The Medicine Murder Panic: Colonial Weakness and the Emergence of Nationalism in Basutoland, 1945-60

Submitted by Joseph Macdonald, in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

Abstract

This thesis focuses on the effects of the 'medicine murder panic' in colonial Basutoland from 1945 to 1960, particularly the event's influence on the early Basotho nationalist movement. Portrayals of the rise in 'medicine murders' during the 1940s as a threat to the moral fabric and personal safety by commentators, particularly those within the press and the Christian missions, helped create a panic that shaped how the state responded to the crime. Britain failed to tackle the underlying issues that were causing the epidemic and its racially tinged response undermined its position with much of the nation. The escalation of the panic and poorly managed response revealed fragilities within Basutoland's governance and damaged Britain's authority in the territory. Making use of this moment of disruption, anti-colonial groups, first Lekhotla La Bafo and then the Basutoland African Congress, politicised the killings and linked the panic to wider dissatisfactions with colonial rule. As a result, nationalists increased their support and influence in society, leveraging that to put pressure on Britain for a negotiated withdrawal from Basutoland, with Britain ceding significant powers after 1960. While there has been detailed research exploring the murder and panic, particularly by Colin Murray and Peter Sanders, the medicine murder panic is often inaccurately portrayed as being an event unto itself, separated from the other political changes within the protectorate. This thesis contributes to the wider historiography of colonial panics by demonstrating how the previously assumed apolitical occurrence had a significant political impact. It offers a deep reading of the medicine murder panic in a context of emerging nationalism to reveal how a panic could widen cracks in a colonial state and stimulate a particularly nationalist form of opposition.

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Acknowledgements

They say the PhD is a long and lonely process. They are not kidding! I have been lucky though to have the support of a few individuals and institutions that has made this thesis possible.

I would like to firstly express my thanks for the financial support I have received from the London Arts Humanities Partnership (LAHP) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). This work was supported by an AHRC London Arts & Humanities Partnership Research Studentship, without it I could not have afforded undertake this research.

There is no way I would have finished this thesis without the encouragement, constructive criticism and suggestions of Reuben Loffman, my supervisor, whose warm patience and support were invaluable for completion. His mentorship over the past three and a half years have not only sharpened my academic mind but provided me the level of self-belief that has made me the man I am today.

I also would like to thank Kim Wagner, my secondary supervisor, who helped refocus the thesis's intervention and provide constructive criticism.

Next, I want to thank my family, particularly my mother Ruth and father Allan. I owe my love of education to both my parents, who instilled in me from an early age a curious mind and desire to see how the world worked. Both my mum and dad have provided me endless support and encouragement, as well as acting as occasional proof-readers when needed, and I owe them everything – for this thesis and so much more.

I would lastly like to thank my loving, if at times frustrated with my late hours and mini breakdowns, partner, Tiff. Without her love and support this thesis would have been a lot lonelier and more unpleasant.

Abbreviations

BAC - Basutoland African Congress

BCP – Basutoland Congress Party

BMP – Basutoland Mounted Police

BNC – Basutoland National Council

BNP – Basutoland National Party

BPA – Basutoland Progressive Association

LLB – Lekhotla La Bafo

HCT – High Commission Territory

MFP – Marematlou Freedom Party

PEMS – Paris Evangelical Mission Society

Introduction

The Kingdom of Lesotho, known during the colonial period as Basutoland, is a rare example of an enclave state, being fully enclosed by its domineering larger neighbour South Africa. Consisting of 30,344 square kilometres (km) of territory, it is the most mountainous nation in Africa, with four-fifths of its land considered "steep mountainous terrain."[1] While only around one-quarter of the population lives in the more mountainous region, true both today and throughout the late colonial period, it is the mountains that define the geography of the kingdom acting as a physical barrier between them and the rest of the continent.[2] The nation has certainly earned its epithet 'the mountain kingdom,' with all Basotho, the people of Lesotho, living over 1,400 metres (m) high and with the majority living above 1,800m.[3] In comparison the tallest point in the United Kingdom, Ben Nevis, is a comparatively mere 1,344m.[4] For the presence of these mountains alone, Lesotho is a nation relatively unique within Africa.

Geography though is not the only aspect of the Basotho kingdom that makes it notable, as it is a nation with a rich and dynamic modern history. This thesis focuses on one event within said history, the medicine murder panic, a violent epidemic that gripped the nation and stunned the imperial administration during the dying embers of colonial rule. This occurrence, sparked by an increase in the number of 'medicine murders' but defined by moralising representations and an ineffective government response, provides a unique insight into the impact of a 'moral panic' on a nation's political development.[5] While the narrative on why the murders occurred and why a panic emerged is already well established, I aim for the first time to specifically focus on the political impact of this event and transform the way in which we understand how colonial panics were perceived and politicised.[6]

There is often an assumption within the literature that whilst colonial panics affect and traumatise those within the societies they occur in, in particular white settlers and administrators, they do not have significant political legacies.[7] Too often it appears that these panics, which consumed a great deal of attention for regimes, had little impact beyond the event.[8] The case of Basutoland

[1] Halpern, J., *South Africa's Hostages: Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland*, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), 181.
[2] Makbanya, E., *The Plight of the Rural Population in Lesotho – A Case Study*, (Roma: The National University of Lesotho, 1976), 6 & Ibid.
[3] Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages*, 65.
[4] 'Great Britain's tallest mountain is taller,' *Ordnance Survey Press Office*, https://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/newsroom/blog/britains-tallest-mountain-is-taller, (accessed 10/01/2023).
[5] Murray, C., & Sanders, P., *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho: The Anatomy of a Moral Crisis*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 1-5.
[6] Ibid, 293.
[7] Jackson, W., 'The Settler's Demise: Decolonisation and Mental Breakdown in 1950s Kenya,' in Fischer-Tiné, H. (ed.), *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, (Zurich: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 73-74.
[8] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 60 & Pratten, D., *Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 238.

demonstrates however that these panics had the potential to influence and shape the political development of those same societies. When the specific historical factors that gave rise to and influenced the productions of the early Basotho nationalist movement are considered, it is clear the experience of the panic deeply affected it. In particular, the failed response to stop the killings launched by the colonial state damaged colonial authority and helped create the conditions for nationalism to grow in popularity and strength.

It is here this thesis makes its first major intervention into the broader understanding of colonial panic, by examining an instance where a colonial murder panic disrupted the governing authority and deeply impacted that nation's politics. Why the killings in Basutoland became a national panic that absorbed so much of the government's attention most likely had something to do with the duration of the medicine murders, the significant number of them and their politicisation by the nationalist movement.[9] However, the alarm over this seemingly uncontrollable murder spree also became influential as it was shaped by the weaknesses present within the Basutoland state.[10] Unlike previous studies of colonial panic, this thesis will make the argument that colonial panics could have had a far more disruptive effect than previously assumed, reflective of existing weaknesses within the governance of the territory. A re-evaluation of the medicine murder panic will therefore broaden how we perceive the intense impact of colonial panic, yet this is not its only contribution.

The second intervention this thesis aims to make, specifically into the historiography of Basotho nationalism, is to transform how we understand the course of Lesotho's independence and reinsert the medicine murder panic into the broader narrative of the nationalist movement. Studies of the medicine murders commonly argue that the panic did not have such a major impact and did little to affect Basutoland's political development.[11] This existing view ignores the use of medicine murder within the rhetoric of the early nationalist government and the extent to which it intersected with other arguments on the failings of British rule. Similarly, the history of Basotho nationalism has often been told from the lens of a conflict between the two main nationalist parties: the progressive Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) and the more conservative Basutoland National Party (BNP).[12] This reading of Basotho history neglects the wider context of the panic that occurred concurrently with the growing power of the Basotho opposition movement. This thesis will therefore challenge the existing paradigm to argue that the context of the medicine murder panic was vital for the early nationalist movement's development from 1945 to 1960.

