the police would always come home searching for him and in the processes mishandling us. We did not know where he was but we were accused of hiding him. We ended up running away from home to stay with our uncle at Bolata village. My father remained in hiding until Christmas time. We were longing to

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Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Ntshepeng Mokoena, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 28/03/2002.

see him. He decided to come home during Christmas to spend time with us. However, on his arrival on 24 December 1950, he was arrested and taken to Harrismith. The police caught him when he was relaxing and enjoying his beer. When we arrived at home on Christmas day to see him, we found him gone. We were told by the neighbours that he was arrested. We were devastated by the news and thought the police were going to kill him. He was found guilty and sentenced to jail in Pietermaritzburg. Due to lack of money we could not visit him whilst in prison and during his absence life was very difficult. We had to live the life of begging. As the older child I had to drop out of school so that I could look after my siblings. When my father was released, he struggled to find steady employment. But I managed to go back to school and continued with my studies.”³⁵

The outbreak of the fighting at Namoha also frightened the herd boys, who were looking after cattle at Monontsha village. The sound of guns they heard caused them to abandon the cattle. One of them, Molefi Koloi, an ordinary Mosotho from Hlatseng village, whose father was an active member of the *Lingangele* recalled:

“When the confrontation began we were looking after the livestock and were not too far from the scene of the clash. We left the cattle and ran to our homes when we heard the sound of guns and saw people scatter. We were frightened by the sound of the guns and when we see people scattering all over the mountain. There was confusion all over and we ran in different directions. When I arrived at home, I locked myself up in the house and eagerly waited for my parents to come home. When my mother arrived she was terrified, because she was worried about my father. Fortunately, my father, Scotland Koloi, arrived home late that night and explained to us what happened. The following day he fled to Middlepunt farm to stay there until everything had subsided. However, when he learned that he was also on the wanted list of the police he came back home. He was arrested on the same night that he arrived even though he intended to hand himself over to the police the next day. He was convicted and sentenced to three years imprisonment. Unlike in many families we did not suffer a lot because my father, as a traditional doctor, was successful. He was the chief traditional doctor of the *Lingangele*. When he was released, he continued with his practice and did not need any job.

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Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mamphutlane Tshosane, an ordinary Mosotho from Monontsha village, 28/03/2002.

He was even making more money because of the stories making rounds that, had he not used his magic, police would have wiped away all the Basotho at Namoha. It was also rumoured that the police guns ended up pumping water and others oil instead of the bullets, and that is why the police decided to retreat. Because of all the stories my father was feared and respected by majority of people.”³⁶

The families of those who were in the forefront of the *Lingangele* suffered more than other families. Some children grew up not knowing who their fathers were and their whereabouts. Many children, as indicated earlier, had to drop out of school to assist their mothers in making ends meet. The impact the Battle had on them is still felt today. Mpheteng’s family is an example of such families. In fact, Mpheteng was the secretary of the *Lingangele*. His children are still suffering the consequences of their father’s actions. The memories of the police harassment still haunt them to the point that it is difficult for them to talk about their past. Tibiri Mpheteng, an ordinary Mosotho from Kudumane village, lamented:

“My father, Paulus Mpheteng, was very active in the matters of the *Lingangele*. As his children we never spent time with him. He was always in and out of the house. After he was exiled, he escaped into Lesotho. He would arrive unexpectedly during the night and disappear once again. He stayed in Lesotho and was always in the company of the *Lekgotla La Bafo*³⁷ in Lesotho. Police were always coming home day and night looking for him but could not find him and we did not understand exactly why police were after him. The police were mishandling us every time they come home and could not find my father. Life was very difficult for us. My mother was not working and had to sell ‘traditional beer’ and fat cakes to keep us going. Because of hunger and the fact that we had to help our mother in selling, we dropped out of school early and I went to look for work. I was given a job by ministers of religion at Lefika, working as a gardener. However, when they heard that I was the son of Mpheteng, they immediately dismissed me. I travelled around

³⁶ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Molefi Kolo, an ordinary Mosotho from Hlatseng village, 18/04/2002.

