



**Reinventing African Chieftaincy
in the Age of AIDS, Gender,
Governance, and Development**

Edited by Donald I. Ray, Tim Quinlan,
Keshav Sharma, and Tacita A.O. Clarke

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20 Contesting the Political Meaning of Chieftaincies in the New South Africa

Kereng Daniel Lebogang Kgotleng

This chapter explores the politics of a succession dispute about the chiefship of the Batlhaping boo Phuduhucwana in Taung, North West province, South Africa. The chapter argues that succession disputes are not just about identifying the “real chief,” but rather are intrinsically linked to the political environment surrounding the chieftaincy. As a result, succession disputes are also about the meaning and role of an institution like “the chieftaincy” in a post-apartheid South Africa. Moreover, the Phuduhucwana succession dispute opened up an avenue for the Phuduhucwanas to define the proper status, role, and powers of their chieftaincy within the new local government framework and to set out clearly the kind of chieftaincy they would like to have in Taung.

INTRODUCTION

The Batlhaping boo Phuduhucwana is a Tswana chieftaincy in one of the poorest and remote municipalities of Taung in the North West province. Despite this, the chieftaincy has experienced numerous restructuring aimed at fulfilling grand narratives coming from the South African government. Together with the other two Batlhaping chieftaincies, Batlhaping boo Phuduhucwana was part of Taung Native Reserves, which was set aside for resettlement by Tswana people (Breutz 1963; 1968). The reserve later became a district of the Bophutatswana homeland. Following a process that has been seen alternatively as an accommodation of ethnic identities, the subordination of chieftaincies in local government (Southall and Kropiwnicki 2001), or the half-hearted dismantling of chieftaincies (Mamdani 1996; Ntsebeza 2003), the Phuduhucwanas, together with the Batlhaping boo Mothibi and Mosega, became part of the Taung municipality. This process has raised many challenges that chieftaincies had to respond to, and also challenges about the chieftaincy. The primary challenge is finding a legitimate reason for a liberal democratic state to grant constitutional recognition to an institution that is based on cultural values, which are not always congruent with liberal values. The challenge is made even more problematic by different sources of legitimacy that the chieftaincy and the state appeal (Thornton 2003, 138–43; Ray 2003, 88–94). The legitimacy of the South African state is premised on its promotion of liberal values under the banner of “one law for one nation” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2004, 189). The legitimacy of chieftaincies is premised on the autonomy of culture – a culture that was once suppressed by the apartheid government and is now finding its freedom in the liberal constitution that seems to also deny its legitimacy. The challenge becomes even more serious when culture is equated with a development agenda that has not developed a coherent institutional representation and where the presence of state institutions is marked by uncertainty or absence and for many they exist as a point of imagination and longing (Pinto 2004, 337). The chieftaincy has been equated with empowerment of local people to make political and economic decisions that affect them on a daily basis without state interference.

In these remote and poorer parts of South Africa, “a better life for all” has come to a point where culture and the institutions it gives rise to cannot be left unexamined. In these remote areas, culture, chieftaincies, and municipalities are being examined and redefined to determine if they are propitious for development. As Comaroff and Comaroff (2004, 189) pointed out, it is in these areas that “there is more room for experimentation in coping with the implications of Culture for everyday life in the postcolony” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2004, 189). It is also here that plurality and fragmentation are transformed by an ongoing dialogue between different regimes of knowledge and discursive practices that seek to bring about their own model of local government. The approach of the South African government has involved the promotion of chieftaincies as cultural symbols that represent a pre-colonial past that can be deployed to justify the consensual parliamentary model that was adopted after 1994.

This approach was also an attempt to depoliticize and subordinate chieftaincies in national and local politics. The subordination of chieftaincies is not a straightforward process. Local-level dialogue about municipalization has affected this process and shaped it in such a way that it acquires a dimension with the potential to undermine government attempts to depoliticize chieftaincies. For example, Ward councillors in most of Taung use *kgotlas*, a local structure of chiefs and their headmen, as venues for their meetings. In these chiefship structures, headmen or chiefs reign supreme. It is also here that the autonomy of culture becomes absolute and the state is an “alien symbolic surplus” (De Boeck 1996, 86). By opening the *kgotla* to government elected officials, the chieftaincy is expanding its authority and gains access to state resources like electricity, water, and the provision of health care without losing its autonomy to the state. Moreover, the *kgotla* becomes a medium for mediating conflicting expectations for *a better life for all* in a context characterized by lack of material resources. In this process the role of the *kgotla* is to maintain a coherent developmental practice and to act as an “umbilical corridor” that filters state resources while shielding their subjects from state and market vicissitudes (Argenti 1998).

The succession dispute shows that government attempts to subordinate and remove the chieftaincy from local politics have not been altogether successful. Instead, the profile of chieftaincies, confronted with discourses about development, rural reforms, and liberal democracy, has acquired

a new meaning. This ability to acquire new meanings and to transform them is made possible by the political ambiguity of the chieftaincy in South Africa. Succession disputes within this contested terrain of local government, development, and rural reforms have provided the public, councillors, government officials, and traditional leaders with an avenue to change the meaning and standing of the chieftaincy within a democratic South Africa.

The purpose of this chapter is to present the succession dispute and its often-neglected impact on the politics of local government as a cultural performance amenable to providing a horizon for articulating aspirations in remote and poorer parts of South Africa. It is often assumed that letting members of the chiefship sort out their problems without interference from government or the municipality can separate the politics of the chieftaincy from municipal politics and administration. My postulate is that succession disputes can also affect and be indistinguishable from the general politics of local government and, because of the close link between local government and traditional authorities, succession disputes cannot be understood as if they take place only within a framework of traditional authorities. The political framework of succession disputes is a much larger field, which is encompassed within the rubric of development and local government.