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[9] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 60.
[10] Thabane., M., 'Aspects of Colonial Economy and Society, 1868-1966,' in eds. Pule, N., W. & Thabane, T., *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (Morija, University of Lesotho, 2002), 103.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Weisfelder, R., F., *Political Contention in Lesotho, 1952-1965*, (Roma: Institute of Southern African Studies, 2002).

Before exploring these themes in detail, we first set the scene with an individual murder. The local dynamics within individual murders were a major factor in the resulting panic and it is therefore important to establish what the dynamics within them were. On a hot spring evening, on 20 May 1956, the sun was starting to set in the sleepy hamlet known only as "Mpiti's Village."[13] It was, on the surface, an idyllic scene with the distinctive round Basotho homes known as rondavels, the expanse of green mountains and smallholdings creating a sense of rural tranquillity. The village is located in the Mantsonyana area of the Maseru District and is in one of the poorer regions of Basutoland. Travel to some of the most remote villages, such as Mpiti's Village, in Mantsonyana is especially difficult to reach by ground transport, notably so in a country where all ground travel around the mountainous central region is not easy. Travel to some of the more remote villages including Mpiti'scan take hours in a vehicle, an uncommon mode of transport in rural Basutoland in the 1950s, and even longer by foot or horseback. It was an area therefore that was relatively untouched by 20th century modernity and even the rest of the kingdom; defined by both its remoteness and its local beauty.

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Fig 1: A typical view from Mantsonyana.[14]

[13] Account of man entering village in Maseru with severe injuries and dying soon after,' (06/06/1956), FCO 141/625, *TNA*.
[14] 'Mantšonyane Health Services Area,' https://hospital.tacosa.org/mantsonyane.html, (accessed 07/03/2023).

Archbishop Desmond Tutu shared this interpretation of the region during the 1970s, in his travels across the Basotho kingdom as the Anglican Bishop of Lesotho.[15] One journey through the immediate area surrounding the village was recorded in Tutu's diary, kept by his aide David Bruno;

> We leave Bishop's House in a blue Toyota truck, plus canopy, at 8.15. A fabulous day... super skies, fresh clear air and wonderful, clear views. We leave the tar after only a short way and thereafter are on dirt, mountainous roads. Over Blue Mountain Pass, which is a 8,900 ft, and on over the range after range, getting more and more remote. Little thatched rondavels [round homes], people ploughing on precarious slopes and a few blanketed folk. But otherwise almost deserted country. Green mountain slopes, small rushing streams, and much rock strewn across the bumpy road."[16]

The view of Mantsonyana as being quiet, remote, underpopulated, and picturesque is, therefore, no misconception but hiding behind this natural beauty, described by Tutu's aide, hid a tragic event nearly fifteen years prior when this peaceful scene was disturbed by a moment of horrific violence.

In the setting sun on that May 1956 night villagers viewed the silhouette of a figure approaching their homes.[17] The figure's name was Mputana Lekholele, a Mosuto male, although it would take an investigation to establish his identity as Mputana fell over when reaching the village and never woke up again.[18] The reason for his collapse was the extensive wounds he had received with large pieces of flesh missing from various parts of his body. Mputana's right cheek was mostly missing and his teeth and intact tongue "could be seen."[19] His lower jaw was only partially attached, held together "loosely… by fibrous tissue."[20] A wound extended deeply between his larynx and right salivary gland, with the tissues deep in the opening "blackened and putrefied."[21] Large amounts of his teeth had seemingly been ripped out, many of the remaining chipped and broken, and the top of his chin had been removed.[22] Whatever instrument used to enact this damage had also bisected his lower lip, cut off multiple fingers including the right index, and taken "significant portions" of flesh from his chest and left large gashes all over his arms and legs.[23]

Considering the severity of his injuries, it was amazing Mputana had survived as long as he had. To make the long trek and climb to a populated area in such a remote region must have taken a

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[15] Allen, J., *Rabble-Rouser for Peace: The Authorised Biography of Desmond Tutu,* (Simon and Schuster: Reading, 2006), 160-162.
[16] Ibid.
[17] 'Account of man entering village in Maseru with severe injuries and dying soon after,' (06/06/1956), FCO 141/625, *TNA.*
[18] 'Post-mortem of Mputana Lekholele,' (06/06/1956), FCO 141/625, *TNA.*
[19] 'Account of man entering village in Maseru with severe injuries and dying soon after,' (06/06/1956), FCO 141/625, *TNA.*
[20] Ibid.
[21] 'Post-mortem of Mputana Lekholele,' (06/06/1956), FCO 141/625, *TNA.*
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid.

herculean effort; alas, it would not be enough to save him. The residents of Mpiti's village, likely shocked and concerned at the sight of the mutilated man, were able to get him to the St. James Mission Hospital where Mputana would live for four more days before finally succumbing to his injuries on 24 May.[24] The post mortem report noted the cause of death to be a "toxic reaction" as a result of an infection in his neck wound and noted that "a sharp instrument" was to blame for the damage.[25] As soon as Mputana arrived at the hospital, the authorities had been informed. Early reports from the police who viewed the body immediately suspected that murder was the cause of his death.[26] Consequently, the Maseru police launched an investigation to establish which individual, or the group of individuals, were responsible.

The police quickly decided that Mputana was the victim of a 'medicine murder,' an experience which few, if any survived. Medicine murder is often associated with the Sesotho word *liretlo* (pronounced *direlto*). The term denotes the removal of strips of flesh or particular organs from a still living victim, usually a commoner who had certain traits the killer wished to imbue. The extracted flesh is placed in a 'medicine horn' and used to make protective medicines known as *lenaka*.[27] Most commonly, the perpetrators were chiefs who wanted to satisfy a personal political ambition or were feeling insecure in their position and wanted the *lenaka* to strengthen them.[28] These killings had existed in some form in Basutoland since the 19th century but the number of them had increased rapidly after the end of the Second World War, it is understandable then that investigators immediately assumed this killing in Mantsonyana was another instance of the phenomenon. The pattern of wounds on Mputana's body being consistent with a knife, the removal of parts of his flesh and his status as a commoner seemed to be consistent with this being a *liretlo* murder, albeit one where the killers had seemingly failed to finish the job.

The police began by interviewing the members of Mpiti's village who had brought Mputana to St James Mission Hospital and from this, they were able to compare the given description with reports of a missing man in Mantsonyana.[29] When establishing who could have committed this crime, investigators were made aware of an anonymous written warning officers in Maseru had received on 3 May of a killing being planned by a consortium of chiefs in the Mantsonyana area.[30] The police at the time had dismissed these allegations as merely another rumour, false claims from members of the public being relatively common within the broader climate of colonial panic that existed thanks to the murders.

[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] 'Police report on investigation of death in Mantsonyana,' (08/06/1956), FCO 141/625, *The National Archives* (*TNA*).
[27] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 1.
[28] G. I. Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder: A Report on the Recent Outbreak of 'Diretlo' Murders in Basutoland*, (London, His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1951), p, 16.
[29] Ibid.
[30] 'Police report on investigation of rumour,' (03/05/1956), FCO 141/625, TNA.

Investigating officers had concluded that this anonymous tip was "likely idle gossip" and that they would "keep an eye on the area, but we do not expect anything to happen."[31] The investigator's initial hesitancy in trusting this unnamed source would prove to have deadly consequences for Mputana, as the investigation progressed, this would increasingly become clear.

