

Dreams for Lesotho: Independence, Foreign Assistance, and Development**John Aerni-Flessner****Publication Date**

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DREAMS FOR LESOTHO

INDEPENDENCE,
FOREIGN ASSISTANCE,
AND DEVELOPMENT

JOHN AERNI-FLESSNER

DREAMS FOR LESOTHO

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Independence,
Foreign Assistance,
and Development

JOHN AERNI-FLESSNER

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Introduction

Hope . . . is not the same as joy when things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early successes, but rather an ability to work for something to succeed. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It's not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. It is this hope, above all, that gives us strength to live and to continually try new things, even in conditions that seem hopeless.

—Vaclav Havel, “Never Hope against Hope”

Strolling down Kingsway, the main commercial and governmental street in Maseru, one finds that most traffic consists of the ubiquitous taxis cruising slowly for passengers. These include both large white Toyota Hilux vans and dilapidated “four-plus-ones”—old taxi cars whose horns inevitably sputter rather than hoot from years of overuse. The sidewalks are packed with Basotho, many of the women wearing patterned and brightly colored Seshoeshoe dresses with matching head coverings, the men in suits or wearing *kobo*, wool blankets, with the occasional older man wearing the *mokorotlo*—the iconic conical grass hat of Lesotho.¹

Amidst this hubbub, one also sees the luxury sedans and massive *bak-kies* (pickups) of South African businesspeople, Mercedes-Benz sedans with red governmental license plates, and a profusion of large four-wheel-drive vehicles marked with an alphabet soup of acronyms—UN (United

Nations), WFP (World Food Programme), CARE (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere), UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), GIZ (German Agency for International Cooperation), USAID (United States Agency for International Development), DFID (Department for International Development, U.K.), and more. That these aid organizations are ubiquitous in the capital is not surprising as Lesotho consistently ranks among the world's poorest countries. The organizations have heavy-duty vehicles so they can tackle the dirt and gravel tracks that lead to the majority of villages in the country, suggesting that they are focused on serving all Basotho, regardless of ease of accessibility. The massive vehicles also signal, however, a disconnect between the organizations and ordinary Basotho walking Kingsway—low-level civil servants, the roughly forty thousand people employed in the garment industry, rural villagers in town to access banks or health care, or the large population of urban dwellers who muddle through on a combination of remittances, old-age stipends, the informal economy, and a few odd head of livestock that they manage to keep in periurban Maseru settlements. In climate-controlled comfort, the employees of aid organizations, Basotho and expatriate, cruise through town in a sort of luxury known only to senior governmental officials and a few other well-placed businesspeople.

It is no wonder, then, that Basotho like Thabelo Kebise, a fifty-four-year-old union organizer and former professional driver, hope to find work in the development sector. In Kebise's case, this desire remained even though he had a private sector job in a country where such jobs are scarce. He saw the development sector as providing the best potential to increase his earnings and improve his prestige.² The development sector is well entrenched in Lesotho, not just in terms of structures—vehicles, buildings, and programs—but also in the minds of Basotho. It is part of the landscape, part of the fiber of the national community, and still a salient marker of Lesotho's sovereignty from South Africa. Lesotho's independence is reaffirmed daily by the fact that Maseru is an international capital with American and Chinese embassies and an international airport and by the presence of a host of multilateral and bilateral development and aid organizations that have separate Maseru offices rather than just branches of a central office based in Pretoria or Cape Town, as they would if Lesotho were a province of South Africa. This state of affairs came about because of how colonial administrators, Basotho officials, and ordinary Basotho internalized the rhetoric of development in the 1960s and 1970s and how

they worked for conceptions of independence that were dependent on economic, social, and political development. The definition of *development* was never static or agreed on by all, but the term became a rhetorical linchpin that guided conversations and actions around what independence should look like in Lesotho. Common to all the conceptions was the idea that independence could not come about without development and that more development would lead to greater independence for individuals, communities, and the country as a whole.

Development and development organizations were not always present in large numbers in Lesotho, however. At independence in 1966, there was only a small British aid program, a handful of private charitable organizations with minimal staff, and no industry or manufacturing in the country. And yet nine years later, in 1975, the government of Lesotho was accepting funding from twenty-seven countries, with seventy-two more “international agencies and non- and quasi-governmental organizations” in the country, bringing in millions per year. By the end of the decade, Lesotho received \$64 million per year in development assistance, or \$49 per person.³

This rapid increase raises questions about why so many organizations came to Lesotho after the transfer of power, how local people felt about their arrival, and how their presence affected local political processes. The phenomenon of the arrival of aid organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) around independence was certainly not unique to Lesotho, but the country was the setting for Ferguson’s analysis of the impact of development on local governance and power structures. He argued persuasively that the net effect of this macro-process of “development” was not improved life outcomes for the population, increased national economic output, or any of the other lofty goals put forth by government planners and development professionals. Rather, it was the entrenchment of “bureaucratic state power” by situating decision making about development projects in technical agencies and bilateral funding agreements rather than in local political processes.⁴ This formulation suggests a “gatekeeper state” for aid where those in power in Lesotho welcomed such programs because they solidified government authority, even if this authority came with a gradual loss of sovereign decision making by the national government and an inability of the populace to have substantive input into projects.⁵ Thus policy makers were defining development as projects that promised to help centralize government power through

the implementation, routinization, and bureaucratization of projects that promised poverty amelioration, increased employment, and/or new infrastructure. The rapid increase in the number of development projects and in funding in the years after independence reflected strong support from government for development, but it does not illuminate how those outside government experienced and made sense of the arrival and subsequent rapid expansion of development in Lesotho.

Development, generally speaking, is used throughout this book to refer to the process through which individuals, state agents, humanitarian organizations, and NGOs attempted to implement projects designed to improve the material conditions of life. This definition was not, however, universally agreed on. As noted above, government planners tended to employ development as a strategy designed to help bureaucratize and centralize state authority. For Basotho outside of government, the term often referred to the desire for projects to enable them to find material prosperity in Lesotho, to gain access to more and better governmental services, and to obtain a meaningful political voice in development projects specifically and governance in general. Painting in these broad strokes, however, should not blind us to the fact that conceptions of development were not static.

The malleability of the idea of development is what made it such a powerful rhetorical device that individuals used to claim the mantles of citizenship and belonging. Basotho of all political persuasions and positions in society adopted the rhetoric of development to argue for particular forms of projects that would bring about the world they envisioned upon achieving independence. Development, independence, and nationalism became intertwined in Lesotho in governmental policy decisions and in the public mind beginning in the 1950s. Development remained the salient language through which Basotho debated the forms and meanings of Lesotho's 1966 independence, and it remained the language of political contestation through the 1970s. The prominent place that rhetoric about development enjoyed among politicians and ordinary Basotho put pressure on political leaders to seek out and accept more foreign aid, even if it worked against the short- and long-term interests of the government, national sovereignty, and the public good. Many of the development projects initiated in the post-independence period were "failures" in that they did not ameliorate poverty, increase GDP, or achieve their objectives. But this was not the metric by which government leaders, bureaucrats, and overseas

development planners were evaluating projects. Rather, since these individuals viewed development primarily in terms of its ability to extend the reach and further entrench the power of the state, these projects were only too successful.⁶

Ordinary Basotho, however, also managed to find utility in projects that “failed.” In the colonial period there were few development projects operating in Lesotho, and those that existed faced significant resistance from the local population because of heavy-handed implementation. Thus, even if independence-era projects did not deliver promised poverty alleviation, more jobs, or increased popular input in governing processes, the sheer fact that the government was bringing development projects to fruition in the country helped Basotho achieve and maintain some faith that the concept of development still held the long-term key to the fulfillment of their independence dreams. This allowed Basotho to continue to nurture optimism through the years of political turmoil that marked post-1970 Lesotho.

Most Basotho hoped for an independence that would improve their material conditions of life and also allow them to remain as far from the apartheid system as possible. For them, the idea of development just “made sense,” as Havel wrote. They knew the history of failed colonial development initiatives in the country, but their faith in development and desire for independence led them to prioritize investing time and energy in personally working to help build infrastructure like communal water taps, school buildings, and roads. This physical labor—the literal building of the nation—was a way to surmount the shortcomings of prior development projects that did not live up to their expectations, as well as a way to act out their own visions for independence and build community in Lesotho.

This faith in development as the means to transform the country and individual lives was similar to the “nostalgia for the future” that marked post-Cold War Togo. There, in Piot’s formulation, people yearned for the possibility of an unknown and uncertain future, because it had to be better than the present.⁷ Similarly, Ahearne found twenty-first-century residents of southern Tanzania looking back fondly on the colonial-era Groundnut Scheme, widely considered one of the worst failures of British colonial development efforts, because it provided the only successful example of large-scale local employment in public memory. In addition to employment, the project had given people the language they could deploy with government and international organizations to “express [and demand] a

desire for a better future.”⁸ Basotho likewise deployed the rhetoric of development and utilized small-scale development initiatives to envision and help bring about a better future for themselves and their communities despite the very real limitations of the postcolonial state.

The faith that Basotho placed in the concept of development, thus, was not rooted in prior project success, or even in seeing governmental officials and project managers as trustworthy. Rather, it was rooted in a belief that development was required in order to ensure a better material future for all and in order to bring about a more responsive government. The irony of this stance was that colonial planners, Basotho leaders, and independence-era development consultants all purported to find Basotho afraid of the idea of development and leery about participating in development projects. These officials seemed genuinely confused as to why individuals and communities as a whole might oppose projects that promised to ameliorate poverty or were designed to meet pressing “national interests.”⁹ This resistance was rooted not in a rejection of the idea of increasing rural incomes but rather in opposition to how administrators initiated and carried out projects without significant local input. Local populations understood that the government’s goal was to increase colonial authority, so there were few avenues for local input into project operations. Since they could not reject particular aspects of projects, they had to reject them in their entirety. Similarly, project administrators, politicians, and bureaucrats misread opposition as evidence that Basotho were opposed to development, nationalism, the parliamentary system, and even the idea of the modern nation-state. This misreading of popular sentiment about development continued into the independence era.

Examining development from the perspective of both local people affected by projects and government planners, it becomes clear that the failure of projects to attain their stated antipoverty goals was not the fault of ordinary Basotho rejecting particular development initiatives. Rather, this failure came about because colonial and independence-era officials misunderstood or did not care that Basotho understood development as a multifaceted process that should lead to a broad range of economic and political outcomes. Accusing individuals and communities of resistance to development became a convenient cover for political leaders to proffer to donors to explain why projects failed to meet stated goals. This put the onus of project failure on local noncooperation and exonerated project administrators and governmental officials—thereby protecting their ability to gain future funding.

At the same time politicians claimed legitimacy based on delivering funded projects. These same projects embodied and bolstered the hopes of many Basotho that they could achieve a degree of material and political independence because the post-independence period offered significant new opportunities for the government to solicit and attain foreign funding for more projects. Basotho saw development as a source of employment, patronage, increased government services, and upward mobility and as an opportunity to have a more significant political voice. There was no other comparable pathway to these desired objectives in the anemic postcolonial nation-state. The concept of development, thus, served as the vehicle through which ordinary Basotho hoped to bring to fruition their independence visions. Politicians, likewise, hoped to harness the funds and connections development promised to achieve political legitimacy at home and diplomatic legitimacy abroad. Development became the language and practice of independence in Lesotho.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

The entire concept of development represents, in some ways, a lack of faith in the ability of free markets to achieve specific economic and social goals that the state and nongovernmental entities deem important. In Lesotho, as in many places across the African continent, a wide variety of local, national, and international actors contested how development should operate in the local context. All attempted to harness the energy and vision behind the idea of development to push forward agendas ranging from bringing about particular notions of independence to furthering their own political ambitions. These actors also used development in an attempt to bring about macroeconomic changes in line with particular geopolitical orientations, especially around the Cold War and support for or resistance to the South African apartheid system. Cooper defined development as “state projects, channeling resources in ways the market does not, with the goal of improving the conditions that foster economic growth and higher standards of living.”¹⁰ This definition encompasses some aspects of development as defined in this book, but it leaves out humanitarian aid and the activities of local organizations, including NGOs. In Lesotho, for instance, food aid the United States provided for drought relief ended up “financing” development work through self-help programs that “paid” people in food to build infrastructure (as seen in the book’s cover photograph).

Similarly Basotho youth and community groups invested their own time and resources in projects that included small-scale infrastructure creation and community-building efforts.