The provincial government had assumed that it could play a fact-finding mission and assist in the resolution of any dispute by providing disputants with “facts” about the case. This fact-finding mission derived from the belief that succession disputes are always about establishing genealogical “facts” of disputants. The succession dispute of the Phuduhucwana chieftaincy shows that, far from being a neutral player, the state is often drawn into these conflicts. The kind of relationship the chieftaincy has with government can have a decisive influence in government’s interference and be as political as any other participant in the succession dispute. One should also bear in mind that local councillors and government officials are also members of the same broader cultural knowledge that produces and shapes the knowledge of traditional leaders and other members of the “traditional community.”

This was also the case when the government intervened in the succession dispute of the Ba Ga Nawa Chieftaincy, the Lehurutshe Chieftaincy in Moshana village, the Chieftaincy of Bakgatla Ba Ga Pilane (Kraai

2002, 6), the chieftaincy of Moshoeite in Lehurutshe, Barolong Boo Ratshidi, and the Batlhaping Boo Phuduhucwana. Some of these cases involved the arrest of royal men for convening an illegal gathering against the newly appointed chief, as in the case in Lehurutshe and Taung. With the exception of the Barolong Boo Ratshidi succession disputes (Kgotleng 2001), no proper study of these succession disputes was undertaken. Of all these cases, the Barolong Boo Ratshidi and the Batlhaping Boo Phuduhucwana were perhaps more dramatic because they remained unresolved for quite a long time. Secondly, within their own region, these two chieftaincies are much larger polities. The common thread in all of these cases was the provincial government's conspicuous involvement, which raised alarm, caught the attention of the local media, and led to court battles in these affected societies. Emerging from these court battles was not only an attempt to revoke or uphold government's decision but also to contest government's intervention in the first place.

Since the introduction of the Transitional Local Council in 1995, the state's structure of municipal government in Taung, the relationship between the Phuduhucwana chieftaincy under the chiefship of Samuel Mankuroane and Transitional Local Council has not been cordial. A number of municipal councillors saw Chief Samuel Mankuroane as an obstacle to "development" in Taung. In return, Chief Samuel Mankuroane saw councillors as usurpers of his role and authority. Both were on an ever-recurrent collision course. A number of councillors, especially executive councillors like Mrs. K. Koikoi from Ward Nine, were convinced that "from the very beginning Sam did not want a municipality in Taung. He told people that we would make them pay for their dogs and houses" (interview: 08 June 2002). Furthermore, his involvement with the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) and refusal to take his seat within the municipal council was read as a clear sign that he was against the municipality and any co-operation from him would not be forthcoming. There were several major incidents that contributed to the perception that Chief Samuel Mankuroane was an obstacle to the process of "development" and effective implementation of municipal governance. First, there was the incident involving the land and housing scheme. Conflict over this housing scheme revolved around whether the proper authority over the land scheduled for this scheme was consulted and permission was given. The chieftaincy claimed that the chief was the proper

authority because the land in question was occupied and used by the Phuduhucwanas for small-scale farming. Because of occupancy and the right of use, the land belonged to the chieftaincy. The then Transitional Local Council countered this claim by pointing out that the land set aside for this project was in actual fact state land made available to the Phuduhucwana by the government of Bophutatswana as part of its agricultural development scheme for the Taung district. Also, they claimed that with the collapse of the project, and the poor soil conditions for agricultural use, the land was no longer in use. As a result, they argued that the land reverted to government, in this case, the Transitional Local Council, with the authority to allocate the land for other uses without first consulting or gaining permission from the chieftaincy. The housing project went ahead and farmers using that land were allocated another farm bought from a nearby farmer by the government.

Secondly, in some instances, the clash of egos between councillors and traditional leaders was also a cause of conflicts. From my first visit to Taung (12–15 April 2002), it was accepted knowledge that the chief and the mayor were not on good terms. Furthermore, at the local government summit of June 2001, held in Mafikeng, the mayor of Taung referred to Taung and other rural areas as “feudal areas” (speech by Khonkhobe 2001). This was in reference to the existence of chieftaincies in rural areas and their continued control of land and influence over a large population group. By equating chiefly authority with feudal authority, Mr. Khonkhobe sought to demonstrate that chieftaincies were relics of the past and not compatible with a democratic order of elected officials. As a result, two of my informants, one of them a ward councillor and speaker of the municipal council, supported the conclusion that sometimes the cause of trouble between traditional leaders and councillors is a clash of individual egos. It is for this reason that conflicts such as the housing project should not be understood as arising from whether the houses should be built or not, but about whether the correct authority over that land had been consulted. The clash of egos is also a problem because it raises questions about who has authority to convene and chair a meeting, who should speak first and who should speak last. For example, one of the serious causes of tension involved Ward Eight councillor Mr. Mogokotleng’s decision to convene an urgent meeting without getting the go-ahead from the Manokwane sub-chief Francis Baisitse, and also not in *kgotla* as expected. Moreover

such a clash of egos gains additional importance because there is no single organizing principle or single political horizon (Norval 1996, 66) that constitute and shape individual and collective agency. There are two competing legitimacies (Ray, 2003). Pinto (2004, 351) notes that because “development practices are primarily contests of knowledge,” an event like a meeting could solicit different interpretations such as “X” is anti-sub-chief and therefore he is corrupt and used the ward councils for his personal benefit. An alternative interpretation would be constructed as follows: the sub-chief is against “X” and gave him no alternative but to go ahead with the meeting in order to carry out his electoral mandate.