Officers soon discovered, through local gossip, that a 'Chief Seesio' and his unnamed wife had been planning a murder to "fill a horn."[32] This gossip alleged they had targeted Mputana with the aid of an unknown group of conspirators as he did not live in their village, lived alone and was known to be isolated and therefore vulnerable to ambush.[33] Unfortunately for the police however, the collation of these rumours was as far as they got. Whether Chief Seesio did commit the murder, with his wife or other perpetrators can never be known, as the officers were unable to materially connect him to the crime; unable to establish motive, location, witness testimony or forensic evidence that linked the chief to the crime. Like so many other medicine murders, the mystery of whoever inflicted the horrific wounds on Mputana was left unsolved and the case was closed soon after it was opened. The murder occurred in the dark, on the outskirts of society, and the investigation similarly remained frustratingly clouded in a miasma of silence and suspicion.

The murder and investigation not only impacted the rural villages of Maseru where it occurred but soon became part of the wider panic that was occurring across the kingdom. National newspapers, such as the government gazette *The Basutoland Times*, reported on the killing as being yet another in a series of medicine plots within the nation.[34] Other Basotho-led papers, such as the independent *Mochochonono* (the comet) also produced commentary on Mputana's death.[35] Evidently, it seems these reports helped heighten concern for some in the nation, such as a Chief Maama of a village in Maseru province who on hearing of the murder wrote to the Resident Commissioner fearful that he would be next.[36] The investigation of the murder was influenced by a wider panic that resulted in a significant degree of official scepticism to potential warnings before the crime, police officers having dealt with numerous false claims and instances previously where there was no real evidence.

As the killing of Mputana shows, medicine murders and colonial panic went hand in hand. Mputana's murder, like those that preceded and followed it, contributed to heightening the panic by providing another supposedly salacious moment, which the press could sensationalise. These murders and the panic are well established within the historiography however this thesis offers a new

[31] Ibid.
[32] 'Two letters from Chief Seesio and his wife on plots in his district,' (16/06/1955), FCO 141/625, *TNA*.
[33] 'Telegram discussing murder plot in Maseru,' (09/12/1955), FCO 141/625, *TNA*.
[34] 'Letter from chief to Resident Commissioner [RC] on receiving two letters on plots,' (05/12/1955), FCO 141/625, *TNA*.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

interpretation that posits that their impact and relationship to the Basotho nationalist movement is still contested. *How* and *why* the increase in medicine murders and subsequent panic affected British authority over the protectorate of Basutoland remains largely ignored or misunderstood. While understanding how previous studies of colonial panic have approached this can provide clarity on key aspects of the topic, too few assess the impact those panics had on the societies or the politics they affected.

Definitions, Explanations and Key Terms

The following pages focus on an often misinterpreted but significant occurrence in the history of Lesotho. It focuses on the medicine murder panic and argues that it was an indication of something profound happening to the colonial regime's ability to control the territory. It examines the nationalist leaders, civilian observers, political organisations, and administrators who responded to the murders. It explores how these responses helped to shape the early programme of Basotho nationalism, helping to create an opening to challenge the forces of colonial control. It is a story consisting of three main trends: mass ritualistic killings deemed 'medicine murders,' moral panic and African nationalism. By examining the origins of the murders, how they were framed as a national crisis and the rhetoric of nationalists engaged in anti-colonial activities, this thesis will challenge the existing paradigm surrounding the story of the medicine murder panic and re-cast it as having a significant impact on the nation's politics. It is good then to provide a working understanding of what I mean by medicine murder, moral panic, and African nationalism.

Belief in the power of medicines to affect the metaphysical world beyond the body is widespread throughout Southern Africa and was especially so during Basutoland's colonial era (1868-1966).[37] The perpetrators were usually insecure chiefs, the backbone of British power in Basutoland, who looked to advance their positions at the expense of their unfortunate victims.[38] As previously stated, medicine murder is often associated with the Sesotho word *liretlo* (pronounced *direlto* with a 'd'). Both terms describe the same phenomenon, and I will be using both terms interchangeably, depending on the source or context, as this reflects the discussion of the murders at the time; both white and Basotho observers during the period embraced both terms. A definition is easy to come to, in part because the practice was well established within the region; it is a definable and measurable occurrence not wholly unique to Lesotho. Parts of South Africa, particularly within the Natal, as well as within Swaziland, today's Eswatini, have experienced murders "for the sake of obtaining medical ingredients" undertaken

[37] de Jong, W., ''Makhosi a via (Chiefs Commit Ritual Murder)' – Why ritual murders in Southern Africa should be seen as meaningful violence (and not senseless),' *Afrika Focus*, Vol.28 (2015): 9-26.
[38] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa, Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 168.

first by chiefs as a symbolic representation of personal power.[39] These other instances demonstrate it to be a regional practice but what makes the murders in Basutoland distinct, and worthy of further research, is that the killings in Natal and Swaziland did not have a major impact on how the territories were governed.[40]

Observers within both white and Basotho society often presented medicine murder as demonstrative of a civilisational clash between paganism and rational progress and helped create something akin to a "moral panic" as Stanley Cohen defines; "a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests."[41] Key to this is the shared sensationalist response within government and the press. Chris Cunneen reinforces this and notes that, "by their nature, moral panics tend to be volatile and fuelled by media and political interest."[42] Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda expanded on Cohen's view and demonstrated these panics can also have a significant impact on the nations that experience them;

> "Moral panics are unlike fads; though both tend to be relatively short-lived, moral panics always leave an informal, and often an institutional, legacy... Even seemingly inconsequential panics leave behind some sort of legacy; even those that produce no institutional, organizational, or formal legacy are likely to have had some impact in the informal or attitudinal realm."[43]

Moral panics within a colonial setting certainly conformed to many of these sociological definitions but also have some unique features that require historicising.

Some historians like Norman Etherington are critical of applying these definitions too rigidly, noting that a colonial environment brings its own challenges for understanding the spread of moral panic;

> "Stanley Cohen's theory of 'moral panics' does not offer a particularly appropriate explanation… fear of losing control was a constant undercurrent in the thinking of the settler minority. This substratum of anxiety rose to the surface in the form of a moral panic whenever disturbances in the economy or the

[39] Turrel, R., 'Muti Ritual Murder in Natal: From Chiefs to Commoners (1900–1930),' *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 44 (2001): 38. See also: Booth, A., *Swaziland: Tradition and Change in a Southern African Kingdom*, (Aldershot: Gower Publishing Limited, 1984), 75-76, Evans, J., 'Where Can We Get a Beast without Hair': Medicine Murder in Swaziland from 1970 to 1988,' *African Studies*, Vol.52 (1993): 27-42, Kuper, H., *Sobhuza II, Ngwenyama and King of Swaziland: The Story of an Hereditary Ruler and His Country*, (Eswatini: Africana Publishing Company, 1978), 333, Thompson A., C., quoted in Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 300 & 'Letter from official in Swaziland,' (04/01/1952), GRE/I/9/1-84, *Palace Green Library* (*PGL*) (Durham).

[40] Murray, C., & Sanders, P., 'Medicine Murder in Basutoland: Colonial Rule and Moral Crisis,' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 70 (2000): 49-78.

[41] Cohen, M., *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: Third Edition*, (Routledge: New York, 2011), 1.

[42] Cunneen, C., 'Riot, resistance and moral panic: demonising the colonial other,' in Poynting, S., and George, M., (eds.) *Outrageous! Moral Panics in Australia*, (Hobart: ACYS Publishing, 2007), 21.

[43] Goode, E., & Ben-Yehuda, N., 'Moral Panics: Culture, Politics, and Social Construction,' *Annual Review of Sociology*, 1994, Vol. 20 (1994): 149-171.