State-sponsored and state-sanctioned development efforts played a key role in defining the parameters of debates on nation- and state-building efforts, but focusing only on state efforts is too limiting. In Lesotho young Basotho were acting out their nationalist visions by working to obtain an education and participating in the building of community infrastructure. Participation in youth and community groups was crucial to the enactment of these agendas since the groups provided an organizing space and the material support necessary to carry forward small, local projects. Basotho worked to construct infrastructure like roads and village water supply projects, but they also worked to build connections across religious, political, and even in some cases national lines as a way of living out and forcing recognition of their dreams for independence and decolonization. Basotho were involved in community organizations because they either lacked formal participatory mechanisms in government development activities or found their options to participate in projects too limiting for their developmental visions. More than simply community service, the actions of individuals in these groups provide physical evidence of the hopes and dreams Basotho had for independence.

Basotho were familiar with the idea of performing public politics. They were, of course, not the only group performing politics on the African continent at the end of colonialism. For Malawi and Tanzania, Power and Geiger expanded studies of nationalism beyond a narrow, mostly male political elite, while in Tanzania and Angola, Askew and Moorman, respectively, explored how ordinary people expressed their relations to the state and national communities through public performance.¹¹ Coplan detailed the wide array of *lifela* (poetry of mine workers) in Lesotho, arguing that when Basotho performed them in public, the “performance was a rich, even indispensable, resource for understanding the role of consciousness and agency in the interplay of southern African forces, structures, processes, and events,” including nationalism within Lesotho.¹²

While Coplan detailed this performative consciousness and nationalism in informal spaces, the *pitso*, or public meeting, also had performative aspects and deep roots in Basotho society. Chiefs called these meetings for the purpose of gathering information, hearing public sentiment, and making communal decisions by consensus. Machobane described the his-

torically idealized form of the meeting as being a place where any man could air opinions and grievances “with the greatest freedom and plainness of speech” and where the chief must “bear the most cutting remarks without a frown.”¹³ The openness in the meetings and whether important decisions were made by consensus, however, was likely somewhat exaggerated in nineteenth-century accounts. Wallman suggested that *pitsos* were more often a space for performance of public politics and community participation, as they were convened largely as a “social, rhetorical and political exercise.”¹⁴ This process intensified in the twentieth century as the colonial state co-opted the *pitso* to make it a venue for announcing policy rather than generating discussion. *Lifela* and the *pitso* show that Basotho had a long history of public political participation but that most people in Lesotho were also aware of limitations on their ability to influence change through formal processes designed to be, at least in part, symbolic exercises.

The youth and community groups that were driving many of the grassroots development efforts in Lesotho were popular because they gave participants the opportunity to work for their own conceptions of independence. They also offered a venue for broader national and international imaginings. These groups were self-consciously operating not only against the backdrop of the transfer of political power in Lesotho but also against continental decolonization and efforts to end apartheid in South Africa. As Rosenberg and Honeck argue for transnational youth organizations during the Cold War, “Youth subjects are less empty vessels for the ambitions of adult organizers than they are complex players with their own agendas, interests, and desires.”¹⁵ Still, Basotho political leaders, church leaders, and colonial administrators all hoped that by channeling youthful political, spiritual, and economic energies into organizations run by adults they could control the molding and shaping of political sensibilities and harness the energies of youth for their own purposes. In large part, they were wrong. Basotho in organizations as diverse as the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides, the Homemakers Association, the University Christian Movement, and the Lesotho Workcamps Association used groups to learn about and act on their own ideas about independence and development.

Focusing on the actions of individuals in these groups, rather than just the recollections of young Basotho, also helps surmount the methodological challenge of pinpointing the memories of oral informants in specific periods. People often conflate memories of one failed development

project with another because of the long history of project failure in Lesotho. Actions like building infrastructure or service undertaken through school groups are easier to pinpoint in time because of the specificity of the work and the ability to find corroboration in print about the finished products during the independence era. Thus these actions serve as a good proxy for understanding how youthful conceptions of independence emerged and changed over time.¹⁶

The high rates at which young Basotho were participating in groups and their projects challenge state theorists and political commentators who saw a failure of Africans to embrace the idea of nationalism or feel a part of national communities.¹⁷ Widespread, active participation in Lesotho suggests this was less a failure of Africans to grasp the concept of nationhood, or to embrace nationalism, and more a failure of African institutions at independence to deliver on the promises of citizenship and national belonging in forms that people desired. In the early independence period, from 1965 to 1970, when democratic institutions prevailed, Basotho of all ages embraced the process of building the nation and state, though their visions split along partisan lines. After the coup of 1970 destroyed democratic institutions like Parliament, Basotho still tried to influence state processes, though their avenues for such ventures were more constrained. In all times and places, Basotho participated in development projects that fit their visions for the nation or that promised to bring enough benefits to outweigh the costs. They were certainly not “traditional,” afraid of the idea of development, rooted in the past, or unable to look forward, as various official reports from the colonial and independence periods suggested. Rather, people were willing to participate only in projects that aligned with their needs and desires. For many, this meant that they wished to participate only in projects that made room for them to express potentially divergent opinions, gave citizens mechanisms for input into projects, and held out the promise of creating institutions that better served their material and imaginative interests. Basotho in community organizations were willing and able to invest in nationalist efforts, and questions about their desire to do so reflected a failing of the state and international development planners to adequately recognize and be attuned to the rights and desires of a newly independent citizenry.

Despite the differences in what they meant when using the terminology, by the late 1960s and early 1970s a wide swath of Basotho society was communicating their understandings of and dreams for political and

economic independence through the language of development. Newly minted citizens found the language of development congenial to making demands on the governments of the day for increased and improved services. Government leaders also utilized the language to press for more funding from abroad, as well as political support at home for delivering development projects.

That Basotho defined independence by reference to development was possible only because of the groundwork laid by colonial officials, Basotho politicians, and the small but steadily increasing number of educated youth. From the 1950s, these actors deployed the rhetoric of development to link citizenship, independence, and nationalism. The widespread acceptance of the conflation of these three ideas is what this book calls the *rhetorical consensus on development*. While the possibility of rapidly increasing and centralizing state power helps explain why colonial-era officials and politicians wholeheartedly embraced the rhetorical consensus on development, its ability to spread so quickly to all levels of society owes much to the grassroots activities of Basotho in community groups. Seeing all segments of society as not merely accepting the ideas of independence and development, but as actively working for them challenges characterizations of African nationalism as “thin,” only a “discourse of protest,” a “banal” sentiment that people felt “lazily,” or a force harnessed only by “militant urban nationalists” for use as the “social and ideological glue” that held together anticolonial coalitions.¹⁸ While Lesotho is often seen as exceptional on the continent for its supposed ethnic homogeneity, the created nature of the Basotho national community (discussed later in this chapter) and the strength of political rivalries that often correlated strongly with religious affiliation mean that the country is no less “African” or representative for having a larger degree of linguistic and cultural homogeneity. Thus this study of independence-era Lesotho suggests that African nationalism was both a deeper and more robust phenomenon than others acknowledge but also that African nationalism took forms that were not necessarily congruent with the interests of the state and government officials.

Previous work on the history of development in Africa has been voluminous, though much of it has simply examined whether development projects succeeded or failed at meeting their own goals. Alternatively, it has looked at the one-way impact of state projects on local communities.¹⁹ A few works, such as those by Moskowitz on Kenya and Ahearne on

Tanzania, write the history of development from the confluence of local experience and the macro-story. This frame better explains how rural Africans experienced development and how they internalized and utilized the political messaging of development for their own purposes.²⁰ As I argue in this book, histories of independence and decolonization for rural Africans that do not take into account the intertwined nature of independence and development are incomplete.²¹ Telling this story in Lesotho necessarily includes tracing how particular projects arrived, which funding bodies the government approached, and why international funding agencies were interested in financing development in Lesotho. It also must include the stories of how individual Basotho decided when to participate in government development efforts and how they executed their own projects.

Reconsidering development from the bottom up also leads to a better understanding of the weakness of African states. Mann's study of West African NGOs highlights that Sahelian states started losing power not in 1980s neoliberal reform efforts and structural adjustment programs but rather at independence, when political leaders who had "worked to establish that sovereignty" almost immediately began to "mortgage" it in order to further the aims of economic development.²² Similar processes were at work in Lesotho. The first Basotho government almost immediately gave up some of its recently acquired power over internal affairs in exchange for significant development projects, like a World Bank-funded road and a South African-funded expansion of the police force. This Faustian bargain was, in part, a decision that had to be made because of the extreme poverty of the Lesotho government, but the decision to pursue development funding at all costs was, in larger part, the result of deliberate choices made by Basotho politicians in the 1950s and 1960s.

The increasing entrenchment of the rhetorical consensus around development meant that by 1966, when the transfer of power occurred, most Basotho had come to equate the delivery of development projects with independence. But for politicians, the calculus remained that they had to surrender some amount of sovereignty to gain development funding. There was also potentially, however, a high reward for this trade-off as Basotho political leaders realized that they could gain more support for their parties and agendas by delivering aid. The quest for domestic political legitimacy through the delivery of development would continue through the independence period and into the present, and the poten-

tial prize of popular legitimacy made politicians willing to mortgage the greatest symbol of national sovereignty—Basotho control over land in Lesotho.

The early independence period saw great political contestation over the issue of development because the stakes of delivering development were so high. This led, in many cases, to some popular rejection of particular development projects as a divided population viewed projects through a partisan lens. This was especially true for the early independence period when electoral concerns weighed heavily on the minds of all Basotho political leaders. After the coup of 1970 that left the government of Lesotho without domestic political opposition, or having to worry about popular legitimacy through elections, leaders and planners were better able to deliver large development projects that helped consolidate their power. The authoritarian turn was, of course, not unique to Lesotho. The story of the arrival of development is also the story of how authoritarianism in postcolonial Africa led to the entrenchment of state power not only through increased governmental control over state security forces but also through bureaucratic institutions and development projects funded with international aid.

Studying development in Lesotho necessarily involves examining types of projects different from those on which most of the literature on colonial and postcolonial Africa has focused. The Lesotho projects could best be termed piecemeal development, as they were of a much smaller scale than most state-sponsored efforts. As Scott noted, large centrally planned projects were not necessarily more efficient or effective at delivering results to local populations, but they were and are more visible and legible to the state (and, in consequence, historians).²³ While the government of Lesotho desired such projects and actively worked to solicit them, few in the 1960s and 1970s saw the potential for such “high modernist” projects in a country like Lesotho that lacked significant deposits of strategic resources. Therefore, the Lesotho government focused mainly on the smallest projects—ones that could be run with volunteer labor, donated food, and a pittance of cash from domestic and foreign sources. Despite the microscale of these projects, the Lesotho government was quite eager to claim credit for them too, as a way of projecting competency and garnering electoral support. Thus, even though the projects lacked the scale of high modernist ventures elsewhere on the continent, the piecemeal

development the Lesotho government undertook had political importance similar to larger projects that came with a more robust state presence.

Smaller development initiatives were, in Lesotho and across the continent, where the majority of Africans came into contact with government, multilateral organizations, and NGO-run development efforts. Understanding these contacts more fully offers the opportunity to rethink how Africans interacted with and internalized understandings of development, nationalism, and independence. The colonial government in Lesotho had attempted a handful of projects, both large and small. There is a body of literature examining the degree to which Basotho participated in these endeavors and how they shaped popular perceptions of colonial interventions.²⁴ The last major colonial development venture in Lesotho folded in 1961. The relative vacuum of projects in the late colonial period provided a space for Basotho to take initiative on projects in their own communities in ways not possible in the shadow of high modernist efforts.

Overshadowing all scholarship on development in Lesotho is the high modernist Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP). Planning for the project started in the 1950s, with discussions between South Africa and Lesotho starting in the 1960s and 1970s, but an agreement between the parties did not occur until 1986. Today the project's dams supply South Africa's industrial and mining heartland with water delivered through a series of lengthy tunnels drilled through Lesotho's mountains.²⁵ The studies of this project have elucidated flaws in the project planning and implementation, particularly the displacement of ordinary Basotho by project construction. As with much literature on development, however, the LHWP studies have not rigorously interrogated how the project influenced how ordinary Basotho perceived development. Further, these works largely lack significant discussion of how the project's genesis in the late colonial period influenced the forms the project eventually took during the late apartheid era.