These incidences indicate to the public who has the most important roles and who has control and authority in the village. To convene a meeting without a go-ahead from Sub-Chief Francis Baisitse was interpreted as usurping the role of a sub-chief and undermining him in the process. In this tussle, both would attempt to undermine each other’s role, position, and status in an effort to win over control and support of the public. One should also bear in mind that in South Africa, and in Africa in general, land and people constitute sources of authority for traditional authorities (Thornton 2003, 138–43). In all these cases, the chieftaincy and the municipality competed for authority over the control of rural people and land.

Comaroff and Roberts (1985, 246) insist that we must seek to account for “the *total* logic of dispute process and for its systematic contextualization” (their emphasis), in order to understand dispute processes. This principle should be broadened so that the involvement of the provincial or national government in these disputes is not reduced to an anomaly. That is, their involvement should be treated as part of this total logic. Comaroff’s (1974; 1978) earlier account of government’s involvement portrayed it as an outside power that had the effect of fixing the political process of the chieftaincy thus making the outcome of such processes predictable. His approach focused on the jurisprudence dimension of succession disputes instead of local socio-political forces that draw these two “levels” of governments and the public into these disputes. Furthermore, Comaroff’s concern was primarily with demonstrating the neutralization of agency the *BaTswanas* has experienced and continue to experience as a result of colonial rule and later apartheid rule, which introduced the Homeland system. Therefore, the fixing of Tswana laws and customs to disallow the manipulation of royal genealogy reduced Tswanas, in particular royal

men, to following (and reacting to) the script written for them by the colonial and postcolonial authorities (Ortner 2001, 71–81). Comaroff (1974) argues that the fixing of Tswana law was a transformation of a neat relation between achievement and ascription, whereby ascription was elevated over and above achievement. Notwithstanding the effects of the Bantu Authorities Act on Tswana law and succession, each new case of a succession dispute shows that, on the contrary, the fixing of Tswana laws was not absolute. In addition, government has not been altogether successful in capturing the political horizon (*la politique*) of succession disputes (Lacau 1996).

Moreover, a legal case to challenge government's involvement and its undue influence in the succession disputes, presented the role of government, not as an outside force or an anomaly, but as an ill-advised role player that had failed to consult with the Royal House and to take into account the "proper facts" of the dispute by taking sides with other disputants. All sides of the conflict have tacitly welcomed the role of the government in resolving the succession dispute because they also want government recognition if they are to be chiefs. Significantly though, the role of government has become far more than fixing succession laws: it has become integral to the dispute process and its role is equally contestable, negotiable, and open for manipulation.

THE PHUDUHUCWANA DISPUTE

This following section is an outline of the succession dispute between Samuel Mankuroane and his nephew Tshepo Mankuroane. It begins by introducing *dramatis personae* of the dispute before giving a historical overview of how the succession dispute developed. Finally, following Appadurai's (2002) thesis about the capacity to aspire, I will postulate that the succession dispute was interwoven with the aspiration of the Batlhaping about their chieftaincy and local government.

Samuel Morwagaabuse Mankuroane, the main protagonist, became a regent of the Phuduhucwanas following the death of Chief Scotch Mankuroane, the father to Tshepo Mankuroane. However, Scotch's rule of the Phuduhucwana was gradually brought to an early end when Samuel

Mankuroane was invited by the Royal House to take over the daily administration of the chieftaincy. By the time of Chief Scotch's death, Samuel Mankuroane was effectively acting chief. Because Scotch's two sons, Goitsimodimo, the eldest, and his second son, Tshepo Mankuroane, were still too young to take over their father's position, Samuel Mankuroane was formally recognized by the Royal House as acting chief. However, it was a decision that embroiled the chieftaincy in a tussle with the Bophutatswana homeland government under the leadership of Chief Lucas Manyane Mangope. This tussle was finally resolved in 1988–89 when the Bophutatswana government accepted the decision of the Royal House.

Before June 2001, Chief Samuel Mankuroane ruled the Phuduhucwana without any hint, at least, from the local media (or social media, Firth1953) that his position as chief would be contested by one of his nephews. The government had shown support and willingness to work with Chief Samuel Mankuroane despite his legal standing as a regent chief. His association with liberation politics of South Africa, in particular against the Bophutatswana government of Chief Lucas Mangope, largely legitimized his position. However, towards the end of June it became public news that Tshepo Mankuroane, together with a faction of the Royal House had requested the North West provincial government, which replaced the government of Bophutatswana since 1994, to remove Samuel Mankuroane from office and recognize him, Tshepo Mankuroane, as chief of the Phuduhucwanas. Tshepo Mankuroane argued that he was now of the requisite age to become chief. Tshepo Mankuroane and his faction were influenced by the succession dispute of the Barolong Boo Ratshidi in Mafikeng, and, in particular, the conspicuous role of the provincial government. This observation itself is significant to understanding the role of government and the politics of its involvement.

In 2001 Tshepo Mankuroane and his supporters secured the government's support by successfully lobbying it to investigate the "genealogy and succession laws" of the Phuduhucwana. The North West provincial department of Traditional Affairs and Corporate Affairs proceeded by establishing a commission of inquiry, which was given the remit to settle the succession dispute between regent chief Samuel Morwagaabuse Mankuroane and Tshepo Frederick Mankuroane. The commission argued that to settle the succession dispute it was essential to determine who the "real heir" to the chiefship was. However, the report stated that the identity of

the “real heir” is not in “doubt” nor questioned by both sides of the Royal House (Thibedi 2002).