> body politic were severe enough to unsettle the mask of composure worn by the face of public authority."[44]

While this is a helpful clarification Etherington, like Cohen, Goode and Ben-Yehuda, still centres his attention on a panic in which the threat to society is a fictional threat and not in response to a real occurrence. Unlike many other colonial waves of panic or anxiety, such as the poison panics of British India, the crime that drove the colonial terror in Basutoland was not imagined.[45] Analogous to Karen Fields Kitawala rebels, chiefs who committed medicine murder "could see how the colonial regime worked from the way in which it affected them" and "used that knowledge to attack it."[46] Over the decades of colonial rule, chiefs became adept at using murders to reinforce their customary status in society through these local campaigns of terror, in a manner that "legitimized their own authoritative voice" and supposedly produced compliance with the "common people."[47]

This makes discussion of the panic occurring within Basutoland particularly challenging as the fear and anxieties felt by colonial society was not directed towards the "folk devils" of Cohen's conception, but a real, tangible, occurrence.[48] This does not mean that the panic was justified or proportional but demonstrates it was, as Will Jackson addresses writing about the Mau Mau revolt, demonstrative of a broader colonial mind-set;

> "While historians have tended to focus on their irrational quality—the uprisings that were envisaged existed in the realm of fantasy, not fact… Here, colonial fears were justified: there was a popular movement afoot to drive the Europeans from the land. However, what at first appears like a pathological element in the settler response obscures the fact that the performance of emotion was itself a vehicle for the expression of colonial ideology."[49]

While the fears may have been based on a real phenomenon therefore, the existence of colonial panic still reveal a great deal about that society and the way in which the territory was governed. Namely, as Jackson reinforces, it is demonstrative of a sense of weakness and a fear of losing control; "anxiety was perennial to empire. Fears of native uprising made manifest a collective vulnerability."[50]

But what does 'anxiety' mean in a colonial setting and how does it connect to panics? As Harald Fischer-Tiné and Christine Whyte have shown, for those within colonial societies the "experience of discomfort, anxiety and moments of panic that occurred" was certainly "shaped to some extent by the

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[44] Etherington, N., 'Natal's Black Rape Scare of the 1870s,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 15, (1988): 36.
[45] Arnold, D., 'The Poison Panics of British India', in H. Fischer-Tiné *(ed.), Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, (Zurich, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[46] Fields, K., *Revival and Rebellion in Colonial Central Africa*, (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1985).
[47] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*, 184.
[48] Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, 1.
[49] Jackson, 'The Settler's Demise,' 73-74.
[50] Ibid, 73.

specific imperial setting."[51] Colonial panics were often driven in part by this anxiety and the Basutoland medicine murder panic is no different. Empires experienced it through those who feared a disruption in their control, usually an expression of emotion from the tiny white minority of fear they would lose control.[52] Nancy Rose Hunt reinforces "that moods *matter* in historical interpretation. Tension, edginess, and volatility were pervasive in colonial" settings as "uneasy alternations of fright and force, dread and vigour, recurred over and over again within this wilful, nervous state."[53] The emotions at play during the panic was most certainly a factor that contributed to its spread and is an unspoken background factor to many of the interactions that occurred throughout the period; it is important therefore to keep in mind how the omnipresent force of colonial anxiety affected interactions and shaped responses.

The last concept important to this thesis is African nationalism. The 'African nationalism' I refer to consists of the varying ideological and political trends that pulled the African continent towards the collection of independent states that exist today. First, it is important to decide what is meant by 'nation' and 'nationalism' in the context I will use. For Miroslav Hroch, the nation is "a large social group integrated not by one but by a combination of several kinds of objective relationships... and their subjective reflection in collective consciousness."[54] Similarly, Benedict Anderson further describes the nation as a "political community" that is "imagined" because most of its members are bound together in emotional solidarity, as well as in a political entity.[55] The nation is therefore understood to be an invented but emotionally resonant collective fabrication that has its roots in historical custom, contains a shared identity and, usually, has aspirations of self-determination.

In the case of the Basotho, their conception of the nation predates colonial rule and largely with the foundation of the Basotho kingdom in 1822.[56] The shared Sesotho language, the institution of chieftainship and uninterrupted autonomy within the imperial system as a protectorate after 1868, proved to be unifying factors. However, as David B. Coplan and Tim Quinlan argue, the formation of the Basotho state was far from a passive process;

> "The Basotho, therefore, are not a pre-existent entity to which 'history' then happened. Moshoeshoe's nation comes into being in interaction with other African chiefdoms and with colonial settlers and

[51] Fischer-Tiné, H. & Whyte, C., 'Introduction: Empires and Emotions', in Fischer-Tiné, H. *(ed.), Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown,* (Zurich: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 18.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Hunt, N., R., *A Nervous State: Violence, Remedies, and Reverie in Colonial Congo*, (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 7.
[54] Hroch, M., 'From National Movement to the Fully-Formed Nation: The Nation-Building Process in Europe,' in Eley G., and Suny, R., G., eds., *Becoming National: A Reader*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 61.
[55] Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Verso, 1991), 5-7.
[56] Gill, S., J., *A Short History of Lesotho*, (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 2010), 66-68.

> imperialists. For most of their history the Basotho have defined their national identity in a political and geographical sense, in direct opposition to invasive forces and authorities."[57]

Considering Lesotho as a nation having pre-colonial origins with a deeper resonance than some other post-colonial African nations yet still being a nation heavily shaped by its colonial experience, seems an accurate description.

A definition of nationalism as a political force that limits it to "demands for independence on behalf of a nation" invokes a clear standard.[58] Nationalists link the nation as the basis for the right to statehood; Brubaker noted this relationship was to nationalists "a contingent, conjecturally fluctuating… basis for collective action."[59] African nationalism certainly embraces universal definitions, it was the push for greater autonomy and eventual independence from colonial power, driven by a diverse range of historical actors, different identifications and political leaders.[60] For many African nationalists, statehood was not necessarily the natural or even intended outcome of decolonisation, it was a far cry from Kwame Nkrumah's pan-African ideal.[61] Most nationalists would go on to embrace the "problematic nation-states" they inherited as their dreams for alternatives faded.[62] As Miles Larmer and Baz Lecoq surmise, African nationalism, like nationalism more broadly, "is an anti-colonial ideology that imagines a nation to be a political community that by right should be politically sovereign and independent from rule by others" that is nevertheless not "inherently bound to the sovereign state."[63] It was a force that influenced and continues to influence multitudes across Africa, an ideological wave the influence of which has far from worn out. All these conceptions though, are subject to a contested debate within the historiography.

Ritual Murder, Colonial Panic and Imperial Authority

Historians understanding of ritualised murder and colonial panic, particularly in late colonial Africa, have certainly developed over the years. This literature has provided a great deal of insight into why a ritual murder initially occurs, how that ritual murder develops into a panic and what explains the responses of the colonial states to said panic. Despite the different ways these peculiar moments of crisis have been historicized and explained, certain key themes remain consistent; principally the murders

[57] Coplan, D., B., and Quinlan, T., 'A Chief by the People Nation versus State in Lesotho,' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (1997): 32.
[58] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 16.
[59] Brubaker, R., *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19-20.
[60] Rotberg, R., I., 'African Nationalism: Concept or Confusion?,' *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol: 4 (1966): 33 & Gellner, E., *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 1.
[61] Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 115-118.
[62] Larmer, M., & Lecocq, B., 'Historicising nationalism in Africa,' *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 24 (2018): 895-905.
[63] Ibid, 900-905.

being symbolic of broader socio-economic trends and dissatisfactions within social groups. Thanks to this evolving literature we know a lot more about the ways in which colonial panics are caused but, crucially, there remains much to be said about the consequences of these panics and the ways in which they were politicised. The understanding of *causality* in murder panics is certainly stronger than it was thirty years ago, from Richard Rathbone's investigation into the Kibi (Kyebi) ritual murder case, yet gaps remain in our broader understanding of the *impact* of these cases.[64] Fundamentally, as will be explored, despite the literature developing significantly there remains a lack of appreciation into how comprehensively panics can destabilise colonial administrations.