There are plenty of works from across Africa that balance top-down project overviews with bottom-up examinations of local response. These include Van Beusekom's analysis of the Office du Niger, Monson's study of the TAZARA railway, and the Isaacmans' examination of the construction of the Cahora Bassa Dam in Mozambique.²⁶ These works all nicely elucidate the impact of international relations and geopolitical concerns on development efforts while keeping their focus on how local communities understood the impacts of such projects. Similarly, Lal and Schneider

have both rewritten the history of Ujamaa in Tanzania to better understand how the global and the local interacted and how development played out in contexts large and small.²⁷ Tague, similarly, narrated the intertwined story of planners, local experience, and unexpected development results that came out of rural development projects for Mozambican refugees in southern Tanzania.²⁸ In all of these works, however, the authors focused on capital-intensive, highly centralized projects that attracted overseas funding in large amounts or were, as with Ujamaa, the primary focus of the central government. In looking at much smaller projects, this book examines development on a scale where local people felt they could and should have significant input into the process of project planning and implementation. Thus these projects gave people the opportunity to engage in a way that embodied the possibilities of independence.²⁹

That Basotho could continue to actively work for development and independence despite a dismal record of government failure echoes the situation Piot found in Togo. There people were “committed [to] and hopeful” about an integrated development plan that promised to bring paved roads, tourism, electrification, and feeder roads to rural communities, despite years of broken promises. These Togolese villagers in the early twenty-first century were holding onto a hope similar to that of independence-era Basotho: the hope that development could bring about a better future, even when no one could point to successfully completed projects to support it.³⁰ Basotho continued to “perform” development work through youth and community groups during the 1960s and 1970s despite feeling disillusioned with the government after independence.

The ability of the term *development* to simultaneously hold multiple meanings for different constituencies helped make it the key rhetorical term around which Basotho constructed and understood the idea of independence. Globally, from the mid-twentieth century, the term was intimately tied to notions of progressive change and industrialization.³¹ Western support for development was intimately tied, especially by the United States starting in the 1960s, to efforts to stave off communist penetration in newly independent states by pushing free market economics. This came together most influentially in Rostow’s writing as “modernization theory,” which posited development as a linear process of change over time that societies went through on their way from the “traditional” to the “modern.”³² In his role as an adviser to U.S. president John F. Kennedy, Rostow was instrumental in establishing the United States Agency

for International Development (USAID), an organization that saw modernization as “universal, linear, [and] inevitable.”³³ Similar thinking also ruled at multilateral institutions like the World Bank, particularly within the ranks of planners at the International Development Association (IDA). This organization was charged with providing project funding to the poorest countries, a grouping that included Lesotho after independence. Officials thus planned similar projects in different settings. In Malawi, for instance, the Lilongwe Land Development Project served as a model for 1970s-era projects in Lesotho. The IDA goals for Lilongwe were to “establish not only a fixed system of commercially-oriented agriculture, but to inculcate new ‘modern’ attitudes among farmers.”³⁴ Basotho politicians quickly picked up on the language of funding agencies and used it to garner more funding for Lesotho starting in the 1970s. They also infused the rhetoric and ideas into their domestic political speeches and platforms such that by the mid-1960s politicians from all parties equated independence with “modern,” “progressive” change in the economic structures of the country.

Basotho who remained outside of the formal political structures came to embrace the rhetoric of development to define independence as well, but they were expressing a desire for a vision of development different from that of their political leaders. It was the “semantic ambiguity” of the term that allowed so many people with divergent interests to utilize and deploy this language for their own purposes.³⁵ Most Basotho talked about independence bringing about industrialization, the paving of roads, the construction of railways, and having more Basotho involved in cash-crop farming—in short, what could be simply read as a belief in “modernization.” Despite a congruence of form with the visions of politicians, however, those outside the political process saw job and infrastructure creation not merely as drivers of macroeconomic growth but also as starting points for expanding popular participation in governance.

The Sesotho word for “development,” *tsoela-pele*, translates as “to continue” or “to move forward.”³⁶ To continue something does not necessarily imply that one is moving closer to a goal. Similarly, while “moving forward” implies motion, again there is no guarantee that this movement is in the desired or planned direction.³⁷ Basotho outside formal politics using *tsoela-pele* to mean “development” broadly thus did not necessarily have the same notions of progress toward a singular goal that modernization theorists envisioned. The mere presence of development projects in rural

areas and the international connections that their presence symbolized, however, acted as potent symbols of the potential of independence to bring about desired changes. Thus, as long as projects were running, Basotho could nurture a sense of hope that *tsoela-pele* might eventually arrive in a suitable form to fulfill their visions. This faith helped many Basotho weather the storms of political failure and disappointment in post-independence Lesotho, but these individuals are, in large part, still waiting for development to fully deliver on its promises.

CONTEXTUALIZING DEVELOPMENT IN LESOTHO

The processes of aid and development overriding local concerns seem to be universal, especially in the Global South where overseas funding for development and debt service from prior development projects often make up large portions of government budgets. However, the context in which governments and people came to accept such funding matters. The best-known work about development in Lesotho is James Ferguson's *Anti-Politics Machine*, which details the Thaba Tseka Development Project from the mid-1970s into the 1980s. This book shows how aid and development came to override local political structures and serve primarily as a tool to centralize governmental authority rather than to promote poverty alleviation or macroeconomic growth. The story Ferguson tells is so compelling and familiar globally that it is cited in a wide variety of contexts to illustrate the hegemonic aspects of development.³⁸ Ferguson's argument is a starting place for interrogating how and why Basotho politicians, as well as individuals who were not directly involved in politics, were so willing to accept the hegemonic tradeoffs that came with increased aid and development funding in Lesotho.

Understanding how the rhetorical consensus on development came to be and how Basotho worked to turn an intellectual consensus into physical projects explains how people could continue to find hope in projects that consistently failed to alleviate poverty to any degree. As funding came from countries and agencies based far from Lesotho, the story of development is by its very nature transnational. In order to capture both the complexity of the interactions around projects and how Basotho perceived these projects, this book is grounded in the stories of how Basotho experienced and helped shape development efforts on the ground.

Without this history of popular reaction, the decision of the Lesotho government to solicit aid for development that entailed compromising aspects of the country's sovereignty seems to be at odds with the government's stated goal of independent action after colonial rule. Further, the hope that ordinary Basotho placed in the eventual ability of development to lead to independence outcomes they desired, despite decades of evidence to the contrary, looks downright ludicrous. However, these positions make more sense when situated in the context of the widely accepted rhetorical consensus on development. The only way to bring about the economic and administrative changes at the heart of that vision was to pursue development funding at all costs. Thus the solicitation of projects brought about both the continued optimism of the populace and the loss of control by the government.

Lesotho's enclave status played a key role in building a national community, structuring the terms of political debate, and determining how much aid for development flowed into the country. Lesotho was and is a geopolitical oddity because it is by far the largest sovereign state entirely surrounded by another.³⁹ The enclave status, and Lesotho's current national borders, came about through a complex process of diplomatic negotiations, wars, and adjudicated disputes in the nineteenth century. While the borders today are largely congruent with those of 1868 when Basutoland became a British colony, there has been and continues to be contestation over borders between Lesotho and South Africa in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁴⁰

The kernel of the political entity that emerged from colonial rule in 1966 started in the 1820s and 1830s when a group of people came together for protection under the leadership of Moshoeshoe.⁴¹ Moshoeshoe, initially a minor chief from an area of what is today the northern district of Butha Buthe, established in 1824 a new home at the mountain stronghold of Thaba Bosiu (Mountain of the Night). From this location, Moshoeshoe attracted a variety of individuals who joined his growing community in the expectation that they would provide defense when required and seek Moshoeshoe's counsel as the highest authority in their disputes.⁴² This community was the nucleus of today's Basotho nation.

Moshoeshoe effectively marshaled a defense against a host of encroachments in the nineteenth century from groups ranging from the Zulu to the British, but the existential conflict for Basotho was with Afrikaners from the Orange Free State. Utilizing his mountain stronghold

at Thaba Bosiu as a fortress, Moshoeshoe successfully defended territory from attacks, but the core of Lesotho gradually shrunk from the 1840s to the 1860s as peace settlements moved the boundary closer to today's border, the Caledon or Mohokare River.⁴³ The last of these wars, in 1865–68, saw Afrikaner forces overrun most Basotho territory. This impending defeat caused the aging Moshoeshoe to petition Britain to annex the territory, which the Colonial Office did in January 1868 as the Crown Colony of Basutoland.

Through the 1840s and 1850s, Moshoeshoe had increased both the amount of territory claimed by his kingdom and the number of people under allegiance to his rule into a coherent community with shared values. Thus, people increasingly identified as Basotho.⁴⁴ The rapid expansion of the heterogeneous community led to the creation of a vast and disparate chieftaincy to help maintain some sort of centralized authority. The polity mainly consisted of a series of small, semiautonomous villages situated at an ever-expanding remove from Thaba Bosiu. Moshoeshoe extended his authority either by accepting existing chiefs and their followers under his protective umbrella or by “placing” his sons, relatives, and other trusted associates in outlying areas.⁴⁵ In this way, Moshoeshoe built a system Coplan and Quinlan characterize as a “landscape of social and political relations[,] . . . a chiefdom of chiefdoms.”⁴⁶

Important to the later story of twentieth-century development, the nineteenth-century focus on control over land remained at the heart of conceptions of Basotho national identity. The chieftaincy system gave an administrative coherence to Moshoeshoe's kingdom, especially when viewed from the outside. The prime force that united people within the territory, however, was resistance to outside incursions, particularly European settlers.⁴⁷ Besides resisting the idea of ceding land to European settlers, however, there was little unanimity among Basotho on key issues like the proper role of the chieftaincy or how much say individuals should have in public life. Coplan and Quinlan characterize the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a period of “competing but overlapping notions of nationalisms” with agreement only on the need to defend the borders of the realm.⁴⁸

Governance during the colonial period in Lesotho took the form of “parallel rule,” as chiefs and colonial administrators operated largely independently of each other, rather than the “indirect rule” so common in the rest of British colonial Africa.⁴⁹ The chieftaincy system worked well

enough in the precolonial and colonial periods from an administrative standpoint when a strong leader was at the top, as Moshoeshoe was during his younger years. As he aged, however, the system started to splinter, with chiefs at a remove from Thaba Bosiu at times signing separate peace treaties and negotiating without the knowledge or consent of Moshoeshoe. After Moshoeshoe's death in 1870, further splits within the chieftaincy weakened the legitimacy of the institution. This weakness and the inability of the system to deal with abusive chiefs gave educated commoners within Lesotho and the colonial administration pause as to whether supporting chiefly rule was worth the price.⁵⁰ Still, the chieftaincy remained a strong and vibrant institution in Lesotho into the twentieth century, and chiefs today still maintain some authority over local disputes and land claims. Further, maintaining the chieftaincy's rule in rural areas allowed the British colonial administration to run Basutoland "on the cheap," with only a skeletal imperial presence consisting largely of district commissioners and a few police officers.

While the British viewed Lesotho within the empire as a relatively unimportant territory, it was certainly not isolated from regional politics and global trends, as its deep diplomatic and religious ties illustrate. Moshoeshoe inaugurated diplomatic connections with African groups throughout the broader southern African region. Further, he invited European missionaries from the Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS) to Lesotho in 1833.⁵¹ Later he also invited the Catholics, who started operations in the 1860s, with the Anglicans arriving after his death in the 1870s.⁵² The missions set up schools, making for a small but vocal educated Basotho middle class beginning in the late nineteenth century. These educated commoners played an important role in building the rhetorical consensus on development in the mid-twentieth century.

By the 1930s, the colonial administration's concerns about parallel rule led to the first in a series of chieftaincy reforms. The "placing system" Moshoeshoe started had expanded to such an extent that some chiefs numbered their followers only in the low hundreds.⁵³ The profusion of chiefs concerned the colonial state because perceptions of chiefly despotism threatened social stability in the countryside, where the British administration had almost no presence. Also threatening social stability was deepening rural poverty in the 1930s, so as part of the reforms, the colonial administration for the first time promised to bring "development" to the territory.⁵⁴ At its core, however, the package of reforms and development

projects was designed to centralize state authority by curbing the power of the chieftaincy and increasing the presence of the colonial state. These goals remained central facets of development work by state leaders throughout the colonial period, as well as the efforts set up by Basotho politicians at independence.