³⁷ “Council of Commoners.” Freely Translated.

doing piece jobs until I was arrested in Johannesburg and spent six months in jail because I did not have the permission to be working in Johannesburg. But upon my release, I finally got employed in Johannesburg until I was retrenched in 1985. Since then I have been out of work and I believe that had my father not suffered the way he did at the hands of the authorities I could have attended and finished schooling. Today I am still suffering from the consequences because of what happened to my father. I am not learned and I cannot find a job that would help me look well after my family. I feel very sad about the whole thing. Even people whom my father suffered on their behalf never bothered to assist us. But after my father came back home they acted as if they were looking after us, because they wanted something from him, as he was a very intelligent person.”³⁸

Another child of Mpheteng, Selloane Chalale, an ordinary Mosotho from Kensitown location of Phuthaditjhaba, managed to attend school even though she could not finish. However, she was better off than her brother and now she is able to look after herself and her family. Nonetheless, Selloane felt that had her father looked after them, she would be a better person today. She is, nevertheless, not bitter and appreciates the contribution her father had made in fighting for the rights of the Basotho of Witsieshoek. She recalled her early experiences thus:

“When I was born, I was told, my father, Paulus Mpheteng, was busy with the activities of the *Lingangele*. After school, as he was a teacher, he would spend time away from home attending to matters of *Lingangele* and sometimes of the Board. I did not know him that he was my father until 1974. After he escaped from the exile, police were always coming home searching for him and in the process mishandled us. They would ask me the whereabouts of our father and when I say do not know they threatened me that they would take my food away. Even when I told them that I did not know him, they would always promise to beat me or take my food away. Truly speaking I thought that I did not have a father. This man who only came during the night and left again I never thought that he could be my father. On arrival, he would always pray and before he leaves we would all

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Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Bakubung Tibiri Mpheteng an ordinary Mosotho from Kudumane village, 04/04/2002.

pray again, but always when we opened our eyes he would not be there. My mother would also act as if she did not know where that man disappeared. I was not told that, that man was my father. The reason for this was that when the police asked us about him then we should not know anything. We were always living in fear even when police were not coming. When I was sleeping, I would have nightmares. The police were so brutal that when they arrived they would just kick doors open and our doors were always broken. The police also confiscated all the books that belonged to my father. The saddest thing that happened, which we still reap its fruit was that we could not all attend school. I was the only one who attended school but could not finish schooling. My father was not working and not staying at home and my mother was struggling to take care of us. In 1974 my father was tired of always being on the run and came home and told my mother that he was no longer leaving and is going to hand himself in to the police the next day. It was then that we were told that he was our father. On the very same night he had decided not to go back again a large number of the police came and wanted to arrest him. But with the help of chief's intervention they left him because he had indicated that he would go to the police in the morning to hand himself in. We were all scared that police might assassinate him. However, nothing was done to him and he came back home the very same day. It was obvious that he was pardoned. After all those things, nobody wanted to work with him or offer him a job. After much struggle he started a school in 1976 where he taught small children in a shack. He also invited other interested people to come forward and assist in teaching these children. This school developed into a recognised primary school and was named Khotsong Primary School. The school still exists today under the very same name. Nonetheless, he could not teach long there as he was accused of teaching children politics and was forced to resign. He never received any compensation for all his efforts and remained out of work until he passed away in 1993.”³⁹

Mpheteng, after he was allowed back home, he allegedly started a school. According to the informants, his intention to start a school was to teach the Basotho children to

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Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Selloane Chalale, an ordinary Mosotho from Kensitown location, 27/03/2002.

be proud of their culture and to be independent thinkers.⁴⁰ Mpheteng was a very intelligent person and the prison and banishment did not make him change his thinking. He continued with his campaign to discredit the white rule. However, he was not supported as people feared another Namoha. Wherever he would be, he always spoke about the oppression of the Basotho and his wish to liberate them. He wanted to do more for the Basotho, but he was incapacitated by lack of support. One of the teachers, Tieho Mopeli, a retired school teacher from Matshediso village, who taught with Mpheteng at Khotsonq Primary school, remembered that:

“After Mpheteng was allowed back in Witsieshoek, he wanted to continue with activities that would undermine the white rule. To him, *e ne e sa lala, empa e bothile*.⁴¹ He applied for an identity document and thereafter started a school. He started a school because he believed that the NG Kerk that was responsible for education in Witsieshoek was not teaching the Black children what was relevant to them. Therefore, he wanted a school that would produce the Basotho intellectuals, who would know and understand their culture. He invited other learned persons who were not working to join him in teaching the Basotho children what was relevant to them. He mostly taught his learners the most important events in the lives of the Basotho, particularly about the Namoha Battle and the life and times of the prophet Walter Matitta⁴²

⁴⁰ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Tieho Mopeli, a retired school teacher from Matshediso village, 28/03/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Selloane Chalale, an ordinary Mosotho from Kensitown location, 27/03/2002; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Bakubung Tibiri Mpheteng an ordinary Mosotho from Kudumane village, 04/04/2002; Personal collection, tape-recording interview with Chief Setsoto Mopeli, a sub-chief at Poelong village, 25/09/2001; Personal collection, tape-recording of interview with Mr. Harry Mothibi, an ordinary Mosotho from Mabilela village, 29/08/2001; Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Thulo Victor Mopeli, a retired school teacher from Kudumane village, 22/03/2002.