As stated, Rathbone pioneered historicised investigations into ritual murder investigations in colonial Africa, by contextualising the events beyond an anthropological understanding.[65] He presented the case of the murder of Chief Akyea Mensah in 1944 by his relatives, who were also his political rivals, demonstrating that shifts in the balance of power within the Akyem Abuakwa state gave rise to tensions that spiralled into murder.[66] He describes the reason behind the killing thusly:

> "At the level of the Akyem state, the accusations came from an affronted section within the polity, the Amantow Mmiensa, who had been defeated by the Stool in the course of the 1932-3 disturbances arising from the Native Administration Revenue Ordinance but whose grievances against the Okyenhene were of greater antiquity. The accused were all descendants of past kings of Akyem."[67]

Rathbone stresses how these rivalries were affected by drifts in "national political, economic and social development" and that these "allegations of ritual murder" in Akyem Abuakwa "cannot be neatly divorced from that broader national picture."[68]

Roger Gocking advanced Rathbone's study by examining another 'ritual murder' case, the lesser-known Bridge House murder, also in colonial Ghana, that more greatly mirrors the medicine murder killings in Basutoland.[69] Gocking argued:

> "The Bridge House was a 'medicine murder' carried out to use the victim's blood and body parts to make a powerful medicine for an immediate objective... linked to bitter factional disputes over succession to the paramountcy of the Edina state.[70]

[64] Rathbone, R., *Murder and Politics in Colonial Ghana,* (Bury St Edmunds: St Edmundsbury Press, 1993)
[65] Ibid & Rathbone, R., 'A Murder in the Colonial Gold Coast: Law and Politics in the 1940s,' *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 30 (1989): 445-461.
[66] Rathbone, *Murder and Politics in Colonial Ghana*.
[67] Rathbone, 'A Murder in the Colonial Gold Coast,' 461.
[68] Ibid, 446.
[69] Gocking, R., 'A Chieftaincy Dispute and Ritual Murder in Elmina, Ghana, 1945-6,' *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 41 (2000): 197-219.
[70] Ibid, 197-200.

Unlike Rathbone, Gocking directly frames the context surrounding the killing within the broader understanding of a declining colonial authority arguing that both this and the Kibi murder case "highlighted the weaknesses of colonial criminal adjudication... Coming as they did when the 'winds of change' were beginning to blow and talk of a 'new World order' was rampant."[71] Elliot Fratkin similarly argues that the murder of white Kenyan ranger Theodore Powys in 1931 by Samburu pastoralists was driven by colonial encroachment on their economic autonomy and the subsequent "use of spiritual power" was an attempt to resolve this "political conflict."[72]

These examples provide useful context into the forces that drive individual murders, establishing them to have deeper socio-political meaning that is not always explicitly stated as a motive. However, they all focus on a specific crime and therefore do not explain how such killings become an epidemic, meaning their conclusions are somewhat limited in a study of Basutoland. Crucially, they also provide little examination into the effects of these crimes on the societies that experienced them. Rathbone and Gocking give no indication that these killings had any significant impact beyond the immediacy of the case, although this could be explained as the result of the more personalised nature of the murders they examine. Studies that have more directly tackled ritual killings as a widespread epidemic, beyond an isolated if meaningful single occurrence, have the potential to expanded historiographical understanding of the wider impact of ritual murder. These cases encompass a much broader examination into social dynamics and involve a much greater number of historical actors, if there is an instance of a colonial panic impacting the politics of the nation it occurred in, then it would be found here. The Southern African cases most similar to Basutoland, colonial Natal, and Swaziland, have provided researchers one avenue to explore the wider occurrence of multiple linked ritual murders.

Swaziland experienced a medical murder panic from 1952 to 1979. Similarly to Basutoland flesh was taken from victims to make medicines that provided power to the killer; however perpetrators came from a wider range of social classes than just the chieftaincy.[73] The killings proved "disturbing" to the colonial administrators who called for an investigation into it.[74] The anthropologist Hilda Kuper provided the first major investigation to the Swazi killings.[75] She explained the increase in murders was a consequence of "political upheaval" where murders made use of the existing belief in medicine murders to achieve personal power, affirming the interpretation of these killings representing something material beyond supposition.[76] Jeremey Evans and Alan Booth built on Kuper's fieldwork to provide a

[71] Ibid, 212.
[72] Fatkin, E., 'The Samburu Laibon's Sorcery and the Death of Theodore Powys in Colonial Kenya,' *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, Vol. 9 (2015): 35.
[73] Ibid.
[74] 'Letter from T.V Scrivinor on the causes of Medicine Murder,' (25/11/1955), DO 119/1406, *TNA* (Kew) & 'HC letter clarifying whether MM has increased,' (24/10/1955), DO 119/1406, *TNA* (Kew).
[75] Kuper, H., *Sobhuza II, Ngwenyama and King of Swaziland: The Story of a Hereditary Ruler and His Country*, (Eswatini: Africana Publishing Company, 1978), 333.
[76] Ibid.

more comprehensive analysis of the event. They argued that the murders "were indicative of a widespread sense of desperation" among Swazi who feared "the new and bewildering forces confronting them" and saw medicine murder as a way to fortify their social position.[77]

Academic interest into the *muti* murders of the Natal region of South Africa have produced similar sets of conclusions. The area bordering Basutoland experienced a wave of *muti* murders, analogous to *liretlo*, first by chiefs and later ambitious commoners as a symbolic representation of personal power.[78] Anthropologist Harriet Ngubane provided the first explanation for the episode and argued that *muti* murder was the final stage in Zulu culture for dealing with malevolent troubles; in essence a human sacrifice to provide the most powerful protection.[79] Rob Turrell developed the understanding of the event to demonstrate these killings had occurred in a particular socio-political context; namely the aftermath of the 1906 Bambatha rebellion and the imposition of a poll tax.[80] Evidently, just as in Swaziland, this ritual murder epidemic had emerged from a reinterpretation of a local tradition in a time of national struggle.

Together both sets of authors within the Swaziland or Natal literature indicate that ritual murder epidemics emerged from a wider socio-political context and an impetus from local tradition. At no point though is there any major discussion of how these killings were debated within the political sphere or connected. The reasoning behind the act is explained, expanding on Rathbone and Gocking's thesis beyond a single occurrence, but still the discussion of impact of the wider panic, which they only hint at, is lacking. While a useful intervention, which demonstrates a shared set of socio-economic circumstances that can precede a medicine murder epidemic, neither the Swaziland nor Natal literature offer any real insights into the ways in which a moral panic emerged within colonial society due to the killings. While they all broadly share in the conclusion that "both historical and modern pressures of social change deserve careful attention" in the examination of medicine murders, whatever mention there is of a broader panic because of these mass episodes is lacking explanation; beyond a repetition of the facets of said panic.[81] This means both phenomena are divorced from each other, instead of recognising them as interlinked but distinct occurrences with similar causes and impacts. More recent works have certainly better explored the relationship between mass ritualized killings and colonial panic.