Civil society in Lesotho was flourishing by the early twentieth century. Basotho were active in local civic groups as well as regional and international organizations like Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the South African Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU).⁵⁵ The relatively high literacy rates of educated commoners (*bahlalefi* in Sesotho) allowed for a thriving newspaper culture and furthered the sense among *bahlalefi* that they should play a larger role in politics in the territory. All the main missions had newspapers, with the PEMS *Leselinyana la Lesotho* dating to 1863, the Catholic *Moeletsi oa Basotho* dating to 1933, and a host of secular papers that started in the early twentieth century as well.⁵⁶ The newspapers served as conduits to South African and global news in addition to reporting on local events and developments in the churches. Their coverage beyond Lesotho especially focused on issues affecting Africans and the African diaspora. Finally, they also serialized Sesotho authors like Thomas Mofolo, Azariele Sekese, and Z. D. Mangoaela, helping facilitate the creation of a robust Sesotho literary tradition.⁵⁷

While most people in Lesotho identified themselves as Basotho from the nineteenth century, this term oversimplified the diverse backgrounds of the population. A strong sense of racial and ethnic solidarity existed with other southern Africans, especially those affected directly by European settlement.⁵⁸ But there were also great regional migrations stretching from the 1860s to the early twentieth century. These included significant numbers of migrants going to work in the Cape Colony and in the gold and diamond mines, the Anglo-Boer Wars, the rinderpest epidemic of 1897, and evictions of non-Europeans from the Union of South Africa following the South African Land Act of 1913 that ended sharecropping.⁵⁹ Some people left Lesotho during these times, but the net impact of migration prior to the 1920s was an increase in the population in Lesotho. While the newcomers often failed to access as much land as long-established families, especially as arable land became increasingly scarce by the early twentieth century, local communities within Lesotho absorbed them with relative ease. This integration suggests that borders and na-

tional imaginings in Lesotho were flexible through the early twentieth century and that the supposed “homogeneity” of the Basotho community is a contemporary political argument rather than a historical truth.⁶⁰ In reality, what constituted “the Basotho community” has always been part and parcel of wider political contestation, and this was true from the inception of a Basotho identity under Moshoeshoe to the creation of new institutions during the independence era and even into the present.

At least as important to the creation of a shared national identity as the arrival of migrants was the experience of Basotho with South African labor migration. While not every individual migrated, just about every Basotho family had members who left for durations ranging from months to years. The discovery of diamonds and gold in South Africa during the late nineteenth century allowed Basotho farmers to prosper prior to the 1890s arrival of the railroads because Lesotho was the closest reliable source of grain. Basotho with cattle, horses, and wagons also profited from involvement in the teamster trade. These opportunities were in addition, of course, to laboring in the mines, which was another option many Basotho took. By the late nineteenth century, Basotho were well integrated into the regional economy, with the proliferation of household goods and firearms being the most obvious manifestations back home in Lesotho. In addition to a personal or familial desire for income and goods, many Basotho went to the mines at the behest of local chiefs, for whom access to firearms to assist with defense remained a priority.⁶¹

By the 1920s, however, the combination of poverty, colonial taxation, and increasingly scarce arable land in Lesotho made migrant labor less a choice for Basotho households and more a necessity.⁶² Though miners were the single most identifiable category of migrants, other Basotho migrated to live and work informally on the margins of South African cities. Still others went seasonally to work on farms, especially in neighboring districts of the Orange Free State.⁶³ The experiences of migrants when they were in South Africa, especially with prejudice and discrimination from people of European descent, contributed to the creation of a sense of commonality between individuals from Lesotho. Once Basotho crossed the Caledon/Mohokare River, they found they had more in common with individuals from Lesotho than they did with others around them. After 1948, the formal apartheid system further reinforced this group consciousness by forcing all Sesotho speakers to live in specific areas.⁶⁴

The single biggest driver of national consciousness among Basotho, however, was the threat of the incorporation of Lesotho’s territory into the

Union of South Africa. Much like the nineteenth-century threat from Afrikaners in the Orange Free State that contributed to the start of a national consciousness, Basotho quickly united across clan, religious, and political boundaries whenever South Africa threatened territorial sovereignty. The biggest threat since the 1860s came in 1909 when the Union of South Africa emerged from its four constituent territories—the Cape Colony, Natal, the Transvaal, and the Orange Free State. The British attempted to incorporate the three High Commission Territories (Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate, and Swaziland) into the Union as well. The Basotho response, with the chieftaincy in the lead, was the strongest of any of the territories. They sent an eight-chief delegation to London to personally advocate for the continued territorial independence of Lesotho from the Union.⁶⁵ They were successful in the short term, but they could not forestall the inclusion of Clause 151 in the Act of Union that created South Africa. This clause stipulated that the South African Parliament could at any time formally request the incorporation of the territories.

Clause 151 proved to be a continued source of tension in Lesotho throughout the colonial period, as chiefs and commoners alike feared secret colonial administrative machinations to incorporate Lesotho into South Africa without Basotho consent. These fears became even more pronounced after the formal implementation of apartheid in 1948, as South African laws became more blatantly discriminatory. The near-constant fear of incorporation pervaded Basotho political discussions and day-to-day affairs within the territory into the 1960s. The silver lining of this fear was that it helped forge a stronger national identity among Basotho by contrasting South African discrimination with local political opportunity, however limited.

The growing strength of national consciousness, however, did not mean that Basotho were focused only on events within Lesotho. Many Basotho were active in groups working for political change in South Africa because of how closely intertwined the two states were. Basotho played key roles in most of the major South African political organizations from the time they were founded, including the African National Congress (ANC) and the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), as well as later groups like the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM). Lesotho's paramount chief, Letsie II, sent three representatives to the 1912 founding of the African Native National Congress (the ANC's precursor organization) in Bloemfontein. Similarly, Lesotho-born Potlako Leballo was one of

the earliest leaders of the PAC in the 1960s, and because of the leadership's close connections to Lesotho, the PAC core spent the years 1962–65 in exile in Maseru.⁶⁶ James Motlatsi, hailing from Lesotho, was elected NUM's first president in 1982, in part because many of the most radical and militant members of the union were Basotho from Lesotho.⁶⁷ In these political organizations, Basotho found space to participate in the politics of South Africa, a country many viewed as having been built, at least in part, on the backs of their own labor.⁶⁸ For the majority of miners and migrants who eventually returned to Lesotho, however, these organizations also served as incubators for a politicized consciousness that they brought home. Thus, it was no surprise that returned migrants, miners in particular, played key roles in domestic political developments.

Two commoner groups worked diligently in Lesotho from the early twentieth century to force changes in colonial governance. The Basutoland Progressive Association (BPA) and Lekhotla la Bafo (LLB; Council of Commoners) both worked to push commoner political agendas. They had to work with and through the Basutoland National Council, a consultative assembly primarily for the principal chiefs, which was founded in 1903. Mission-educated commoners formed the core membership of the BPA, which was founded in 1907. The organization's primary goal was to secure more seats for nonchiefs in the council. LLB, on the other hand, drew its membership mainly from rural commoners with less education. The organization's primary aim from its inception in 1919 was to reclaim power for chiefs and commoners from the colonial government and return it to Basotho. Both the BPA and LLB had direct ties to politically active South Africans because of the interrelated nature of regional education and employment systems.⁶⁹ While neither group was particularly pleased with the forms colonial reforms took in the early decades of the twentieth century, their active and continued presence in Lesotho helped lay the groundwork for the groundswell of Basotho political interest that started in the 1950s.

Though the BPA and LLB were influential at the national level, there were other avenues for organizing and participating in politics at the grassroots level. One major thrust from the 1930s came from Catholic Church programs that helped local communities organize farming and purchasing cooperatives, construct small-scale irrigation dams, and build more schools.⁷⁰ Another impetus for rural discontent, protest, and organizing in this decade came from resistance to the colonial anti-soil erosion

campaign (see ch. 1). This 1930s-initiated program proved unpopular because it limited the amount of land available to families for cultivation and grazing. By removing arable land from cultivation in the name of soil conservation, this first major development project in Lesotho galvanized rural populations to organize and protest because the centralizing efforts of the colonial state were having a direct impact on their livelihoods and control over the land.⁷¹ Colonial officials, on the other hand, saw local protests against and efforts to sabotage the project as evidence that Basotho were “naturally” resistant to development. This laid the groundwork for future administrations to dismiss local institutions and populations for impeding the implementation of development projects.

So, by the independence period, Basotho were not experiencing development for the first time. Rather, they were drawing on personal and communal experiences with development efforts—both state-run and at the grassroots level—that in many cases stretched back decades. The emphasis that Basotho and colonial officials placed on the rhetoric of development in the years between the 1930s and independence helped development take a place of prominence in national political conversations, as well as in the minds of many Basotho. By the time of independence, it would become the dominant language through which Basotho expressed their personal and national aspirations. Basotho, by and large, internalized the connection between independence and development, which meant that no matter how many projects “failed” to bring results, Basotho could still retain a faith that someday development would change their lives for the better. Since it was so intertwined with conceptions of independence, to give up hope in development would have meant also abdicating a belief in the eventual success of nation- and state-building projects in Lesotho.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS BOOK

Chapter 1 traces the political and social changes in Lesotho in the decades leading up to independence. Basotho were increasingly excited about independence but also nervous about the pace of change. Independence, therefore, did not gain simple and straightforward acceptance by the time of the transfer of power in 1966. Chapter 2 traces the manner in which the idea of development came to occupy a place of prominence among ordinary Basotho and politicians during the late colonial period. Colonial

development efforts, including the anti-soil erosion campaign, prospecting for diamonds, plans for large dams in the mountains to supply South Africa with water, and area-based agricultural projects, proved to be politically contentious. While the projects did not eliminate poverty in Lesotho, provide many new government services, or open new political spaces, the rhetoric and promise of rural prosperity emanating from them allowed Basotho to have faith in the potential of development. This offered the hope that someday, once Basotho were running their own affairs in an independent Lesotho, development might bring about broad economic prosperity and representative political institutions. Young Basotho, especially those with some education, played a key role in nurturing and propagating these sentiments.

Chapter 3 explores the history of political rhetoric and its connection to development. Politicians of all parties deployed the language of development to argue for their own visions of independence in Lesotho. They connected local politics to global conflicts like the Cold War and the struggle against apartheid, rhetorically attacking their opponents for being insufficiently nationalist for proposing to solicit development funding from particular foreign sources. At independence, Basotho largely disapproved of the negative tenor of these attacks. However, increases in the amount of rhetoric connecting development and independence helped cement the connection between these concepts in the public mind. The period 1965–70 was the high-water mark of Basotho engagement with development in the independence period because a lack of large state-run development projects and ample opportunities for youth and community groups to carry out their own projects led to a proliferation of smaller efforts.

Chapter 4 looks at the role of development in the 1970 election campaign, the subsequent coup, and the efforts of the post-coup government to rebuild popular legitimacy through the delivery of development projects. It was after 1970 that Lesotho started to attract significant overseas funding for large development projects, and this was in part because the authoritarian and despotic post-coup government was better positioned to implement larger-scale projects. The Lesotho government also benefited from changes in the international donor climate that encouraged more giving to the world's poorest countries. Centrally run programs lacking popular input mechanisms proved as unpopular and unsuccessful as similar colonial-era projects had been. Still, Basotho did not give up hope in the

eventual ability of development to beget their desired visions for independence because they could easily compare their own conditions in Lesotho to that of South Africans living under the apartheid regime.

Chapter 5 traces the newfound ability of Prime Minister Jonathan's regime to solicit and run significant development projects in the post-coup period. These projects were no more successful in alleviating poverty than earlier attempts, but since they came with larger sums of money, the government was able to bureaucratize and formalize its presence in some rural areas. This shows how the rise of the conditions Ferguson describes in *The Anti-Politics Machine* was the result of a series of choices, each logical in its own right, made by Basotho officials dating back to the late colonial period. Younger Basotho who came of age in the independence period managed to maintain their faith in the idea of development, but they often had to reframe and compromise on their previous visions for independence. Some left Lesotho, while those who remained found that avenues for direct participation in politics were closed due to the authoritarian nature of the government. Rather than give up all hope in the ability of development to bring about change, Basotho, like the Lesotho government, reframed their visions for independence to meet the new political, social, and economic realities.

The short concluding chapter 6 brings together the book's main themes and briefly surveys particular development initiatives that have taken place in Lesotho since independence. It reiterates how Basotho utilized development to not only imagine preferred communities but also actively worked for the success of particular projects despite bureaucratic obstacles and the lack of adequate funding.

CHAPTER I

Political Changes and Basotho Responses, 1950s to Independence

The 1950s and 1960s were heady decades in Lesotho. Multiple rapid constitutional changes, expansion to secondary and tertiary education, and increased tensions with the apartheid South African government contributed to a general sense that Lesotho was on the precipice of fundamental societal change that would reverberate beyond its borders. Increased political interest throughout Basotho society was especially pronounced among the younger generation. The political reforms of the late colonial period, however, arrived in fits and starts with no master plan guiding the process and no sure path to independence until 1964. It was an uncertain time that left many people unsure of how much faith to put in colonial administrators or even Basotho politicians who were promising rapid independence.

Colonial administrators in London and Maseru largely controlled the pace of political change, and they made development efforts central to this process. The creation of district councils in the late 1940s, the National Council in 1960, and an elected Parliament in 1965 marked the evolution of local political representation in the territory prior to independence. Although these changes can be packaged, with hindsight, into a neat and tidy narrative, at the time they were haphazard and largely unanticipated.