⁴¹ “It was not sleeping, it was only lying down.” This means the quarrel was not finished, there was only a temporary truce. Freely Translated.

⁴² According to the informants, Walter Matitta was born in 1896 in Lesotho. His birth was prophesied by Prophetess Mantsopa. At birth he had fully developed set of teeth, but disappeared when he was seven years old. When he was a young man of about twenty-one, he became ill and died and was resurrected on the third day. When he was resurrected he could read and write, and could speak seven languages like an educated man. He began preaching and he could explain the Bible in a way that was acceptable to the Christians who heard him. He also came to preach and healed people in Witsieshoek. His mission was seen

because he believed they had to know those things. I started teaching at his school and I knew what he was accused of doing, that he was teaching children politics, was a distortion of the truth. He was teaching them their heritage and to be independent thinkers. The accusation levelled against Mpheteng was just a campaign to get rid of him because the authorities wanted to silence everybody who played a major role in the Namoha Battle. In actual fact, they wanted the incident to be forgotten and to defame all those who played a major role in the build up towards the Battle. Anything that reminded them of the incident was to be removed. We people who were close to him were sidelined by the authorities and could not be employed anywhere in the Reserve. We had to work at that school without any compensation until he had been dismissed.”⁴³

The learners in schools also felt the wrath of the law and the consequences of the Battle of Namoha. Manti Sempe, a retired school principal from Beirut location of Phuthaditjhaba, who was a student at the time of the Namoha Battle remembered:

“What the government officials were doing to us was unfair. The government did not even respect us in classes. One day the police came and drag our teacher, Mpheteng, from class and arrested him. We were furious but the principal admonished us not to hinder the work of the police. This action, together with subsequent events, caused me to hate white people and saw them as our enemies. What aggravated my hatred was the fact that my grandfather, Matala Sempe, was shot at and was seriously wounded at Namoha. He was also arrested but released because he was not an active member of the *Lingangele*.”⁴⁴

Another former learner, Mary Nkomo, an ordinary Mosotho from Elite location, who was based in Bethlehem at the time remembered how difficult it was for them when they were commanded to attend the funeral service of Lieutenant Jonker. They reluctantly

as comparable to that of Moses. Unlike, Moses, Matitta was sent by God to the Whites, who controlled the government, as well as to the Blacks. During his time, it claimed that Matitta did many miracles from healing to resurrecting people.

⁴³ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Ticho Mopeli, a retired school teacher from Matshediso village, 28/03/2002.

⁴⁴ Personal collection, cassette of interview with Mr. Manti Eugene Sempe a retired school principal from Beirut location, 25/03/2002.

attended together with their teachers. According to her, that was done so as to show the white people in Bethlehem that they did not endorse what the Basotho in Witsieshoek had done. Mary Nkomo portrayed the atmosphere at the funeral service of Lieutenant Jonker as follows:

“At the time of the Namoha Battle I was schooling in Bethlehem. We heard what happened in Witsieshoek and how that had led to the death of many people. I was afraid to go back home after the Battle, because I did not know what was happening in there after the Battle. When we heard of the death of Lieutenant Jonker, I thought that the fighting was going to affect Bethlehem. That was evidenced by the attitude of the white people to us. They looked at us with suspicion. We were even afraid to go to town. However, on the day of the funeral service of Lieutenant Jonker we were forced to attend by our teachers. It was a very sorrowful day for family members. White people in attendance were looking at us with distrust. We were very frightened. But nothing happened to us at the funeral. Some of the black people in Bethlehem were also very angry at the Basotho of Witsieshoek for killing Lieutenant Jonker, whom they described as a person who was dedicated to his work and who loved black people. There was a general feeling that the Basotho of Witsieshoek had to pay for what they did to the Jonker’s family. I was not sure whether that was said to appease the white people or that they really meant it. but the fact was that the Namoha Battle brought tension between Black and White people.”⁴⁵