According to the commission’s report, what was being questioned was in actual fact the succession *process* itself. Instead of heeding this self-acknowledgment, the commission rather focused on affirming Tshepo Mankuroane as a “real heir” to the throne and, also, the law of succession in accordance with Tswana Law. As a result, the commission’s (Thibedi 2002) findings were that succession among the Batlhaping boo Phuduhucwana was based on a primogeniture system, which ruled that an eldest son of a chief will succeed to the throne. If not, due to ill health or premature death, the second eldest son shall succeed to the throne. Therefore, Goitsimodimo Mankuroane should succeed to the throne, but because of his illness, and poor mental health, he should not succeed to the throne. Instead of him, Tshepo Mankuroane, the second eldest son of Scotch Mankuroane should succeed to the throne as regent of the Phuduhucwana people and act on his behalf until his death. As a result, the commission recommended that Tshepo Mankuroane be appointed acting chief of the Batlhaping Boo Phuduhucwana. In other words, the commission recommended that a regent be removed from office only to be replaced by another regent.

This recommendation suggests that there are other factors at play than just a rendering of “facts” by government. After all, the aim of settling the dispute was to unite the people of Taung with the knowledge that the right person is chief and hopefully make the Batlhaping “a more prosperous tribe that the Batlhaping [boo Phuduhucwana] deserves to be” (Thibedi 2002, 2). The government could have retained Samuel Mankuroane as regent of the Phuduhucwana. Samuel Mankuroane became regent because of his skills and knowledge necessary to make the Phuduhucwana “a more prosperous tribe.” The commission conceded this fact, but why the commission found it fruitful for the Phuduhucwana to have another regent and remove a regent of the same government under the same leadership, put in office for only six years, remained a mystery. The resolution of this mystery sheds a great deal of light on the workings of chieftaincies in contemporary South Africa.

In order to understand the politics of succession dispute between Chief Samuel Mankuroane and Chief Tshepo Mankuroane, it is important that one should first start with an outline of events. It is from these

events that the role of all players can be understood. Oomen (2000, 71) emphasized local agency:

The framework provided by national law, the failure of alternative institutions and the insecurity at the policy level have only created a setting in which various local groups attempt to shape a traditional authority best suited for their interests.

The Phuduhucwana succession dispute provided various players in the dispute with a locus for shaping the chieftaincy and articulating their aspirations for the present and the future. That is, the succession dispute cannot be reduced to a legal framework. Moreover, local agency is a *habitus*, meaning: “The system of dispositions – a past which survive into the present and tends to perpetuate itself into the future by making itself present in practices structured according to its principles” (Bourdieu 1977, 82). It is about constituting a socio-political order, local economic development and the meaning of local government and an attempt to shape a chieftaincy in accordance with aspirations tied to these attempts (Oomen 1999). It is on these premises that people either supported Chief Samuel Mankuroane or Chief Tshepo Mankuroane, or perhaps shifted their support from Chief Samuel Mankuroane to Chief Tshepo Mankuroane.

CHIEF SAMUEL MANKUROANE'S *LOCUS STANDI* AS CHIEF OF THE PHUDUHUCWANA

Samuel Mankuroane was first recognized as chief of the Phuduhucwana in 1987. In 2002, the North-West government finally terminated Samuel Mankuroane's term of office. Samuel Mankuroane's reign as chief of the Phuduhucwana seems to have encountered a series of political oppositions from governments and factions within the “Royal House” and members of the public. Because the succession dispute is a political process that involves the public gaining access to the “tribal office,” any succession dispute is a competition for power, which can never be possible without the participation of the public (Swartz 1968, 227). Their role in this process will be highlighted.

The succession of Kgosikeeche Scotch Mankuroane – father to Tshepo and Goitsimodimo Mankuroane was embroiled in a controversy that would resurface with the succession dispute of his son Tshepo Mankuroane. After the death of Thapama Rabodigelo in 1962, who was also a regent, instead of appointing Scotch Mankuroane to become a chief, Heavyfight Sematle Molale was appointed acting chief of the Phuduhucwana. Scotch Mankuroane was known to be an alcoholic, something that was of great concern to the royal members. As a result, his succession to office was delayed by the appointment of Heavyfight Molale who was recalled from the mines (Thibedi 2002). Heavyfight Molale handed over the chieftaincy to the chiefship of Scotch Mankuroane on 10 August 1966. Furthermore, even though Scotch Mankuroane was appointed and was recognized officially as chief, not regent, by the time of his death, he was no longer running the affairs and administration of the chieftaincy.

Years before the death of Scotch Mankuroane, the affairs of the chieftaincy were run by Samuel Morwagaabuse Mankuroane (Samuel Mankuroane), the third son of Rakuna Andries Mankuroane, Scotch Mankuroane's paternal cousin from a junior house within the Royal House (Thibedi 2002). All sides of the conflict do not dispute his role during this time. What is contested, however, is what his role constituted or meant. Did it mean that Samuel Mankuroane would now become a chief or a regent once Scotch died? These two positions are influenced by one's reading of Scotch's relationship with the woman who became his common law wife. Samuel Mankuroane was called to assist Scotch because of his educational qualification and administrative skills. Among many people, this calling has translated into a topic of much heated debate. Samuel Mankuroane's supporters claim that that calling was to make him a regent or a chief. Mr. Morake, a close ally of Samuel Mankuroane, who led a breakaway faction to establish a pro-Samuel Mankuroane *kgotla* as a protest against their sub-chief Samuel Saku's support for Tshepo Mankuroane's appointment as a chief of Phuduhucwana, stated that Samuel Mankuroane was introduced by Scotch as their future chief and never as a regent as government claims. Mr. Molale said that "Scotch called him to the tribal authority and told everybody that 'he shall be your chief'" without conditions that when one of his sons matures he will have to hand over to him (interview: June 27, 2002). Others (notably Mr. Solomon Morake, nephew to Samuel Saku, one of the leading supporters of Tshepo) argued

that Samuel Mankuroane was appointed as regent and that his position would be terminated by the decision of the Royal House. At the time of this research, there were at least two royal houses, one for Samuel Mankuroane and one for Tshepo Mankuroane.