The district councils came out of wider British efforts to decentralize power in the late empire; conversely the National Council and Parliament came about largely because of the British government's desire to leave the empire ahead of earlier schedules. Also, these changes took place only after protracted and intense political fights with and among Basotho about the best means to gain and maintain power. The inability of the colonial regime to telegraph its long-term intentions led to some confusion among Basotho as to where to put their efforts, particularly with regard to development. Thus decentralized development efforts such as rural agricultural cooperatives that district councils initiated in the 1950s gave way to efforts to secure centralized, large-scale project funding by the 1960s. No matter how confused the reform efforts were, however, the new political spaces allowed and encouraged a wider swath of Basotho society to engage with and participate in governmental processes, particularly through development efforts.

While support for development and independence was not universal by any means, through the 1950s and 1960s more people in Lesotho came to accept the ideas as linked and desirable for the greater good of individuals as well as the country. The experience of newly independent African states, starting in the late 1950s with Ghana, inspired many Basotho to think about what independence might mean and how they could imagine changes in their own society and country. A relatively free and open local press contributed to the increase in political interest and introduced Basotho to new ideas from across Africa and the world. The press also encouraged people in Lesotho to see local action as part of broader continental and global trends by situating local political developments in a larger context. For many Basotho, it confirmed what they wanted to be true: Lesotho was a place that mattered. Expanded interest in development and independence, however, did not result in agreement on what the terms meant or who got to define them. These debates about nationalism, independence, and development were also common in many other places in Africa.¹

Driving the increasing interest in politics and development in all forms were the new opportunities for popular participation that the colonial administration granted in the 1950s and 1960s. The new democratic institutions in Lesotho were contrasted in the minds of Basotho with the increasingly harsh apartheid system just across the border, a system with which most Basotho had direct, personal experience. Independence was

not an inevitable outcome of political reform efforts until after Britain promulgated Lesotho's second constitution in 1964, which contained a schedule for such a declaration. Basotho did, however, see the incremental changes taking place during these decades as leading inexorably in that direction.

Even after the constitutional guarantee, though, it took a concerted effort by chiefs, politicians, and ordinary Basotho for independence to come to fruition. The terms of the debate were constrained by the limits of the imaginations of colonial planners in London and Maseru, by Lesotho's economic dependence on apartheid South Africa, and by political divisions within Basotho society. However, many Basotho began to work for the independence they wanted to see through active engagement in the new political processes and development projects. Despite the belief of many colonial officials that Basotho were disinterested or apathetic, this active participation in political and development work underscored the degree to which Basotho understood their own independence efforts as part of greater processes of decolonization and as a way to gain more economic and political control of their own lives.

CHIEFTAINCY AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM, 1935–1965

Colonial Basutoland was never a territory that the British government in London was particularly enthusiastic to have. Britain took on Basutoland as a Crown Colony in 1868 mainly as a counterweight to the growing power of the two Afrikaner republics in the interior of South Africa, and the main goal of the colonial administration was to maintain the peace without expending resources.² The discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and gold on the Witwatersrand in the late nineteenth century made the territory more important to colonial administrators because it was located within easy travel distance of both sites. Basotho farmers supplied grain to the mining regions until the arrival of railroads in the late 1880s and early 1890s undercut the price advantages they had previously enjoyed.³ After this, Basotho increasingly went to the mines to work as migrant laborers. British colonial administrators encouraged this practice because Basotho labor helped ensure a stable workforce for the mines, which were largely capitalized by British investors, and because the wages allowed more Basotho to pay colonial taxes in cash. Migrant labor underwrote the

financial stability of Basutoland and its skeletal administrative structure, which, by 1900, included only about thirty British administrators in the entire territory, including police officers.⁴ Thus the mining boom was the impetus that pushed the colonial administration to govern Lesotho as a rural labor reserve for South African mines and farms beginning in the nineteenth century.

In practice, this meant that the colonial administration allowed the Basotho chieftaincy to maintain significant control over land allocation and disputes in an administrative system termed parallel rule. In this system, the paramount chief (*Morena e moholo*) held all of the land in trust for the Basotho people. Stretching back to Moshoeshoe I, the various *Marena a moholo* (plural) “placed” chiefs in certain areas with the authority to distribute land and settle disputes between individuals in their name. In time this system entrenched a senior chieftaincy (whose members were called district and ward chiefs), which held governing power over all residents in their territories. They presided, in turn, over a hierarchy of minor chiefs and headmen who settled local day-to-day disputes. This chieftaincy system operated for the most part without interference from or reference to the colonial government, hence its name, “parallel rule.” In practice this meant that the *Morena e moholo* saw himself (or herself when the regent ‘Mantsebo occupied the office in 1941–60) as the equal of the British resident commissioner.⁵ Parallel rule, however, left both the colonial administration and the senior chieftaincy dissatisfied; both wanted more power and control. Ultimate legislative power rested in the hands of the British High Commissioner to South Africa, which he delegated locally to the resident commissioner stationed in Maseru. The legislative authority of the High Commissioner over Basutoland, Swaziland, and the Bechuanaland Protectorate led the three territories to be called the High Commission Territories (HCT).

The creation of the Union of South Africa in the 1909 Act of Union caused much consternation in Lesotho, particularly among the chieftaincy, as Clause 151 promised the eventual incorporation of the High Commission Territories into the Union. This clause ended up in the act despite the efforts of *Morena e moholo Letsie II*, who organized and sent a delegation of Basotho chiefs to London to lobby against incorporation. The visceral reaction of most Basotho to the idea of incorporation made it the singular issue during the colonial period that could unite chief and commoner, Protestant and Catholic, young and old. Scott Rosenberg dates the coalescence and start of an explicit Basotho national identity to the period

around the Act of Union, while Elizabeth Eldredge dates its start to the increased economic and political insecurity of the late nineteenth century.⁶ In either case, by the first decades of the twentieth century inhabitants of the territory saw themselves and increasingly referred to themselves as Basotho, largely because of the outsized influence of South Africa politically, economically, and proximally.

An outgrowth of this emerging national consciousness by the 1920s, at least among the relatively small population of educated commoners, was the presence of the first national and nationalist imaginings of an independent nation-state for Basotho. The local newspaper *Naledi*, a mouthpiece for the Basutoland Progressive Association, printed an opinion piece in late 1926 noting, “The history of the Basuto [*sic*] nation . . . proves [that] . . . the Basuto are amenable to unity . . . [and] not very long from now they will be asking the Imperial Government for their sovereign independence.”⁷ Similarly, Lord Hailey noted in his 1930s survey of British administration in colonial Africa that people in the territory, particularly the chieftaincy, had a “strong sense of nationality, and a firmly fixed ideal of Basutoland as a semi-independent state.”⁸ While this certainly does not prove or even suggest a widespread nationalist sentiment for independence, the presence of such ideas among chiefs and educated commoners helped lay the groundwork for greater political interest and more widespread acceptance of the dream of independence by the 1950s and 1960s.

Further laying the groundwork for independence-era nationalism were attempts by the colonial administration to curb the power of the chieftaincy and decentralize authority, which led many Basotho to protest what they saw as colonial administrative overreach. These reforms did, however, create the political space in which youth and community groups could implement small-scale development projects by the late 1950s and 1960s. The reforms started in the 1930s with efforts by the colonial administration to convert the system of parallel rule into the indirect rule more common in the British Empire’s nonsettler colonies in Africa. The other goal of the reforms, though, was to address the serious economic crisis ravaging the territory as a result of the combination of a three-year drought and the global Great Depression that depressed commodity prices. To find a path forward, the Colonial Office appointed its African financial expert, Sir Alan Pim, to head a committee tasked with investigating the social, economic, and political issues the territory faced. The

report's two main recommendations for ensuring social stability and increasing economic prosperity were chieftaincy reforms and a campaign against soil erosion.

Following the publication of the report, the colonial administration started the first explicit development program in the territory by accepting a Colonial Office loan to fund a campaign against soil erosion. While it was the first program in Lesotho, it was not a new initiative; similar efforts were under way across southern Africa. Colonial officials designed these programs with the explicit goal of increasing rural homestead income, but their prime motivation was the consolidation of colonial power through better control over rural areas and African peasant agriculture.⁹ The 1930s chieftaincy reforms were part and parcel of these efforts, with the reforms officially framed as efforts to help free local populations from arbitrary and despotic chiefs but with enhanced colonial control over administrative structures as the ultimate goal. The Pim Report-inspired chieftaincy reforms failed to fully break the pattern of parallel rule in Lesotho as the government suspended implementation during World War II, out of fear of social instability. After the war, however, the colonial administration pushed for more reforms. Similarly, the anti-soil erosion campaign generated a lot of resistance among rural populations, and efforts to enforce the terracing of fields were haphazard in their implementation countrywide.¹⁰ Despite this, the mixed record of reforms did not dissuade colonial officials from pushing for more imperial funding for development and reform projects during and after World War II.

After the war, the Colonial Office saw reform efforts and development interventions as a way to reinvigorate colonialism and consequently promoted them even more heavily. The Colonial Office made this strategy clear from 1940 when the British Parliament passed the Colonial Development and Welfare (CDW) Act.¹¹ For Lesotho, the administration in Maseru made plans for more and better roads to promote trade and tourism, more health care facilities and schools, improved agriculture and livestock breeding programs, large hydroelectric projects, and more cooperative ventures. That these development plans echoed the specifics first set out by the Pim Report is not surprising, for this document and its recommendations for development would reappear almost verbatim in projects during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. They also became the foundation of Basotho political party platforms around independence and continued to influence development efforts after independence. That the

recommendations from a 1930s colonial report could form a sizable part of nationalist platforms and popular imaginings suggests the degree to which the rhetoric of development captured elite political discourse and was translated into nationalist ideals in the 1950s and 1960s.

The problem with Basotho politicians embracing the Pim vision of colonial development, however, was that embedded in the report were critiques of ordinary Basotho for their supposed failure to embrace development and of the chieftaincy for supposedly aiding and abetting rural administrative inefficiency. It was the first time the colonial government publicly made such claims. As the embrace of the report by Basotho politicians makes clear, it was colonial administrators as well as Basotho politicians who time and again blamed the lack of development in the territory not only on inadequate colonial funding but also on Basotho intransigence in different forms. So the report claimed rural Basotho were too stubborn to heed the benefits of colonial development initiatives and the chieftaincy was obstinate for failing to properly control land allocation. Pim accused the chieftaincy of having no checks on its behavior: "Control from below has lost its effectiveness, and has not been replaced by any control from above."¹² Thus, in conjunction with the anti-soil erosion development work, the colonial administration pushed the 1938 Khubelu (red) reforms—named after the color of the Pim Report's cover. The administration removed the ability of the *Morena e moholo* to name chiefs and limited the number of chiefs who could hold court, and thus collect income from the fines levied.¹³ A necessary precursor to development, by this logic, was the centralization of administrative control over rural areas because the people who lived there were unable to govern for and by themselves.

The Khubelu reforms marked the start of chieftaincy reform, but colonial officials saw this as merely the first step in finding a way to fill the rural power vacuum that reducing chiefly power would leave. So in the postwar period, various resident commissioners implemented even more reforms. Resident Commissioner Charles Arden-Clark in 1946 created the Basuto National Treasury (BNT), which for the first time made all chiefs salaried employees of the government. By eliminating the ability of chiefs to raise personal revenue through court fines, this effectively ended any vestiges of parallel rule. To persuade the chieftaincy to accept these changes, the colonial government split chiefs into two groups: a senior group that benefited from colonial rule and a junior group that lost power

and authority. The British won over the regent 'Mantsebo by placing the administration of chiefs' funds at Matsieng, the royal village and official residence of the Morena e moholo, which allowed her to maintain centralized authority.¹⁴ These reforms left 117 senior chiefs with increased administrative powers but left the 1,348 junior chiefs with diminished powers or none at all. While the reforms finally achieved the administrative goal of bringing Lesotho more in line with the indirect rule of the rest of the empire, it was also a mixed message: the centralization of authority around the chieftaincy happened simultaneously with the creation of decentralized district councils. In addition to sending a mixed message, this created practical problems for development in that it put a recently neutralized chieftaincy in direct competition with local development initiatives for which the district councils were responsible.

The split in the chieftaincy and the loss of power by individual members led to a crisis of authority in rural Lesotho in the 1940s and 1950s that the colonial authorities called the "medicine murder crisis." This outbreak of ritual murders came about as chiefs, reacting fearfully to their loss of power, turned to medicines made from human body parts in an effort to maintain their status and position.¹⁵ The number of murder cases opened by the government climbed rapidly throughout this period, but the execution of two senior chiefs in 1949 so shocked many Basotho that it caused them to start to question the right of the colonial government to be the arbiter of political and administrative changes in the territory. For a period in the mid-1950s, support for the chieftaincy coalesced as *Lekhlotla la Bafo*, the newly formed Basutoland African Congress (BAC) political party, and the chiefs all came together to oppose colonial initiatives.¹⁶ The colonial government, however, signaled a willingness to further embrace the empire-wide push to devolve power by the mid-1950s, and this fragile alliance broke down as groups within Lesotho once again jockeyed for power.