[77] Evans, 'Where Can We Get a Beast without Hair,' 75-76.
[78] Turrel, R., 'Muti Ritual Murder in Natal,' 38.
[79] Ngubane, H., 'The Predicament of the Sinister Healer: Some Observations on "Ritual Murder" and the Professional Role of the Inyanga,' in Last, M., & Chavunduka, G., L., (eds.), *The Professionalisation of African Medicine*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 194.
[80] Turrel, R., 'Muti Ritual Murder in Natal,' 21.
[81] Evans, J., 'Where Can We Get a Beast without Hair,' 27-42

David Pratten has examined the phenomenon in more detail, in a broader survey, to those who came before him. Pratten argued, in his investigations on the man-leopard murders in Nigeria, that focusing on the moral panic that emerge from ritual murder waves, as well as the murders themselves, enhances the understanding of both such events;

> "Several basic features of the man-leopard murders suggest a similarity with the sociological phenomenon of the 'moral panic'. The murders themselves were quickly identified as a threat to the established social order and witnessed an unfolding of colonial anxieties – secret societies, women's freedoms, prophetic practices and rapacious chiefs… The model of the moral panic therefore provides an interesting tool in analysing the spiralling of signification and disproportionality associated with the murders."[82]

Pratten elucidates how "life in colonial Nigeria, in its cultural, social, and political and economic aspects, contributed to the murders" and reveals how these structural factors contributed to a climate where the murders and panic could spread. [83] Pratten deconstructs the colonial view of a secret society causing the killings and reveals an array of individual strategies entrenched in various historical trends at the heart of perpetrators' motivations.

Similar to Jackson's conclusions, he argues "it is difficult to overestimate the fear and panic felt by colonial officers" whilst also offering a comment that "the moral panic thesis also tends to overlook the specific content of the panics themselves in favour of a more detached interpretation of public discourse."[84] Pratten's work is detailed and certainly expands on the existing understanding regarding murder panics to a degree, demonstrating how a grouping of murders became a panic, yet he fundamentally does little to move understanding beyond Rathbone and Gocking's initial thinking; beyond looking at a series of killings and not a single murder. We know that ritual killings and panic emerges in specific socio-economic context, what Pratten fails to provide is a true broader explanation of what the killings meant to Nigerian society and how the occurrence impacted national politics. The story Pratten tells is regional and somewhat depoliticised, focused mainly on the motivations of the killers and little on their noticeable impact on the national stage. Pratten's approach is also not without his critics within the wider historiography. While Pratten argued that "the apparently mundane personal motives, indeed, were crucial not only in unravelling the mystery of individual cases, but in understanding the significance of the… episode as a whole," he did not offer any comprehensive reasoning as to why the murders occurred.[85]

[82] Pratten, *Man-Leopard Murders*, 237.
[83] Ibid, 21.
[84] Ibid, 238.
[85] Ibid, 238.

Vicky Van Brockhaven argued this meant he therefore failed to offer a broad theory into what was causing the deaths.[86] She argues Pratten's inability to come to a definite answer on the reasoning behind the murderer's actions left the murders somewhat "incidental to the social history" he describes, more focused on the socio-political context than explaining what was behind the episode.[87] Van Brockhaven responds to the gaps left by Pratten by expanding the understanding of broader perpetrator motivations in leopard-man killings, using judicial documents from the Belgian Congo.[88] Her perception of the murders as a form of armed mobilisation rooted in local traditions adapted to diverse contexts adds to Prattan's work by providing a wider context to their emergence and revealing how "leopard-men straddle different cultural complexes, timeframes, and governance contexts."[89] She embraces Pratten's recognition of social tensions being at the heart of 'leopard man murders' and attempts to tie the social context he describes to a more unifying hypothesis, "that leopard-men were ritually-empowered armed groups, rooted in precolonial traditions."[90]

While this builds on the existing understanding of leopard man murders, it is her other main intervention which offers some commentary on the effects of the killings that is more important. Van Brockhaven argues that "institutional networks and processes of institutional dynamism set the scene for later political developments" and highlights the "similarities between leopard-men cases and present-day armed groups."[91] She states;

> The strongest parallels can be perceived in the reoccurrence of ritually-empowered militias… In the present the same cultural foundations continue to matter in the constitution of power, in the mobilization of people, and in the legitimation of their actions, including violence.[92]

This is helpful but is focused on the legacy of the killings themselves, how the ritual was reinterpreted over following generations in specific localities, and not the impact of the panic on Congolese society. Namely, while the political impact of leopard-man is articulated, she does not give any assessment of a loss of control or wider impact on the administration.

[86] Van Brockhaven, V., 'Anioto: Leopard-Men Killings and Institutional Dynamism in Northeast Congo, c.1890-1940,' *The Journal of African History*, Vol.59 (2018): 21-44.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid, 25-26.
[89] Ibid, 44.
[90] Ibid, 24.
[91] Ibid, 44.
[92] Ibid.

While not strictly a ritual murder epidemic, Luise White's examination of vampire stories in 1903s East Africa bears many similarities to Van Brockhaven's research.[93] White summarises the spread of these murderous rumours;

> "These were, as officials knew, widespread stories, which showed great similarities and considerable differences over a wide geographic and cultural area. Game rangers were said to capture Africans in colonial Northern Rhodesia; mine managers captured them in the Belgian Congo and kept them in pits. Firemen subdued Africans with injections in Kenya but with masks in Uganda. Africans captured by mumiani in colonial Tanganyika were hung upside down, their throats were cut, and their blood drained into huge buckets."[94]

While, unlike other ritual murder cases, these stories were not an actual occurrence, the forces encouraging their spread were similar to those of the leopard-man murders. White notes said stories were "a fairly obvious metaphor for state-sponsored extractions, just as vampires are an unusually convincing modern metaphor for psychic ills" that "emerged out of witch beliefs."[95] Pratten, Van Brockhaven's, and White's works are complementary. Combined they all have revealed plenty about the spread of stories of ritual violence, yet still leave questions surrounding the nature of panics, the way in which they spread and, most importantly, how they affected colonial power.

This literature focusing on mass ritualised killings, or similar spectacles, certainly has revealed much in the factors that drive both individual and mass killings. Principally the existing historiographical understanding has demonstrated ritualised murder to be indicative of socio-economic dislocation, the adaption of an existing tradition, frustrated elites and, crucially, a weak state authority.[96] Despite this effort to demystify the forces behind medicine murders, the literature on the topic leaves some questions unanswered. While the broader forces that cause a murder and lead to mass murders are explored, the reasons why a 'moral panic' within colonial society often follows such an event are less explained. Furthermore, there is a lack of exploration of the impressions that these murder panics left on these nation's society and politics. Assessing the ways in which administrations manage panic and the impact of this is vital to an understanding of medicine murder in Basutoland. Some of these gaps therefore within the literature on ritualised killings, primarily explanations of why colonial states responded in the way they did, can be filled through attention to the broader literature on colonial panic.

[93] White, L., *Speaking with Vampires Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
[94] Ibid, 7.
[95] Ibid, 15.
[96] Rathbone, 'A Murder in the Colonial Gold Coast,' 461, Turrel, 'Muti Ritual Murder in Natal,' 38 & Pratten, Man-Leopard Murders, 237.

Certain historians have often focused on instances of panic from an administrative perspective, concerned with rationalising the reasons for a government's response. This line of analysis often leads to the conclusion that colonial governments acted the way they did to external or internal pressures due to their inherent weakness. Maurus Reinkowski and Gregor Thum for example state that "as well-trained and well-equipped the bearers of imperial rule may have been, they nonetheless found themselves, more often than not, in fragile positions of power."[97] They note;

> "Advanced technology and superior military strength could often compensate for asymmetry in numbers. It was much harder, however, to overcome the lack of knowledge about the colonized that led to difficulties in interpreting and predicting their behaviour and assessing the degree of their loyalty or hostility. Such ignorance was fertile ground for exaggerated fears and conspiracy theories."[98]

While "a fascination with the exotic was part of the attraction of the imperial experience" for many in colonial society this impulse also "had a dark side in the fear of the unknown."[99] This meant that the mind-set of the bearers of imperial rule proved susceptible to anxieties over the actions of their subjects and this had a significant impact on their actions.[100]