A faction who opposed Samuel Mankuroane argued that, from the very beginning, Samuel Mankuroane was called to be only an assistant to Scotch. However, this did not mean that he was chosen to be a regent after Scotch's death. The other interpretation is that Samuel Mankuroane was called to act as a regent and it is Samuel Mankuroane himself who appointed himself as chief. Mr Van Rooyen, a spokesperson to Tshepo said:

They all deny making him chief by giving him the leopard skin, because they are afraid that people will ask them why did you make him wear the leopard skin even though the certificate says 'regent.' (interview: 11 June 2002)

On 9 February 1987, eight months before the death of Scotch Mankuroane, the Bantustan government of Bophutatswana recognized Samuel Mankuroane with effect as acting chief of the Phuduhucwana (Thibedi 2002, 15). His appointment was not without a struggle. The government of Bophutatswana under the leadership of President Lucas Mangope refused to grant recognition to Samuel Mankuroane on the grounds that it was against Tswana customs and law to do so (Thibedi 2002, 7). But after a few persistent protests, the Bophutatswana government relented and issued a certificate of recognition on 22 January 1988 (Thibedi 2002).

Opposition to Samuel Mankuroane's appointment did not only come from government. Some members of the Royal House were also against his appointment. Rumours began to circulate that some people and the Bantustan government of Bophutatswana were actually planning to assassinate him. As a result, he exiled himself to Johannesburg. This happened shortly after the death of Scotch in August 1987. He was only forty-nine years old and ruled for twenty-four years. In the absence of Samuel Mankuroane, the Bophutatswana government appointed Modisakoma Steven Molale as acting chief, and, subsequent to the 1988 commission of inquiry, the government appointed Kgotlaethata Mankuroane as a regent in 1989 (Thibedi 2002, 7–8).

Succession is not just a legal field; it is also a “contested political principal” (Moore 2001, 109). The political field under which the succession dispute takes place had an influence on the political process. In the period 1987–88, the succession dispute took the form of resistance against the state, that is, the government of Bophutatswana. Some of my informants told me that they supported Samuel Mankuroane because he was not going to “sell them” to the Bophutatswana government, that in fact he would “protect” them against it (interviews: 9 and 13 June 2002). This support continued even when he was in Johannesburg.

People in Manokwane recounted to me how they contributed financially to his accommodation in Johannesburg (interviews: 21–22 June 2002). They still recognized him as their chief, even though the government had given them another chief. Instrumental in the mobilization of support for Samuel Mankuroane and the collection of financial contributions was the sub-chief of Manokwane, Francis Baisitse. Francis Baisitse was known as an ANC activist and also a former supporter of the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) under the leadership of Rocky Malebana Metsing, a party that together with some factions of the Bophutatswana military attempted to overthrow the government in 1988. Sub-chief Baisitse is actually credited with introducing the ANC in Manokwane. Because of such people, support for Samuel Mankuroane did not wane.

In 1994, Bophutatswana, the last remaining Bantustan, ceased to exist. The Taung districts fell under the newly created provincial administration of North-West. For the people of Taung, particularly the Phuduhucwanas, the end of Bophutatswana meant the return of Samuel Mankuroane to take his rightful place in Phuduhucwana. The year 1994 was also the year in which people celebrated the achievement of resistance and the heroes of resistance were also honoured. Considering the *mêlée* under which Samuel Mankuroane left Taung, it was not surprising that he too was to be honoured for his role in the resistance.

If traditions, that is, chieftaincies, were to be accommodated in post-apartheid South Africa, a rationale for such an accommodation had to be found. Locally it was in the person of Samuel Mankuroane that such a rationale was found. In fact, chiefs could have been ignored or excluded, were it not for the instrumental role that the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) played in the 1980s and 1990s in drawing the ANC politically into a political alliance with traditional

authorities (Oomen and Van Kessel, 1997). Chief Samuel Mankuroane was an honourable chief who had made selfless sacrifices in promoting and defending the rights of the Phuduhucwanas and also protecting the integrity of their cherished traditional institution.

It is not surprising, then, that on 16 November 1994, the nascent provincial government of North-West celebrated “resistance” to apartheid by re-appointing Samuel Mankuroane as acting chief of Phuduhucwana. The re-appointment of Samuel Mankuroane was not just a celebration; it was also a “restoration” of the chieftaincy to its rightful place in South Africa. In order to “restore” the chieftaincy, the government obliged itself to redefine the chieftaincy after the colonial and Bantustan government had distorted it so that it could occupy its rightful place in a democratic South African government (Mokgoro 1994, 5).