As colonial administrators throughout the British Empire in the late 1950s and 1960s sought to speed up development efforts to justify their continued presence, it was not clear how political devolution or development would happen in Lesotho. Most British administrators were not convinced of the political or economic viability of the territory in a postimperial world because of its dependence on the apartheid state. Despite their misgivings about the long-term viability of the territory, however, the colonial administration was particularly sensitive to unfavorable

comparisons with South African development efforts in the Reserves/Homelands. This was also true of imperial officials in London, up to and including the secretary of state for Commonwealth relations, Patrick Gordon Walker. He visited the region for six weeks in January and February 1951 and afterward called Lesotho and the other HCT the “shop-windows in the midst of the Union [of South Africa]” that must be made “economically strong and progressive” in order to showcase how British colonial efforts compared favorably to the apartheid policies of South Africa. His memo called on the British government to increase its investment because Britain needed to “develop the Territories if we are to hold them.” Despite their limited prospects for income-generating development projects, the memo continued, they must still get their “fair share of whatever money we are putting into our Colonies.”¹⁷

In spite of this support for development, Walker’s memo mainly reiterated colonial concerns about the difficulties of bringing development to a resource-poor territory and the administrative difficulties that even a marginal increase in funding would entail. Compounding the mixed messaging of the memo for making policy, it claimed both that the chieftaincy was “essential” for development in rural areas and that the government should focus on co-opting an increasingly educated and demanding set of politically active commoners. Without resolving this contradiction, it asked the colonial administration to thread the needle by “prevail[ing] upon the Chiefs to work with elected council and to decentralize [chiefly] authority to local councils.”¹⁸ As already noted, the chieftaincy was increasingly distrustful because of the multiple reforms that had stripped their power. How the Maseru administration was supposed to convince these individuals to dutifully and cheerfully carry out colonial development aims while the administration undercut their power through democratic institutions was not explained.

The initial foray into establishing representative institutions in Lesotho was the 1940s creation of the district councils, with the public nominating members at public gatherings, or *pitsos*. These bodies, in conjunction with the formation of the BAC as the territory’s first political party in 1952, combined to make more plausible the idea of a local legislative body. Lord Hailey’s 1953 survey of administration across the British Empire called for just this, as he noted the territory was ready and able to exercise local legislative and executive functions.¹⁹ The simplest way to do this was to transform the Basutoland National Council into a legislative body, with

its members choosing an executive council. The National Council, founded in 1903 as a purely advisory body, was originally composed of the senior chieftaincy along with five commoners appointed by the resident commissioner.²⁰ The 1940s changes added five members from each of the nine districts and representatives of civil society like traders, former soldiers, and teachers, but hereditary chiefs still held a slim majority in the body.²¹ In 1952 and 1953, however, the council passed resolutions calling for the High Commissioner (HC) to devolve legislative powers, and these calls led the HC to appoint the Administrative Reforms Committee in 1954.²² This six-member body consisting of three British-appointed colonial administrators and three Basotho chiefs, and taking the name of its lead author, Sir Henry Moore, took testimony from over four hundred Basotho. Despite these strong pushes by Basotho and outside experts, the Moore Report called merely for minor changes in local governmental powers and fell far short of advocating for a local legislative body.²³

The BAC drew strength from a burst of public protest over the lack of a pathway to local legislative authority in the Moore Report. The party newspaper, *Mohlabani*, played a key role in whipping up support for the devolution of more political power to Basotho, and its stringent advocacy drew more young, educated Basotho into political activity, many for the first time. Tšeliso Ramakhula, a twenty-five-year-old teacher in the rural Mafeteng District, was already a BAC supporter, but he remembered the report as a vehicle for galvanizing support for the party and its goal of local self-governance.²⁴ But it was not only in the political newspapers where reporting on the Moore Report found traction; the religious newspapers *Moeletsi oa Basotho* and *Leselinyana* also dedicated space to its release and analyzed its implications.²⁵ The wider readership of these newspapers, and the degree to which they circulated in rural areas through the wide network of mission stations, shows the extent to which political news traveled throughout the country.²⁶ While the report caused a burst of political activity, it was a short-lived phenomenon among the populace at large. It did, however, bring together the chieftaincy and the BAC in an alliance that aimed to secure legislative power for the National Council, and in this it succeeded. Political agitation within the council and by senior chiefs forced the Maseru administration to get Alan Lennox-Boyd, secretary of state for the colonies, to appoint a committee to write a constitution for Lesotho, the first in the HCT.

The 1956 Constitutional Reform Committee, as it was officially called, came into being because of this local pressure, but it was also a result of moves toward political independence across Africa and a response to events in South Africa. Ghanaian independence in 1957 changed the time lines for the independence of British colonies in Africa, but even before this the British found it increasingly hard to criticize South African apartheid policy with development efforts across the HCT so poorly funded. Given long-standing Basotho suspicions that the British government in London cared more about its relations with South Africa than it did for the people of Lesotho, the refusal of the Moore Report to back a local legislature in 1955 looked more sinister in light of a 1954 request from the South African government for the handover of the HCT.²⁷ While by the 1950s British administrators did not seriously consider South Africa's incorporation requests because of the international opposition to apartheid, Basotho fears were justified given Britain's decades-long neglect of the colonies.

Putting further pressure on the Colonial Office to act on promises of economic development and political reform in the territories was the 1955 Tomlinson Commission in South Africa. The commission's report laid out plans to create ethnic "Homelands," or Bantustans, with calls for increased funding for development in areas reserved for Africans under the apartheid system in order to make these areas viable economically. The apartheid government had little intention of funding all the development proposals in the report, but the renewed focus on development for African communities in the wider region put continued pressure on the British government to more effectively counter charges of colonial neglect.²⁸

The Constitutional Reform Committee's recommendation that Lesotho gain a local legislative body led to the first legislative powers for the Basutoland National Council in the 1959 constitution, but it also heightened tension between centralization and decentralization advocates. The constitution mandated that the 1960 elections select only members of the district councils, who, in turn, selected the members of the National Council. In addition, they left the power and the funding for development projects in the hands of the district councils, thereby setting up a two-tiered system of authority whereby legislative power was centralized but control over development funding was decentralized.²⁹ With the National Council still having half its members as hereditary senior chiefs and colonial government appointees, national-level elected leaders could

exercise little actual power. The lack of power for winning the elections made politicians more willing to attempt to wrest control of development funding and projects from the district councils in a centralized system at independence.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN LESOTHO, 1952–1970

Basotho, male and female, young and old, took to electoral politics with enthusiasm in the late colonial and early independence periods. While formal electoral politics and a legislative body were new in 1960, political participation and interest were not. Earlier organizations like the Basutoland Progressive Association and Lekhotla la Bafo that had played important political roles from the 1920s through the 1940s suggest the degree to which political participation was normalized by that point among many Basotho, not just the educated.³⁰ While the BPA was largely on the wane by the 1950s, many members of LLB played key roles in the founding and early days of the BAC. The BAC changed its name in the late 1950s to the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) to contest elections. The Basotho National Party (BNP) and the Marematlou Party, both founded in the late 1950s, also contested the elections.

It was not merely political participation in Lesotho, however, that informed Basotho reactions to political developments. Proximity to and experience with South Africa helped shape the political consciousness of many Basotho. Most Basotho who pursued higher education in the immediate postwar period did so in South Africa because the only university in Lesotho, the Catholic Pius XII University College, was a sectarian institution with a limited degree program until 1964. This meant that many Basotho ended up at institutions like Fort Hare, Lovedale, and Healdtown, where they shared classes and living spaces with future leaders of the ANC, the Pan-Africanist Congress, and other regional political organizations. BAC founder Ntsu Mokhehle, for example, attended Fort Hare simultaneously with future liberation struggle leaders Nelson Mandela, Oliver Tambo, and Robert Sobukwe. So by the time Mokhehle started the BAC in 1952, he had already honed his political philosophies and organizational skills in the ANC Youth Wing in South Africa, as well as in LLB in Lesotho.

Beyond the small handful of Basotho in elite South African schools, an even larger number of Basotho joined groups like the ANC and PAC while on migrant labor contracts in South Africa. The mines in particular were a place of radicalization for those living and working in South Africa, but the politicization of Basotho did not happen only there. Even earlier, Basotho joined groups like the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union and Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association, which had a strong presence in rural South Africa as well as in Lesotho.³¹ Thus the leadership of the BAC developed concurrently with and benefited from the ideas of other local, regional, and international political groups organizing at the time. While all parties in Lesotho attempted to have a cross-border presence among Basotho migrants with chapters in South Africa, only the BAC succeeded to any appreciable degree, with chapters active in most of the Witwatersrand mining communities. The base of the party, however, remained in Lesotho's lowlands, in particular, in towns like Mafeteng, Hlotse (Leribe), and Maseru, because so many returned miners and educated civil servants settled there.³²

The close ties between Basotho political leaders and their South African counterparts meant that changes on one side of the border often reverberated on the other side. The BAC name change in 1957 to the Basutoland Congress Party reflected a shift to a more direct electoral strategy in response to constitutional changes in Lesotho, but it was also the result of growing ties between BCP leadership and the African Nationalist faction within the ANC. This group soon left the ANC to form the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC). Ntsu Mokhehle was especially close to the PAC leaders Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe, Potlako Leballo, a Lesotho-born firebrand, and A. P. Mda, who fled into exile in Lesotho in 1963. These close ties are illustrated by Sobukwe's address at the inaugural BCP conference at Fraser's Memorial Hall in Maseru in 1957.³³ The BCP ended up allied with the PAC in part because both ANC and BCP leaders wanted the allegiance of Basotho migrant miners when they were resident in South Africa. The BCP worried that cultivating ties with the ANC would cause Basotho to either stay in South Africa long term without returning home or that their members would lose touch with efforts to effect political change in Lesotho. Mokhehle, ever suspicious, also believed that a 1961 plot to unseat him from his role as party leader emanated from political refugees aligned with the ANC in Lesotho.³⁴ The links between the BCP and the PAC deepened as this split with the ANC occurred, but the pri-

mary driver of these close ties in the early 1960s was the presence in Maseru of most of the leadership of the PAC-in-exile.

It was not only ties with South Africa that Mokhehle and the BCP leadership cultivated. They also looked to Kwame Nkrumah and Ghanaian Pan-Africanism for material and intellectual support starting in the late 1950s. Mokhehle attended the All-Africa People's Conference in 1958 in Accra and was elected to the steering committee, while at the same time the BCP received money from the Ghanaian government.³⁵ This support from Ghana and, by the mid-1960s, from a wider network that included Egypt and the People's Republic of China gave the BCP the financial ability to hold rallies and develop party structures throughout lowland Lesotho.

The BCP's alliance with Pan-Africanism more broadly led to this international financial support, but it also meant closer scrutiny by the colonial administration and the South African government. The presence of the PAC leadership and worries that the PAC's armed wing, Poqo, was planning strikes from inside Lesotho caused both governments to keep the BCP's activities under close watch.³⁶ The colonial government had always viewed the BCP as a threat to political stability in Lesotho. Resident Commissioner Edwin Porter Arrowsmith fired three BCP leaders from the government-run Basutoland High School in 1955 because they refused to cease publishing what he deemed antigovernment material in the party newspaper, *Mohlalani*.³⁷ Similarly, colonial administrators viewed the BCP as being behind every disruption in the country in the early 1960s, for example, blaming a school strike on the BCP. Despite the commission of inquiry's inability to find evidence that party leadership had even met with students beforehand, its report chided the BCP for creating an "atmosphere of indiscipline" that "encouraged" the students.³⁸

This view of the BCP as a radical group was not just confined to colonial administrators; many Basotho also saw the group as radically out of step with a rural, conservative populace. Institutionally, the strongest counterweight to the BCP was the Catholic Church, which had the largest number of mission stations and schools scattered throughout the rural areas. These stations still relied heavily on European and Canadian donors to fund operations and French Canadian priests and nuns to staff its churches, schools, and cooperative associations. Their ability to raise funds in North America and Europe made it the best-funded mission entity operating in the country. The Catholic hierarchy, though, worried that

BCP dominance in Lesotho threatened their religious operations, so they played a direct role in the formation of an alternative party in 1958, the Basotho National Party. The BNP's membership drew primarily from junior chiefs and Catholic Basotho, who tended to live in rural areas, and the party was strongly anticommunist because of the influence of the expatriate Catholic hierarchy. The leader of the party, Leabua Jonathan, was himself a minor chief from the rural Leribe District who had worked in South Africa, as well as in the civil service in Lesotho as a judicial adviser under Patrick Duncan in the late 1940s. He had spent much of the 1950s as one of Regent 'Mantsebo's official advisers.³⁹ Jonathan helped position the BNP as a less radical nationalist alternative to the BCP, arguing that the development potential of Lesotho could not be realized if strident opposition to apartheid damaged the ability of Basotho to migrate for work while the state worked to provide new economic opportunities at home. At the 1960 elections, the BNP, less than two years old, did not fare well, but it grew increasingly strong through the 1960s.⁴⁰