Stories of the Basotho opposed to the *Lingangele*

There are always two sides to a story. Not all the people in Witsieshoek supported the *Lingangele* even though they did not approve of the culling. However, many people could not come out to voice their disapproval of the actions of the *Lingangele*. Those people who were known not to be supporters of the *Lingangele* were labelled traitors. That attitude affected the children negatively more than their parents. These children of the rangers (inspectors) were the ones who were the most prejudiced. That caused them great hardship and they did not understand why they had to suffer because of the work that was done by their parents. Michael Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho of Namahadi

⁴⁵ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Mary Nkomo, an ordinary Mosotho from Elite location, 25/03/2002.

village, narrated his experience this way:

“My father, Mosola Moteka, was the chief inspector (ranger) of the cattle. They were the ones who checked and made sure that all the culled livestock was disposed off. The people hated him (and us his children) because of the work that my father was doing, disregarding the fact that he was also working for his children. Wherever we went out, people would pass remarks and made us feel unwanted and ashamed of our father. I could not understand that behaviour because I did not have a choice, and he was my father. Life was very difficult for us. I nearly committed suicide because of the treatment we were receiving wherever we went. But with God’s grace I did not and we survived the storm.”⁴⁶

Another informant, Dimakatso Sethunya, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Sethunya village, who was opposed to the actions of the *Lingangele* but was in favour of the cattle culling harshly criticised the *Lingangele*. She called herself a loyal supporter of the Paramount Chief. She pointed out that she and most of those who were loyal to Chief Charles Mopeli did not suffer as those who supported the *Lingangele*, because they did not live under any fear of being arrested. She felt that the *Lingangele* movement was just a ploy by its leader, Mopelinyane, to fight the Paramount Chief. The reason for Mopelinyane to fight was to oust Charles Mopeli so that he could become the Paramount Chief. Dimakatso Sethunya welcomed the decision to banish Mopelinyane, because that, according to her, helped to restore peace in Witsieshoek. She described her feelings thus:

“I did not go to Namoha because I was one of the persons who respected Morena Charles Mopeli. Mopelinyane was a terrorist, he was a crook. We could not associate ourselves with him. He wanted to be the paramount chief, a position he did not deserve. He was using other people to fight his battle with Chief Charles Mopeli. People like me could not be persuaded by hypocrite like Mopelinyane to follow him. What happened at Namoha rejoiced me because what those people were doing was not right. Therefore, justice was done. As for others who were there not aware of the intentions of Mopelinyane, they had to understand that *Nonyana e*

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Personal collection, transcript interview with Mr. Michael Moteka, an ordinary Mosotho from Namahadi village, 01/04/2002.

otlletlwa le sehlahla.⁴⁷ To show that they were wrong and they failed in their plot, Mopelinyane was banished to Nebo, a punishment we all accepted because we were now going to live peacefully. To prove that the action taken against Mopelinyane was the correct one, no confrontation has ever occurred since Mopelinyane was removed from Witsieshoek. I am still proud of Chief Charles Mopeli who worked hard thereafter to rebuild his nation and accepting members of the *Lingangele* back in Witsieshoek, indeed, *sehole se ratwa ke mmasona*⁴⁸. Many regretted their involvement in the *Lingangele* actions against the government.”⁴⁹

Conclusion

From the above discussion, it appears that the Namoha Battle had affected the Basotho of Witsieshoek in many ways. Most of those people who were directly involved in the Battle felt proud of their contribution. They believed that had they not opposed the Trust they could have lost their hard earned livestock. The informants’ personal histories are very important as they tell the story why they joined the *Lingangele* in opposing the Trust. Despite the sufferings, they feel proud that they took part in the fight against cattle culling. It is important to point out that the Battle of Namoha impacted on both the people who were engaged in the fight as well as those who were not. In all the stories and experiences of the individuals discussed above there is a common feeling, that of bitterness.

The Battle left many people impoverished and had led to the division of the Witsieshoek residents into two opposing groups. Contrary to what many people were made to believe (that all the Basotho supported the *Lingangele*) the above stories demonstrate that not all the Basotho were for the *Lingangele* and that some were indeed in favour

⁴⁷ “The bird is struck together with the tree.” This means that in a retaliation one may hurt innocent people together with the guilty. Freely Translated.