It is this rightful place of the chieftaincy that would prove problematic not just for the provincial government but also for the national government. The appointment of Samuel Mankuroane as acting chief was also an attempt, by government, to redefine the chieftaincy. It was not resurgence or a revival of traditional authorities; it was rather a “renewed salience” which formed part of “the epic transition from apartheid to democracy” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997) that romanticized the chieftaincy as a heritage and a symbol of African democracy. But the restoration of the chieftaincy would be far from simple because the ANC, like the National Party government in 1950 (Oomen and Van Kessel 1997), would embark on a profound restructuring of rural societies. The ANC government was to reshape local government in rural areas, bearing in mind that the Rural Development Framework (Department of Land Affairs, 1997), argued that there has never been a local government in rural areas and that the ANC envisaged a ceremonial role for traditional authorities.

Samuel Mankuroane’s recognition as acting chief coincided with the changing shape of local government and local politics. It is within the political horizon of local government that the chieftaincy became a contested terrain of meanings, aspirations, and expectations, which compounded on the role, status, and powers of the chieftaincy. Various people at national, provincial, and local levels sought to deploy the chieftaincy to achieve their own political objectives cast in terms of their own repertoire of meanings and expectations by defining its role, status, and powers.

Central to these meanings, aspirations, and expectations is a discourse of *rural development*. In 2000, during the municipal demarcation process, Samuel Mankuroane voiced his concerns about the status of chiefs within the demarcation process and rejected the inclusion of chieftaincies under municipal structures. Lack of clarity concerning the role of chieftaincies in local government meant that the relationship between the TLC, later municipality, provincial government, and the Phuduhucwana chieftaincy continued to sour. By 2002, Samuel Mankuroane had acquired a reputation for being anti-development, and against the TLC and later the municipality. Ward Nine Councillor Koikoi said that:

The problem is, from the very beginning, Samuel Mankuroane did not want the municipality. There was no progress without any development. (Interview: 8 June 2002)

On 6 June 2001, six years after Samuel Mankuroane was appointed acting chief by Premier Popo Molefe, a faction from the Royal House requested the provincial government to terminate Samuel Mankuroane's status as acting chief of the Phuduhucwana on the grounds that Scotch's two sons were now old enough to take over the chieftaincy. On 27 March 2002, Samuel Mankuroane's acting capacity as chief was terminated and Tshepo Mankuroane became acting chief. The day after Tshepo's recognition, Samuel Mankuroane convened a press conference and he made it clear that he was still acting chief and that the Royal House and the people had not yet removed him from office. He said that the government is meddling in the affairs of the Barolong Boo Ratshidi and the Phuduhucwana because they want to control them (interview: 12 April 2002). As a result of Samuel Mankuroane's refusal to vacate the office and hand over the keys, stamp, and tribal letterheads, Tshepo requested an interdict from the Supreme Court to force him to comply with the decision of the provincial government.

On 14 April 2002, the succession dispute gained another dimension when Monty Mahumapelo, a chief's secretary, was stabbed to death. The stabbing was the result of an argument he had at the bar. The following day, Samuel Mankuroane's faction spread rumours claiming that the argument was about the succession dispute and the killer was one of Tshepo's supporters. These rumours constituted an important social

discourse strategically deployed to discredit Tshepo Mankuroane's position and credentials to become a chief (Bhabha 2004, 286). The killer was arrested and the police reported that the argument had nothing to do with the succession dispute but was instead a fight over money or beer. However, the arrest and police report did not do much to change some of my informants' perception about the killing of Monty Mahumapelo as they were now convinced that the police were no longer impartial and were being used by the government.

On 30 March 2002, Samuel Mankuroane once again refused to comply with the instruction "to vacate the Tribal Office and to hand over the keys of the Tribal Office to Mr K Nomnga on or before the 1st day of May 2002" (Office of the Premier 2002). As a result, on 14 June 2002, Samuel Mankuroane was arrested and released on bail after spending a night in Pudimong jail, where he allegedly shared a cell with Monty Mahumapelo's killer. The arrest was probably not expected by many people, including some of my informants who are close to Samuel Mankuroane. The effect of the arrest was to render the Phuduhucwana authority non-functional for the whole week. People seeking assistance returned at the locked gates or were returned and sent to Regional Director Mr. K. Nomnga for assistance. People in the office could not help because the stamp crucial for the running of the chieftaincy and issuing permissions to ordinary people to receive services such as social grants was not available. Keys to the cupboards were also still in the possession of Samuel Mankuroane. Furthermore, Tshepo gained entry to the offices after "breaking and entering" and in this act he was duly "assisted" by the police.

The police came with Tshepo and they found us at the tribal office. Tshepo together with his mates started to break office doors. We told the police that it is you who are breaking into the offices. They replied, "no it is Tshepo in his capacity as chief." (interview: Headman Solomon Morake, 26 June 2002)

Moreover, the recognition of Tshepo as acting chief was rather an unceremonious affair lacking any form of public affirmation, reduced to bureaucratic paperwork, and enmeshed in a dispute, which was just gaining momentum. Furthermore, the decision to appoint him was made at the provincial branch offices of the Department of Public Works (government)

buildings that are considered to be “away from the community, not in the house of the *morafe*” (interview: Solomon Morake, 26 June 2002). For Samuel Mankuroane’s supporters, this is an irrefutable proof that the government had taken sides. They also question the motive of government to put in office a person not well known in the community. For example, the security guard at the “tribal office” did not know Tshepo. Even though my host’s (Bushie Mankuroane’s) house is not far from Tshepo’s home, they, and their children, had a vague memory of Tshepo and they could not even tell me how he looked except that he is young (interview: June 13, 2006). This was because, Tshepo spent most of his time outside Taung and in Mafikeng doing his legal studies or elsewhere with his mother’s relatives.