Sloan Mahone argues along the same lines and provides vital context to "episodic mass hysteria" such as the *liretlo* panic.[101] Crucially Mahone provides a wider context, within which decades of "remembered evidence" within administrative reports led, by the 1940s, to an acceptance within British colonial administrations that Africans could spontaneously erupt into rebellion.[102] This context is vital to keep in mind when examining *liretlo*. Administrators in Basutoland had decades of reporting on African 'mania' across the continent they could access, which shaped their preconceptions of what was occurring. The focus of Mahone, Reinkowski and Thum, though are largely fixed on the viewpoint of white administrators. To address this, Harald Fischer-Tiné and Christine Whyte argue "the observation that feelings of anxiety and the experience of panic were by no means the monopoly of imperial elites, but rather were often shared across the colonial divide."[103] Fischer-Tiné and Whyte argue that panics were affected by and effected colonial subjects, not merely existing in the discourses of white observers. While they understand that the local experiences of different colonies varied, certain

[97] Reinkowski, M., & Thum, G., 'Introduction,' in Reinkowski, M. & Thum, G., (eds.), *Helpless Imperialists Imperial Failure, Fear and Radicalization*, (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 8.
[98] Ibid, 8-9.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid, 20.
[101] Mahone, S., 'The Psychology of Rebellion: Colonial Medical Responses to Dissent in British East Africa', The *Journal of African History*, Vol. 47, No. 2 (2006): 241-258.
[102] Ibid.
[103] Fischer-Tiné & Whyte, 'Introduction: Empires and Emotions', 1.

trends remained consistent, particularly the belief in a colonised people being naturally violent and secretive that "lent itself to a continual state of anxiety over the potential loss of control."[104]

Will Jackson advances this by placing discussions of colonial anxieties into a specific context of post-1945 decline of imperial power and the first shoots of decolonisation;

> "Individual… narratives combined with the 'bigger' history of the twentieth century. Decolonization from this perspective entailed much more than the political processes that preceded the emergence of independent nation states. No less relevant was the commonly felt estrangement from empire experienced by those most intimately caught up in its unforeseen decline."[105]

This has great relevance to a study of Basutoland, adding new context to the decisions made by the colonial state in tackling the panic. Colonial discourse surrounding the subjects of empire feared the seemingly teeming masses of subjects and their supposed irrationality. As cracks in the imperial edifice began to widen after 1945 this sense increased. As such, their ability to exercise authority was far more precarious than the images of hegemonic power they liked to project. A moralising colonial panic, such as the one seen during the medicine murder crisis, therefore was less a response to African irrationality and more of a reflection of the weaknesses inherent within imperial administrations.

This is shared in the literature on colonial panics more globally, particularly studies of imperial Asia. Mark Condos for example argued, in his examination of the making of colonial power in British India, a similar sense of disquiet was present; "anxious British administrators were frequently worried about rebellions, violent crime, and seditious propaganda."[106] David Arnold similarly examines the 'poison panics' of British India from a position of colonial weakness, noting; "the colonial state was not devoid of information, but it lacked the political will and the confidence in its own subordinate agencies to translate its concerns into legislative form and effective practice."[107] This mirrors the failure of Britain to properly deal with the chieftaincy in Basutoland, fearful of a backlash. Despite noting these poison panics to be a major feature of Indian colonial life in the late 19th and early 20th century though there is little discussion on how they were responded to, if at all, within wider Indian political discourse. Martin Shipway takes a somewhat different approach and argues, in the case of South-East Asia after 1945, imperial administrations were often feigning their inability to affect the colonies they were governing due to the "reality of cash-strapped and ramshackle political and administrative

[104] Ibid, 18.
[105] Jackson, 'The Settler's Demise,' 74.
[106] Condos, M., *The Insecurity State: Punjab and the Making of Colonial Power in British India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 23.
[107] Arnold, 'The Poison Panics of British India', 65.

structures."[108] Shipway reinforces there is a material element to the ways in which states responded to moments of crises that must be kept in mind when assessing a panic. These non-African cases add a great deal to the wider understanding of colonial panic by demonstrating it as a shared colonial experience.

The literature on both ritualised murders and anxieties in colonial Africa together therefore offers some critical reflections that greatly enhance any analysis of a colonial state's capacity to manage critical events, like the medicine murder panic. The historiography on ritual murders shows them to have far deeper forces driving their spread than many assumed at the time. At the same time, the literature on colonial panics adds to our understanding of how states responded to internal murder panics by emphasizing how much their response was driven by internal anxieties. Case studies demonstrate empires lacked resources and relied heavily on rhetorical flourish and symbolism.[109] Efforts to maintain a semblance of colonial order were more an expression of anxiety and fear than an expression of real power.[110] Colonial panic over ritualised killings was therefore a misinterpretation of events shaped by a moralising reaction driven by sensationalist reports within imperial administrations that were often already built on fragile foundations. Yet still, an explanation as to why Basotho nationalists may have embraced the medicine murders as a rhetoric tool to attack the colonial state and the ways in which the fall in imperial authority aided in their expansion is absent from this explanation.

Lastly then, we can turn to a developing scholarship examining how moments of colonial crises could impact national politics. Although the use of the medicine murder panic by Basotho to undermine the colonial state may seem to be a unique occurrence, parallels can be drawn to other cases where local crises led to a fall in government authority and stimulated a particularly nationalist form of political opposition. Since at least the 1990s, scholars have asserted the importance that political opportunities such as disruptions in state control had for the emergence of collective action. Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer Zald stated that "most political movements and revolutionaries are set in motion by social changes that render the established political order more vulnerable to receptive to challenge."[111] These disruptions can come in many forms. Perhaps the most common is when an imperial territory or the ruling metropole is invaded or occupied, creating a power vacuum that others can exploit.[112] The pressures of war, changes to provincial autonomy, transition to new forms of

[108] Shipway, M., 'Age of Anxiety: Imperial Helplessness and Imagined Futures of the Late Colonial State in Southeast Asia after 1945,' in Reinkowski, M. & Thum, G., (eds.), *Helpless Imperialists Imperial Failure, Fear and Radicalization*, (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 188.
[109] Reinkowski & Thum quoted in Fischer-Tiné & Whyte, 'Introduction: Empires and Emotions,' 6.
[110] Fischer-Tiné & Whyte, 'Introduction: Empires and Emotions,' 1.
[111] McAdam, D., McCarthy, J., & Zald, M., *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilising Structures, and Cultural Framings*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 8.
[112] Lawrence, A., K., 'Triggering Nationalist Violence: Competition and Conflict in Uprisings against Colonial Rule,' *International Security*, Vol. 35, (2010): 88-122.

government and, crucially for this study, periods of national panic create widespread uncertainty, insecurity, and "opportunity" for opposition forces.[113]

However, the problem of identifying what those political opportunities consisted of is difficult, and there is no clear formula. Occurrences certainly only become opportunities when "defined as such by a group of actors sufficiently well organised to act," but even this is a rather subjective viewpoint that depends on whether or not organised action follows the opportunity.[114] William A. Gamson and David S. Meyer noted this, arguing that overuse of the paradigm risked it "becoming a sponge that soaks up virtually every aspect of the social movement environment – political institutions and culture, crises of various sorts, political alliances, and policy shifts."[115] Despite this criticism, however, as Adria Lawrence asserts, "political opportunity models have provided important insights into how the larger political context effects… collective mobilisation," something she has demonstrated in her studies of French Africa.[116] Lawrence builds on the idea that "changes in imperial control created opportunities for demonstrations against colonial rule" to argue that "nationalist mobilisation should be understood as endogenous to a collapse of society rather than the cause of it."[117] Imperial panics then, where the authority of the state was damaged, had the potential to stimulate opposition to colonial rule.