⁴⁸ “The cripple is loved by its mother.” This means parents do not turn away from their children whatever they may have done. Freely Translated.

⁴⁹ Personal collection, transcript interview with Mrs. Dimakatso Masomsone Sethunya, an ordinary Mosotho from Ha-Sethunya village, 05/04/2002.

of the cattle culling because they believed it was for a good cause. Despite the displacement, suspicion and mutual distrust among the Basotho of Witsieshoek after the Battle, the Paramount Chief, Charles Mopeli, managed to restore peace and calm among his people. The informants alleged that they consented to the peace process because they were threatened with imprisonment, and that their leaders were in prison and nobody was available to lead them. Furthermore, the disbanding of the Namoha village immediately after the Battle prevented any converging of the *Lingangele* members.

Contrary to what many informants alleged (that they were victimised), they also contributed to their situation. The fact that they disobeyed the proclamation prohibiting the meetings made them guilty too. Their refusal to attend the Commission's hearing and to disperse after being asked to do so by the police did not help their cause. Their attitude to the police, and their actions just before the outbreak of the clash, were provocative. Their refusal to disperse and their utterances to the police indicate that they were ready to fight with the police. However, after the Battle they put the blame squarely on the police. In fact, had they adhered to the rule of law the disasters that followed the clash at Namoha would possibly have been avoided. Their personal stories, experiences and perspectives are valuable as they reveal their feelings and historical remembrance of the Namoha Battle. They, indeed, complement the written reports on the Battle.

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SUMMARY

The thesis has discussed the significance of oral history in the reconstruction of the past. The Namoha Battle of 1950 was used as a case study. Memories and experiences of the eyewitnesses on the Battle have been recorded. As discussed in the preceding chapters oral history can be used for various reasons. In this thesis it has been successfully used to record the stories of the ordinary people in supplementing and complementing written sources about the Namoha Battle of 1950.

The Witsieshoek area, where Namoha village is situated, was originally granted by President Brand of the Orange Free State to the Bakoena, the Basotho tribe under Chief Paulus Howell Mopeli in 1867. Witsieshoek was administered by the Paramount Chief and an Additional Native Commissioner. The Paramount Chief was responsible for the land distribution until 1936, when the Native Trust Land Act (No.18 of 1936) (herein after the Trust) was passed. This Act placed the control of the land under the Native Commissioner.

The Trust also made provision for the introduction of betterment measures in the Reserves. However, these measures were not embraced by the Basotho of Witsieshoek. The most resented measure was the improvement of livestock by way of culling the weak animals. The Basotho demanded the appointment of a Commission of Enquiry because they believed they had been deceived. The government's refusal to appoint the Commission and suspend the Trust led to the escalation of violence in Witsieshoek. Consequently, the government brought in police reinforcement to bring order in the area. However, that was misinterpreted by the Basotho as government's plan to coerce them into accepting betterment measures. Thus, they intensified their defiance of the betterment measures.

The escalation of unrest and disturbances forced the government to institute a Commission of Enquiry. The Commission was to investigate the causes of unrest and disturbances in Witsieshoek, and make recommendations. However, the radicals, popularly known as the *Lingangele* refused to cooperate fully with the Commission. In defiance of the proclamation that prevented any gathering of more than five people, on the 27 November 1950, the *Lingangele* held a meeting at Namoha. When the police came to deliver the subpoenas to four of their leaders who were to appear before the Commission, the clash ensued. This confrontation resulted in the death of sixteen people and scores injured.

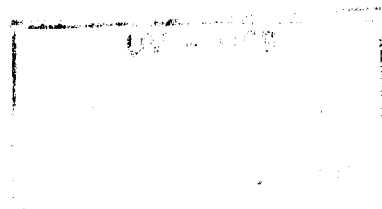
This episode was followed by mass arrests and conviction of the leaders of the *Lingangele* and some of their followers, as well as those who were found in their company. After serving their sentences, the leaders were banned from Witsieshoek and were exiled. This incident left the Basotho destitute. Many ran away from their homes because they feared that they would be arrested. Many had been haunted by this incident until their death while those still living are afraid to freely speak about the event. The Commission that was appointed put the blame on both the 'radicals' and the shortsightedness of the government officials. In the end all the proposed betterment measures were abandoned, and efforts were made to restore peace in the Reserve.