Samuel Mankuroane’s removal from office was accelerated by a number of political developments in Taung. The first one, as already mentioned, was the sour relationship that developed between him and the municipal administration of Taung. Secondly, a perception was shared by councillors and other members of the public that he was against the municipal government and therefore anti-development. Lastly, there is no doubt that Samuel Mankuroane’s support base was also dwindling. The cause of this was people’s concern that they have not seen any development since he took over. Tshepo’s spokesperson stated that Samuel Mankuroane was not progressive in terms of developing the people. Looking at the dilapidated state of the building, he further pointed out “they have been like this since we were born” (interview: Mr. Van Rooyen, 18 June 2002).

Because the succession dispute is a political contest, it allowed for all these factors or grievances against Samuel Mankuroane to be voiced in order to have an effect on the outcome of the process. Some ward councillors, soon after Tshepo’s request to become acting chief was made public, came out and expressed their desire to have a new chief because they believed Samuel Mankuroane was against them and, as a result, they were unable to carry out their duties. Another councillor told me that they supported Tshepo because he is young and interested in development; that is, he is co-operating with the Taung municipality. For example, Mrs. Koikoi said that Samuel Mankuroane’s refusal to co-operate with the municipality and wards disabled her from organizing an election for ward committee members. She has not been to *kgotla* to be introduced to the *morafe* as their councillor (interview: 8 June 2002). Councillors eager to see Samuel

Mankuroane replaced were crucial for gathering support for Tshepo and influencing the commission's decision.

A number of people who had previously supported Samuel Mankuroane said that, after six years without "development," they had decided that perhaps it was time for a change. They had ceased to support him for the reason that Samuel Mankuroane has failed to fulfil their aspiration and has also failed to allow for development: "there is no civilisation [development] in Manokwane" these words were said by a woman who lives in a two-roomed house and makes a living by selling home-made beer in the village of Manokwane, not very far from the chief's court (interview: Mmathata Diphetogo, 22 June 2002). A laid-off migrant worker who resided in Modimong also expressed a similar position:

Many people have said that our chieftaincy is the chieftaincy of *bogwera* [traditional male initiation ceremony] and that we are not concerned with development. When I look at things carefully, I realise too that it is true. We are not progressing. (interview: Kgosiekae Mothusi, 2 July 2002)

Another male interviewee from Manokwane said "it is *bogwera* that led to his removal from office" (interview: 16 June 2002). Samuel Mankuroane's chiefship in Taung had become synonymous with *bogwera*. As a result of his active involvement promoting *bogwera*, it is alleged that he has commercialized it for his own personal benefit. As a result of these allegations, the regional director, Mr. Nomnga ordered a financial audit to investigate these allegations. Considering the timing of the financial audit, it is difficult not to see the link between the report and the succession dispute. From both sides, there were allegations aimed at discrediting the other person's suitability to become a chief.

From these opinions, expressed by three different and unrelated persons, the important thing about the succession dispute was not the *facts* of the case but the demonstrated ability of Samuel Mankuroane to lead them towards development or to bring about the development of their villages. The *fact* that mattered to them was that, since Samuel Mankuroane took office, their chieftaincy has become synonymous with commercially viable traditions and lack of development – "our chieftaincy is the chieftaincy of *bogwera*."

There is a shared hope that Tshepo, as a young person with a law degree from the University of North-West, Mafikeng, would be able to lead them towards development. Furthermore, Tshepo's genealogical records were never mentioned as a precondition for their support. A member of the Royal House, Mr. Samuel Saku said:

The chieftaincy is not a property. *Even if a house is senior*, if the chief is not working properly, we as children of Molehabangwe [Royal House] we have the plans to remove him, because the chieftaincy is not his and it is not his property. (interview: 11 July 2002)

Saku's comments were revealing because of his family connections and vast political support. Saku was once known for his loyal support for Samuel Mankuroane. Because of Saku's persuasion, Mr. Morake claims that from 1994 he was chosen by the people to help at the "tribal authority." The chief had withdrawn from office because there were certain sub-chiefs who were against him. This chief was Samuel Mankuroane and Mr. Saku was fully supportive of him. Saku's sudden change of loyalty surprised Samuel Mankuroane and Solomon Morake. It suffices to say that Saku was no longer in agreement with Samuel Mankuroane. Saku believes that Samuel Mankuroane made "the chieftaincy his property" and commercialized the chieftaincy and its initiation traditions for his own personal benefit. Therefore, it became necessary for the Royal House to reclaim the chieftaincy and remove Samuel Mankuroane from office.

In all of these interviews, the genealogical record of Tshepo or Samuel Mankuroane was not once put forward as an explanation of their shift of loyalty. Tshepo's genealogy only served their purpose, that is, their plan to remove Samuel Mankuroane from office. The genealogical record served only as a mechanism for the removal of Samuel Mankuroane from office. The genealogy was not a reason for his removal. Such reasoning lies elsewhere. Howe (1978, 549) argues that the support for the Central American Cuna chief "derives from a complex of factors" such as "his conduct in and out of office, and his past success or failures as a leader." It is these factors that play a role in any succession dispute. Succession disputes should be regarded as an evaluation of a chief's performance in and out of office, instead of a simple recognition of one's genealogical seniority or junior; or

the transformation of one genealogical status. Among the Tswana, such a transformation of a chief's genealogical status allows for his removal from office, but it is not the *sine qua non* for his removal.