The final major party was the Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP), an amalgamation of disparate interests. It brought together members of the Marematlou Party ("Marematlou" is a Sesotho idiom meaning "the people who come together to push the elephant"), a royalist group founded in 1957 by S. S. Matete to oust the regent 'Mantsebo in favor of her stepson, Constantine Bereng, with the Basutoland Freedom Party. The BFP consisted mainly of disaffected BCP members, led by a former BCP deputy leader, B. M. Khaketla. The Marematlou Party had, by 1960, succeeded in its initial goal of installing Bereng on the throne, but after the amalgamation the party remained a vehicle for the monarch and the senior chieftaincy to have greater influence in electoral politics. Gaining Khaketla's support also meant the party gained the services of the newspaper *Mohlabaani*, as he was the publisher.⁴¹

The MFP positioned itself as a moderate nationalist alternative for those who wished to support the senior chieftaincy and monarchy as defining institutions in Lesotho, but as with all parties, it was also heavily intertwined with regional politics. The MFP came to have close ties with the ANC because the members of the ANC in exile in Lesotho meshed well ideologically with the party but also because the ANC could and did supply funding from abroad that kept the MFP afloat. The vast majority of this funding came via the ANC/South African Communist Party (SACP) organizer and fund-raiser Joe Matthews, who was living in exile

in Maseru from 1960 until 1965.⁴² The amalgamated nature of the party, and the sometimes-competing interests of the senior chief and monarch with communists, ANC supporters, and discontented BCP members, was awkward at times, but it needed the infusion of cash to compete with its foreign-funded rivals in Lesotho.

During the campaign leading to the January 1960 district council elections, all three political parties agreed on two central tenets: Lesotho should be moving toward political independence, and the British needed to fund more development projects. However, only males over the age of twenty-one who were physically present in the territory were allowed to vote, so, in addition to women, migrant laborers who could not get leave to return were excluded. The exclusive franchise was emblematic of the colonial government's view of popular participation in both governance and development. Administrators in both London and Maseru found it difficult to view colonial subjects as full, equal participants in political processes. All of these factors and the relative newness of electoral politics meant that only about thirty-five thousand Basotho voted in 1960, a participation rate of around 24 percent of the eligible electorate and only about 8.5 percent of the total adult population.⁴³

Nevertheless, many Basotho remembered the 1960 campaign as the start of their political consciousness. Alexander Sekoli, a Catholic school-teacher who grew up in the same village as LLB founder, Josiel Lefela, cited this campaign as the start of his political engagement. Previously, he said, "people just continued living their lives like anything," but after the mass rallies and public speeches there was a shift in political engagement.⁴⁴ Another young teacher, Mocketsi Lesitsi, identified the campaign and elections as the time when he and others became aware of the importance of politics and first heard about and started to grapple with the idea of independence.⁴⁵

The BCP victory in the 1960 elections put it at the forefront of the push for independence, but at the same time it was a victory that did not allow party leaders to fully exercise their popular mandate because of the shared nature of power under the 1959 constitution. The BCP controlled six of the nine district councils outright and had significant minorities in the other three, which gave them control of rural development programs since development authority was vested in the councils.⁴⁶ This control also gave them thirty of the forty seats reserved for district council-elected representatives in the new National Council, but there they remained a

minority party because an additional forty seats were reserved for the twenty-two senior chiefs, the paramount chief's nominees, and senior colonial civil servants. The Executive Council, consisting of eight individuals elected from the National Council, controlled central government policy under the 1959 constitution. With the full council selecting these members, the BCP, on account of the threat many chiefs and opposition parties felt from its potential ascension to power, received only one of the eight seats. Even this token representation, however, disappeared in 1961 when that member, Bernard Khaketla, left the BCP for the MFP.⁴⁷ This lack of legislative or executive power left the BCP's 1960 victory rather hollow.

Most politically active Basotho saw the 1960 elections and the rapid decolonization of other African territories the same year as a tipping point in the movement toward independence. This contrasted with the vision of Lesotho's colonial administrators. As late as 1959, in fact, the Colonial Office in London was not planning to broach the subject of independence for any of the High Commission Territories in the next ten years.⁴⁸ But plans were overtaken by events on the ground and shifts in British government policy. On February 1, 1960, two days before his famous "Winds of Change" speech in the South African Parliament, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was in Maseru to meet with local political leaders and government officials. Much of the push for a hastened decolonization time line came from Basotho, however. At the same hour that Macmillan made his famous speech in Cape Town, Basotho chiefs and politicians were gathered in a *pitso* in Maseru to determine when Regent 'Mantsebo would step aside in favor of her stepson. In the culmination of a rancorous debate that stretched back to the 1950s, the chiefs decided that Bereng would replace the regent in March. Bereng took the name Moshoeshe II on March 12, 1960, when he was installed as constitutional monarch. Through his choice of name, Moshoeshe II signaled his desire to lead the country to independence by harnessing the reputation of his great-great-grandfather as a unifier and nation builder.

While Moshoeshe II wanted to represent a new flowering of the Basotho nation in the 1960s, the increased public interest in politics and political culture was able to take root, in part, thanks to a vibrant literary culture in Lesotho that allowed for the rapid dissemination of news and opinion. Stretching back to the nineteenth century, Lesotho's literary tradition had blossomed in the pages of the religiously affiliated newspapers *Leselinyana la Lesotho* (Protestant) and *Moeletsi oa Basotho* (Catholic),

with writers like Thomas Mofolo, Azariele Sekese, and Z. D. Mangoela, among others, getting their start by having their work serialized in them.⁴⁹ Lesotho had a literacy rate of at least 60 percent by 1950, one of the highest rates in Africa, and this increased in the years preceding independence due to the expansion of education.⁵⁰ Mass literacy supported the presence of a highly developed local newspaper culture. The religiously affiliated newspapers were available countrywide, and South African papers were available in major lowland towns. Newspapers were also passed from hand to hand, so that dailies like *The Friend* from Bloemfontein and *The Star* from Johannesburg, as well as periodicals like *The Drum*, *Zonk*, and *New Age*, which focused on fashion and style in addition to politics, circulated widely. These publications accentuated the connections Basotho saw between national aspirations at home and regional and international politics.⁵¹ After 1960, the range of local political publications grew as well. The BCP, after losing *Mohlabani* when Khaketla left the party in 1961, started publishing *Makatolle*, while the BNP founded *Nketu* as their party newspaper.⁵²

The connections between Lesotho and South Africa politically, on the state level and in terms of the experiences of individuals, also deepened during the 1960s. A significant number of political refugees arrived in Lesotho in the wake of the March 21, 1960, Sharpeville Massacre. This put many Basotho and the government on the front lines of regional politics.⁵³ With Portuguese colonialism still entrenched in Angola and Mozambique, white settler rule in the Central African Federation, and South African control over Namibia, the High Commission Territories represented the only safe havens on the border of South Africa for those who needed to flee the apartheid regime in 1960. Lesotho was not the best landing spot for most political refugees, as its location made movement farther north on the continent difficult. Thus most of the top leadership of the ANC avoided Lesotho on their journeys to exile in 1960, yet a few leaders in exile like Joe Matthews and Gilbert Hani made the territory their base. The PAC, on the other hand, saw Lesotho as an ideal place to regroup and set up operations in exile because its leadership had strong roots in both Lesotho and the Transkei, which borders Lesotho to the southwest.⁵⁴ The colonial administration worked closely with the South African police, in particular, Special Branch agents, to keep an eye on this group and other newly arrived refugees. Even with this scrutiny, though, the porous borders and the willingness of many Basotho to quietly harbor refugees meant that

the colonial administration was unaware of the presence of some liberation leaders. The long, lightly policed frontier between the countries allowed individuals to slip back and forth without detection, as a June 1960 incident illustrates. ANC leader Joe Matthews arranged for a charter flight from Maseru to Swaziland to spirit Wilton Mkwayi, Moses Madhiba, and four other high-profile ANC leaders out of the territory. Prior to the filing of the airplane's manifest, however, the colonial government had "not previously known" that three of the six passengers were in the territory.⁵⁵

The Lesotho border represented an opportunity for South Africans to escape apartheid in the wake of Sharpeville, but even when there was not a direct political crisis, many South Africans attempted to get into Lesotho. As the apartheid regime cracked down on protest through the 1950s, the number of South Africans in Lesotho increased. In 1958, however, due in part to colonial decentralization, the Basutoland government promulgated the Entry and Residency Act. This law created district-level boards consisting of one colonial official and three Basotho to adjudicate and authorize the issuing of residency permits, thereby placing control of legal residency questions in the hands of Basotho.⁵⁶ The effect of this was that more South African political refugees were able to secure legal residency in the territory, including well-known leaders like trade union organizer Elizabeth Mafekeng, ANC organizer Gilbert Hani, PAC leader A. P. Mda, and ANC/SACP leader Joe Matthews. Not all refugees utilized this system, preferring to make use of their own local connections to gain asylum. SACP organizer Thabo Mofutsanyana, for example, slipped into Lesotho in 1959 to avoid arrest, without going through official immigration procedures.⁵⁷

Ordinary South Africans and Basotho also made use of the porous border, with Basotho slipping across without going through formal procedures for work and visiting. South African students, in particular, came to Lesotho to attend school in large numbers after the 1955 passage of the reviled Bantu Education Act. In 1958, Leloaleng Technical School in the rural Quthing District enrolled two-thirds of its students from South Africa.⁵⁸ Students at the primary and secondary levels often came to live with relatives, however distant, in Lesotho, or they boarded at school hostels. This included students like Motsapi Moorosi, who had residency rights in Lesotho because his Basotho parents were migrant laborers living in South Africa.⁵⁹ It also included those who had no birth-right claim to the territory like Zakes Mda, who followed his father into

exile in Lesotho, and the Mbeki brothers, Moeletsi and Jama, who lived with their aunt in the Roma valley while attending Lesotho schools.⁶⁰ While the exact number of South Africans in Lesotho's schools is hard to come by, it was certainly large. By the 1970s, over one thousand South African high school students were enrolled in Lesotho, with even more at the primary level.⁶¹ Since primary and secondary schools were scattered far and wide across the country, most rural communities had South African students in residence. This played a key role in popular support for the anti-apartheid movements and impressed on many the importance of political engagement.

Students who came to Lesotho to attend the university in Roma also played a role in spreading political awareness among Basotho. As the apartheid state cracked down harder on protest and constrained what could be taught in classrooms at all levels, the university became a more attractive option for many students from across southern Africa. In 1964, with funding from the Ford Foundation and USAID, the Catholic Church transferred Pius XII University College to the colonial administration, and it became the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate, and Swaziland (UBBS). Students responded positively to this change; enrollments rose rapidly through the 1960s and 1970s, with individuals coming from South Africa, Zambia, Rhodesia/Zimbabwe, and Nyasaland/Malawi, as well as the three constituent territories.⁶² While the direct impact of the students was felt most strongly in the rural community of Roma, the presence of the university meant that there was a cadre of young, politically savvy students in the country. There was also an increasingly international faculty teaching and getting involved with both anti-apartheid efforts and local politics.

Finally, the major religious institutions of Lesotho often had cross-border ties, allowing people to move across the border even if they had no familial connections. Marie Selena, an Anglican nun, was born and raised in the Transkei, but during her novitiate she was sent to the Anglican community at Hlotse (Leribe), Lesotho. She ended up spending most of her career in various parishes across Lesotho.⁶³ A large number of Catholic clergy and nuns were also expatriates in the 1960s, so religion was a way in which many in Lesotho connected with non-Basotho. Between South African students, the university, a highly developed newspaper culture, and a proliferation of religious institutions, Basotho across the country, even in the most remote mountain villages, were connected to people and ideas

from around the region and the world. The political interest that arose in the 1950s and 1960s among Basotho was linked not just to changes in the political structures of late colonial Basutoland but also to the anti-apartheid struggle and the Cold War. Basotho were increasingly aware of changes taking place around them, and they had access to media and networks of people to discuss the ways institutional changes like development and independence in Lesotho would have an impact on and were affected by other changes in the region and the world. While independence was not yet a certainty by the early 1960s, it was an idea that an increasing number of Basotho supported as they dreamed of better economic prospects, more government services in their communities, and the possibility of a more direct say in governance and development projects.