OPSOMMING

Die tesis behandel die belangrikheid van mondelinge geskiedenis in die rekonstruksie van die verlede. Die Slag van Namoha in 1950 is gebruik as 'n gevallestudie. Die herrinerings en ervarings van bogenoemde Slag is opgeteken. Soos bespreek in die voorafgaande hoofstukke mondelinge geskiedenis kan gebruik word om verskeie redes. In hierdie tesis is dit suksesvol gebruik om die verhale van gewone mense op te teken om die geskrewe bronne van die Slag van Namoha aan te vul.

Die Witsieshoek area waar die dorpie van Namoha geleë is, is oorspronklik in 1867 deur President Brand van die Oranje Vrystaat toegeken aan die Bakoena, die Basoeto stam van Hoofman Paulus Howell Mopeli. Witsieshoek was geadministreer deur die Opperhoofman en 'n Addisionele Naturelle Kommissaris. Die Opperhoofman was verantwoordelik vir die verdeling van grond tot 1936, toe die Naturelle Trust grondwet (Nr. 18 van 1936) (hierna die Trust) gepromulgeer is. Hierdie wet het die kontrole van grond onder die Naturelle Kommissaris geplaas.

Die Trust het ook voorsiening gemaak vir die instel van maatreëls om die omstandighede in die Reserwe te verbeter. Hierdie maatreëls is egter nie aanvaar deur die Basoeto's van Witsieshoek nie. Die maatreël wat hulle die meeste gegrief het, was die uitdun van verswakte diere om die lewende hawe te versterk. Die Basoetos het aangedring op die aanwys van 'n Kommissie van Ondersoek omdat hulle geglo het dat hulle mislei is. Die regering se weiering om so 'n Kommissie aan te stel het gelei tot geweld in Witsieshoek. Die gevolg was dat die regering polisie versterking na die gebied gestuur het om orde te herstel. Hierdie optrede van die regering is egter verkeerd vertolk deur die Basoetos wat dit gesien het as 'n plan van die regering om hulle te dwing om die verbeteringsmaatreëls te aanvaar. Die gevolg was dat hulle hul protes teen hierdie maatreëls verskerp het.



Die toename in oproerigheid en onluste het die regering genoop om 'n Kommissie van Onderzoek in te stel. Die Kommissie sou die oorsake van die onluste en geweld ondersoek en aanbevelings doen. Die 'radikale', bekend as die *Lingangele* en sommige van hulle volgelingen het egter geweier om hulle volle samewerking aan die Kommissie te gee. In weerwil van 'n proklamasie wat byeenkomste van meer as vyf mense verbied het, het die *Lingangele* op 27 November 1950 'n vergadering in Namoha gehou. Toe die polisie arriveer om dagvaardings te bestel aan vier van die leiersfigure om voor die Kommissie te verskyn het geweld uitgebreek. Tydens die geweld het sestig mense gesterf en 'n groot aantal persone is beseer.

Hierdie voorval is gevolg deur massa arrestasies en die skuldigbevinding van die leiers van die *Lingangele* en sommige van hulle volgelingen sowel as die wat in hulle geselskap gevind is. Na hulle hul vonnisse uitgedien het is die leiers verban uit Witsieshoek. Hierdie gebeure het die Basoetos verarm gelaat. Baie het van hulle huise gevlug uit vrees dat hulle gearresteer sal word. Baie van die wat betrokke was by hierdie gebeure kon hulle dood nie verwerk of vergeet nie en die oorlewendes is te bang om openlik daaroor te praat. Die Kommissie wat aangestel is het beide die radikale en die kortsigtheid van die regering geblameer vir die gebeure. Aan die einde is alle maatreels vir verbetering laat vaar en is pogings aangewend om vrede te herstel in die Reserwe.

KEY WORDS

- Oral history
- Oral Tradition
- Witsieshoek Native Reserve
- Witsieshoek
- Oetsi
- Qwa-Qwa
- Namoha Battle
- The Trust
- Mopelinyane
- Chief Charles Mopeli's rule
- Lingangele
- Traktaat
- Culling of cattle
- The Basotho

SLEUTEL WOORDE

- Mondelinge geskiedenis
- Mondelinge Tradisie
- Witsieshoek Naturelleservaat
- Witsieshoek
- Oetsi
- Qwa-Qwa
- Slag van Namoha
- Die Trust
- Mopelinyane
- Charles Mopeli se bewind
- Lingangele
- Traktaat
- Uitdun van beeste
- Die Basotho