Appadurai (2002, 6) argues that the voice of the poor, which he regards as a cultural capacity to produce aspirations for the future and for transformation of conditions of poverty, has to take local cultural forms in order to have meaning and to capture the public space of debate. However, due to inadequate resources available to the poor, they have a fragile horizon of aspirations. The chieftaincy, as a resource, is equally available to the poor as it is to the rich. As a result, their horizon of aspirations is not necessarily fragile, because resources like chieftaincies seem to give it content or a conceptual apparatus (see Ferguson 1990). It is avenues like succession disputes that provided the Phuduhucwanas with a locus to exercise their agency and articulate their aspirations about the future of their chieftaincy, municipality, and society. As a result, a chief is essential in this process and "the recruitment of talented office holders is held to be a basic requirement for the achievement of the indigenous ideal of good government" (Comaroff 1978, 3). It appears that, because of the perception that Samuel Mankuroane opposed the municipalization of Taung, he was regarded as anti-developmental. In the words of one of my informants, Mr. Kgosiekae, he was concerned only with "traditions" (i.e., revenue-generating male initiation ceremonies) and fell short of the requirements to be a chief. Considering that the Phuduhucwana supported Samuel Mankuroane because he is talented and educated, there is also a perception that he failed them.

CONCLUSION

The commission used writings of early Tswana anthropologists like Isaac Schapera and P.L. Breutz to support its decision to have Samuel Mankuroane removed. In fact, the commission cited these authors to lend academic support to its conclusion. Schapera's works among the Tswanas are well known and have been of great influence on the colonial government and the Republic of Botswana. His most important publication on Tswana law was *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Customs* (Schapera 1938). The

book has been essential for administrators and the Tswana themselves. It went a long way in informing their understanding of Tswana law to such an extent that “the book can also be found in many offices attached to many Tswana *kgotlas*” (Roberts 1985, 83). It is also found in the offices of commissioners given the task of implementing Tswana law at a time when it was being violated.

Schapera’s (1938, 37) approach was to put Tswana law on a par with western law “for the Tswana, like ourselves, have attained to a stage of legal development where certain rules of conduct can, in the last resort, be enforced by the material power of compulsion vested in the tribal courts.” Not only was Tswana law on a par with the West, it was almost identical to it since Tswana law was clearly codified and expressed in judicial action and court decisions. Moreover, Tswana law was distinct from Tswana customs. To make this distinction, Tswana courts were relied upon to make the necessary judicial definition defining the status of rules, observations, and customary practices as laws. Because the source of Tswana law was customary usages and observances of the people, the Tswana sometimes relied upon their courts to make certain customary practices and observation obligatory, that is, legal (Schapera 1938, 35). Furthermore, Schapera’s argument is that Tswana law followed a fixed pattern, making an outcome in almost any settlement of disputes predictable. This fixed logic applied also to succession to the throne, which was also predetermined by Tswana law. In this case, an heir to the office is always an eldest son of a chief by right of birth; a senior will automatically take office once his father dies.

Seniority is paramount in determining the next chief, a point emphasized by all informants in all succession disputes, including the Phuduhucwana. As a result, Schapera (1938) conceives of a “real heir” who might not become a chief because of “trickery and corruption” or he might have difficulty succeeding to his father’s position. This argument treats succession disputes as an anomaly, a violation of Tswana law concerning succession. However, Schapera does concede that there have been succession disputes among the Tswana. Instead of treating these succession disputes not as an anomaly, Schapera locates the source of these disputes in customary practice of *seantlo*, a Tswana levirate system that seeks to provide a childless chief who passed away with an heir.

Schapera’s treatment of Tswana law conceals quite a bit more about Tswana law than it actually reveals (Roberts 1985, 85). First, disputes

about succession to office are not an anomaly. It is an intrinsic feature of how Tswanas articulate their aspirations and desires about their lived-in world. In order to have their aspirations realized, the Tswana seek to have in office a candidate they think would best realize those aspirations. For this reason, succession disputes aim to put in office a candidate who is seen, by one faction, as a legitimate heir to the office. Of course, another faction will dispute the legitimacy of heirs introduced by another and introduce their own heir as most legitimate. This allows for competition for office, and it is through this competition that the person with the most support and good credentials becomes a chief (Comaroff 1978). Comaroff and Roberts (1985, 79) argue that *mekgwa le melao* of Setswana are neither fixed nor unchanging but “involved in a constant process of formation and transformation.” It is this “constant process of formation and transformation” that allows the Tswana to have a dialogue with the central government and themselves about their political institution. Their political institutions provide them with a venue to exercise their agency, and, through their agency, they are able to effect transformation of their political institutions. The legitimacy of the institution rests not only on its intended aims, such as to preserve the “traditions,” “customs” and “customary law”; it rests also on its ability to provide a locus for the articulation of various and conflicting interests or aspirations. The “traditions,” “customs,” “customary law,” or “identity” of the people is not a given. The chieftaincy allows for the “traditions,” “law,” “identity,” and a person’s *locus standi* to be transformed, including its role in local government. In South Africa’s remote areas where the presence of the state is removed from the realities of daily life, it is here, as John and Jean Comaroff (1997) argue, that experimentation with local government and development becomes possible. The succession dispute was one such avenue where the status of Tswana law, the role and status of chieftaincies, and what people and government expect from a chief, were articulated and negotiated.

The transformation of Samuel Mankuroane’s *locus standi* and the chieftaincy was one effect of this. The outcome was not an intended outcome of the “dominant group” traditional leaders or government. It was rather the unintended consequences of agencies seeking to define the role, status, and powers of the chieftaincy within a political horizon provided by competing concepts of a local government, the chiefship, and the state.

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