POLITICAL CHANGES, 1960s

Along with the political changes in Lesotho, the colonial administration and Basotho politicians increasingly emphasized development as a rhetorical and political strategy during the 1950s and 1960s. The colonial administration in Maseru had run some large-scale development projects in the 1950s with CDW money. These projects included school expansion and repair, anti-soil erosion efforts, and two large agricultural development projects, the Taung Scheme and the Pilot Project, also known as the Tebetebeng Scheme.⁶⁴ These CDW funds represented the first broad infusion of colonial development funding in Lesotho, but compared to other British territories, it was a relatively paltry sum. All of these projects combined garnered only a total of around \$23 million worth of assistance from 1944 to 1966 (fig. 1.1).⁶⁵

Despite this limited funding, Basotho politicians increasingly emphasized the linkages between political reform, independence, and development in the 1960s. They promised that independence meant more jobs, more and better infrastructure, and more foreign aid for development from a wider variety of sources. In the pre-independence 1960s, however, there were no large colonial development projects in operation and the only development came from community-level projects run by the district councils, religious institutions, and civic groups. Echoing the growing political divisions within the country and the continued tension between chieftaincy and democratic structures, these local-level projects often



Figure 1.1 Basotho kindergarten class, October 1970. Courtesy of *Moeletsi oa Basotho*.

proved controversial. The biggest conflicts centered on who had the authority to allocate and distribute land and control its use. When the project managers hired by the district council for the Mafeteng FARMECH Tractor Scheme, for example, tried to get local people to consolidate their fields into larger plots to allow for more efficient plowing and planting, the chieftaincy was quick to mobilize local resistance. Some communities went so far as to refuse to participate because they feared it would mean the loss of local control over land.⁶⁶

The messy operation of development and local administration, however, did not dampen the enthusiasm of the senior chiefs or leaders of political parties for independence. They moved as quickly as they could toward that end, with the National Council passing a resolution calling for self-government in 1961, the first time it was legal for them to do so under the constitution. This allowed Moshoeshoe II to appoint the new Constitutional Commission, which completed its work in 1963 with a plan to devolve even more powers from the colonial government to local bodies. The commission's report led to formal talks in London in April and May 1964 between National Council representatives and the secretary of state for the colonies, Duncan Sandys. The outcome of the talks was the first ever tentative timetable for independence, with elections scheduled for late 1964 or early 1965 to select a parliamentary-style government to jointly

rule with the colonial administration for a year. This positioned Lesotho for independence in late 1965 or 1966.⁶⁷

Basotho, especially the young, were paying close attention to these political developments, largely through the press. Some, like Armelina Tsiki and Chaka Ntsane, noted that they sought out or had access to only one viewpoint in their media consumption, but others, like Selborne Mohlalisi, Mohlalefi Moteane, and Clara Rapholo, tried to get access to as many newspapers as possible to gain a better understanding of the changes.⁶⁸ This enthusiasm for political news from multiple perspectives belies the strength of the partisan difference at the national level, where political leaders used fiery rhetoric about other parties in an effort to attract supporters and demonize their opponents. It also speaks to the openness of most Basotho to a variety of meanings and possibilities for what independence would mean. Still, even with the widespread interest, it took persuasion and encouragement for a lot of Basotho to take steps toward political participation. For a few younger Basotho like Raphael Leseli, it was parents who encouraged political participation. In Leseli's case, his parents were BCP members long before he joined the BCP Youth League in 1965, and they encouraged him to attend rallies and events near their rural home.⁶⁹ It was the same with Chaka Ntsane, except that his parents were members of the BNP.⁷⁰ The parents of many other young Basotho, however, either did not know or did not care about politics, and these young people attributed their political participation to the consciousness-raising environment of schools. Selborne Mohlalisi dated his political engagement to his attendance at the PEMS school in Morija in the late 1950s. He contrasted the enthusiasm of his peers with an older generation that "really was not interested" in the idea of politics and independence until much closer to 1966.⁷¹ In a similar vein, Michael Mateka reported that he learned to avidly read newspapers and follow politics at the Catholic Roma College in the late 1950s rather than because of encouragement from his relatives at home.

The process of gaining and realizing independence for many Basotho did not merely center on October 4, 1966—formal Independence Day. The idea itself was rather abstract, and its meaning to individuals and communities was not always clearly defined. Interestingly, it was an idea that Basotho came to understand both through the promulgation of newly democratic institutions in the late colonial era and through the structures that were significantly less open to popular participation after the 1970

coup and the turn to authoritarian rule. On one extreme were 1950s-era high school students, like Selborne Mohlalisi and Michael Mateka, who had firm ideas about independence even before the implementation of Lesotho's first constitution. On the other extreme was Moeketsi Lesitsi, who finished his secondary education in 1959, the same year as Mateka and only three years after Mohlalisi. Lesitsi was a teacher who had worked for the government on both the 1965 census and the 1966 elections, but at the time of the formal transfer of power, he "didn't even know what independence meant." He identified the years following the 1970 coup as the time when he came to understand independence. For him, the increased possibility of "going to other countries for training and learning" and getting "money from other countries" for development were the outcomes that made the idea of independence for Lesotho real in his mind.⁷² These widely divergent experiences, even among those with similar levels of formal education, show how the centering of independence on the formal transfer of power does not take into account the different ways that people experience processes of change in the state.

The differences between Basotho in their views of independence were mirrored in their political divisions, which often broke along generational and religious lines. The BNP tended to garner the support of Catholics, while most Protestant Basotho supported the BCP. At the national level, the rhetoric was harsh, painting political opposition in terms that suggested differences that could not be bridged. Younger Basotho narrated experiences that noted the national political climate, but they had divergent experiences with how this polarization played out on the local level. Raphael Leseli reported that political divides in his home community of Makhalaneng ha Lekota did not greatly hinder social relations between youth. Many attended political rallies and joined the youth wings; afterward "some would go to another political party and some would go to the other one," but everyone came together for "jolling [partying] and cards and anything [relaxing]."⁷³ Many more Basotho, however, noted that national politics split communities and families. Michael Mateka noted increased rancor as formal independence neared. Divisions between Basotho sharpened "what should have been opposition into enemies . . . : You are against me, you are my enemy. When you are my enemy I bring you down by hook or crook."⁷⁴ Young Basotho tended to blame political leaders for this polarization, but this explanation involved some dissembling too, as many also reported being active participants in the youth wings of parties,

which were often on the front lines of protest and polarization.⁷⁵ It is too much of a generalization, however, to say that all youth political involvement led to polarization, since many sincere young Basotho did not join the youth wings and attempted to build a more inclusive, less partisan version of Lesotho.⁷⁶

Partisanship was felt in the civil service as well, with teachers and other government workers at risk of losing their jobs if they were too open about their political affiliations. Lesitsi was one of many teachers who remembered dressing carefully so as not to inadvertently wear party colors that might cause school managers to accuse him of pursuing a political agenda on school grounds.⁷⁷ A female BCP member teaching in the rural Mafeteng District lied to her Anglican school manager about her party membership because, she said, “he could have chased me away from the school [fired her].”⁷⁸ These were not idle fears, as the outspoken BCP member Tšeliso Ramakhula found out when he lost his job at the Agricultural College in Maseru in the wake of the BNP victory at the 1965 polls.⁷⁹ Schools attempted to keep their students out of politics. Since many of them, especially at the secondary level, were boarding schools, they had a degree of control over their students’ lives outside of the classroom. Mohlalefi Moteane, a student at Peka High School at independence, remembered that he and his peers could attend rallies for any party, but they were not allowed to join a party or even to speak at the rallies—just to observe.⁸⁰ Motsapi Moorosi said that he never went to the rallies, but many of his peers at St. Monica’s high school did. Like Moteane, Moorosi’s peers were forbidden from participating in a more active capacity in politics while they were attending school.⁸¹ Although students’ actions may have been constrained in the short term, nothing dampened political interest in general among the younger generations. This was especially important in light of the rapid expansion of the education system that took place starting in the 1950s. The colonial administration saw few development opportunities in the territory, so most of the post-World War II CDW money earmarked for Lesotho ended up funding school expansion. The school system had about eleven hundred slots for Basotho students in secondary and postsecondary institutions like teacher training colleges in 1951. By 1966, this number had increased fourfold, and as the enrollments rose with the last of the CDW expansion, there were almost twelve thousand high school students by 1972 (see table 2.1).⁸²

Educated youth were at the forefront of efforts to grapple with the concept of independence, and they were the first large group of Basotho, other than politicians, to internalize the connection between independence and development. This happened in large part because of their desire to avoid becoming migrant laborers, but having a large group of mobile, eager individuals thinking about and working for development played an important role in popularizing the linkage between development and independence among the larger population—what this book calls the rhetorical consensus on development. The connections between these concepts existed first in the minds of educated youth, but Basotho youth organizations provided spaces in which these young people could translate ideas into action. Chaka Ntsane was in leadership roles in a number of campus groups at the university around independence, and he remembered his peers talking about “development, development, development.”⁸³ One group in particular was the Lesotho Workcamps Association, which organized students to build infrastructure in villages around the country during school holidays. They received some limited government funding to pay for materials, but the initiative for planning and implementation was the students’. Ntsane remembered students eagerly participating because the work was something tangible young Basotho could do to help improve infrastructure in the country and also because they were able to take the initiative in the organization.⁸⁴ Similarly, Mohlalefi Moteane, a high school student at the time, remembered his hopes for independence revolving around the “younger generations [being] able to qualify and become doctors, engineers so that they come back and run their own affairs.”⁸⁵ Moteane’s conception of independence entailed development he defined as the freedom for Basotho to receive sufficient training so that they could stay in Lesotho and find suitable employment. These visions for independence and development—job opportunities in Lesotho, more infrastructure and government services, and a pathway for individuals to contribute expertise and opinion to projects—marked the emerging youth development consensus that spread into the wider population by the late 1960s and early 1970s.

THE 1965 ELECTION AND DEVELOPMENT

The stakes of the election in 1965 were much higher than they had been in 1960 because leading Lesotho to independence would be the main task

of the winner. All of the parties were better funded and organized, and the Basotho population at large was better informed and engaged with the political process. There was widespread excitement about what future changes might mean, but there was also anxiety. Politicians and ordinary Basotho alike wanted to see Lesotho emerge as a nation-state with a role on the regional and world stages. Attending rallies, showing up to vote in large numbers, and reading the local papers to stay abreast of changes, Basotho certainly did not have a “pathetic contentment” toward governmental affairs, or their own poverty, as a UNDP consultant named N. Kaul wrote in 1965.⁸⁶ Rather, it was a populace that worried about how change would affect individuals, as well as their communities and country.

Over 56 percent of the adult population of Lesotho voted in the 1965 elections, compared to 8.5 percent in 1960. The increased turnout was due to the higher stakes of the elections and the fact that the 1964 constitution extended the franchise to women. Depressing turnout was the lack of provision for absentee voting for workers unable to return to Lesotho for the April elections.⁸⁷ Most observers expected the BCP to prevail based on its wide margin of victory in 1960, so the BNP’s razor-thin victory was an upset. The BNP received about 40 percent of the vote in the three-way contest, but it swept most of the rural constituencies, especially those in the mountains, while the BCP and MFP split the remainder. The BNP secured thirty-one of the sixty seats up for election in the new Parliament,⁸⁸ taking up the reins of shared government with the British colonial regime on May 6, 1965. The British were initially skeptical of the ability of the BNP to govern because of the lack of support the party received from the vast majority of educated Basotho, including most of the civil service. By November, however, British officials were touting BNP leader Leabua Jonathan’s abilities to lead Lesotho to independence on October 4, 1966.⁸⁹

In his radio address to the nation at independence, Jonathan laid out his vision for the new Lesotho. He explicitly linked the concepts of development, independence, and individual prosperity, noting that the government needed to assure the people that “land will be used in accordance with their wishes” to “promote economic development and national prosperity.”⁹⁰ With land having been an emotive issue in Lesotho since the nineteenth-century rule of Moshoeshe, Jonathan’s linkage of land with development and independence was a historical analogy with which his listenership would have readily identified. But it was also part of and the result of a wholesale embrace by Basotho politicians from all parties of the

centrality of development to decolonization. While exactly what independence meant was still open for political debate, and was an open question for many Basotho, the impact of fifteen years of political rhetoric about development and independence had started to solidify this linkage in the minds of many Basotho: independence required development, and development came with independence.

As I discuss in the next chapter, it was Basotho political leaders and colonial officials who first put forth this formulation, but the answer as to how and why it succeeded in becoming the dominant way of understanding decolonization among Basotho in general lay in efforts by younger Basotho. Their embrace of development was rhetorical and political, but it was matched by their actions in youth organizations to bring projects to fruition that would show significant numbers of people what development, and hence independence, could look like.