Lawrence also provides her own model to assess whether disruptions in imperial control led to nationalist mobilisation, arguing that when it does, it is via four mechanisms:

> "Disruptions (1) create the perception that independence is more likely than it was under stable imperial rule; (2) reduce the benefits of collaborating; (3) decrease the policing capacity of the state; and (4) produce uncertainty that prompts identification with the nation. Taken cumulatively, these effects of disruption make nationalist mobilisation more appealing and less dangerous than it is when the imperial authority's control is secure.[118]

This broad view that specific local events were often crucial in providing nationalist movements with the opening to build, consolidate, and eventually succeed can certainly be applied to the relationship between medicine murder and the anti-colonial activism of post-war Basutoland. While it certainly was not an event that disrupted imperial authority to the extent of an invasion or widespread armed revolt, it did cause a "partial" decline in the government's authority.[119] The inability to stop the killings

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[113] Summers, C., 'Ugandan Politics in WW2,' *Africa and World War II*, Byfield, J., A., et al., (eds.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 486.
[114] McAdam, et al, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements*, 8.
[115] Gamson W., A. & Meyer, D., S., 'Framing political opportunity,' *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilising Structures, and Cultural Framings,* McAdam, D., et al., (eds.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 275.
[116] Lawrence, A., K., *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 135.
[117] Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism*, 22 & 222.
[118] Ibid, 138.
[119] Ibid, 21.

certainly affected the perception that imperial rule was "stable," while the intrusive anti-*liretlo* efforts also revealed little benefit to collaborating and that the police could not do what it projected it could.[120]

Basutoland allows us to build on this existing historiography, by embracing Lawrence's observation on the impact of national crises on state authority, and offer a rare instance where a murder panic became intensely politicised by the early nationalist movement.[121] The changing and contextually contingent patterns of emotional expression that led to moral panic and their relationship to the organisation of power in empires can only be grasped when we comprehend the "underlying emotional components of moments of colonial crisis and panics" but this also allows us to better understand their effects.[122] The Basutoland medicine murder panic provides an instance where ritualized killings had far more systemic impact than has previously been assumed in the vast majority of the existing murder and panic literature. The existing literature on colonial panics is focused too heavily on chasing down the somewhat intangible factor of causality. For a new avenue that allows us to better understand these events better there needs to be refocused attention on the tangible impact of panics; particularly the ways that nationalists embraced discussion of those killings to attack colonial power.

The Historiography of the Basutoland Medicine Murder Panic and its Absence from the Story of Basotho Nationalism

Thanks to the number of deaths and far-reaching consequences, the Basutoland killings have left perhaps the largest historiographical footprint of any such incident. While killings in Basutoland certainly fit the pattern of perpetrators coveting personal power in a particular socio-political context that is not how the killings have often been portrayed in the literature. It has too often been seen as an exotic curio, a salacious moment of murderous fervour, and not a central part of Lesotho's modern history.[123] Works that our otherwise comprehensive and detailed, such as the far-reaching enquiry in the history of the Christian church in Lesotho by Craig Hinks, relegate the murders to a couple of pages and do not incorporate it at all into their broader analysis.[124] This leads to the inaccurate impression that the panic did not have much of a long-lasting legacy within the protectorate and was peripheral to broader political and social trends.

[120] Ibid.
[121] Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism*, 22.
[122] Fischer-Tiné & Whyte, 'Introduction: Empires and Emotions,' 19.
[123] Thabane, 'Aspects of Colonial Economy and Society, 1868-1966' & Rosenberg, S. & Weisfelder, R., F., *Historical Dictionary of Lesotho*, (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 273-27.
[124] Hinks, C., *A Quest for peace: An ecumenical history of Lesotho*, (Morija: *The Heads of Churches in Lesotho and the Christian Council of Lesotho*, 2009), 520-521.

Academic assessment of *liretlo* emerged during the panic from researchers employed by the government to get to the roots of the killings.[125] One of the first to analyse the killings was the anthropologist, Hugh Ashton. [126] He affirmed the government's position that this was an ethical crisis, that "the only attack that can shake it is the moral one, by subjecting the use of medicine to moral evaluation."[127] Ashton crucially identified that external pressures had encouraged an increase in the murders;

> Changes to the way the chieftaincy operated "combined with the unsettling effects of the war and of the bitter disputes over the Paramount Chief's succession, have had disturbing effects on the people and their leaders... The discord seems to have introverted and encouraged a return to their traditional beliefs and customs. One manifestation of this is the shocking outbreak of ritual murder… that has cast a shadow over the fair name of Basutoland, hitherto regarded as the most enlightened and progressive African country in the southern continent."[128]

Although recognising this, his language was still dripping with a racist colonial condescension, inferring the actions of a few independent murderers had damaged the 'civilised' status of all Basotho. While his recognition that these murders were a product of a specific colonial context was important therefore, his analysis would certainly be improved upon by the later historiography.

Later independent academic interest that emerged in the 1960s abandoned this focus on immorality but still affirmed the view in colonial reports that the murders were a consequence of mismanaged administrative reform.[129] Jack Halpern, in particular, moved understanding beyond preaching the dangerous impact the murders were having on the Basotho soul to focus on the impact of administrative reforms to the chieftaincy; "after the reforms in chieftainship and native courts became effective in 1945, the incidence of such *diretlo* ritual or 'medicine murders' increased to almost epidemic proportions."[130] Academic interest in *literlo* has, until relatively recently, remained consistently attached to these conclusions that the killings were the response to a specific series of administrative reforms disconnected from broader national politics.[131] It has often been presented as a

[125] See: Jones, G., I., *Basutoland Medicine Murder: A Report on the Recent Outbreak of "Diretlo" Murders in Basutoland*, (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1951) & Hailey, M., H., *Native Administration in the British African Territories Part V. The High Commission Territories: Basutoland, The Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1953), 132.
[126] Ashton, *The Basuto: A Social Study of Traditional and Modern Lesotho*.
[127] Ibid, 316.
[128] Ibid, 7.
[129] Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages* & Keppel-Jones, A., 'South Africa and the High Commission Territories,' *International Journal*, Vol. 6, (1951): 124-5 & Stevens, R., P., *Lesotho Botswana & Swaziland*, (London: Pall Mall Press, 1967), 48-9.
[130] Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages*, 124
[131] Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder*, 63-179.

side note within the broader narrative of 20th century Basutoland and not much more.[132] While this perspective has proven to be prominent, two studies, in particular, have revealed the *liretlo* panic to be a far more complex part of the nation's modern history than previously asserted.

The first of these, by Colin Murray and Peter Sanders, stands as the most important examination of the *liretlo* murders produced to date.[133] Murray and Sanders rightly centre the Basotho belief in the power of medicine as a central factor for the killings, noting it gave it "historical contingency."[134] Murray and Sanders share in the conclusion that governmental reforms played some role in the tragic events of the 1940s but argue this is secondary when compared to the context of political disharmony created within the chieftaincy by the conflict over the paramountcy.[135] They summarise their conclusions thusly;

> "A significant increase [of medicine murders] in the 1940s is most plausibly attributed to a form of competitive contagion… in a context of political insecurity… we seek to explain the moral crisis through the involvement of the highest chiefs in the land and the vigour of the British colonial response; we question a connection often loosely asserted between witchcraft and medicine murder; and, finally, we identify a pervasive ambivalence on the part of the Basotho and of the British and emphasise, despite widespread belief in the power of human medicine, the historical contingency of that belief."[136]

Murray and Sanders somewhat mirror Rathbone and Gocking and view the murders as being driven mainly by this competition within the indigenous elite, with the panic which followed a reaction to the high-profile nature of certain cases and of certain murderers.[137]

Their work is comprehensive and detailed, proving, conclusively that these murders were real and not imagined or a conspiracy. However, they are limited somewhat by a belief in the apolitical nature of the murders and their ultimate lack of any impact on how the territory was governed.[138] There is no real attempt to see how Basotho opposition groups made use of the killings in their rhetoric nor why they may have done this. While they are correct in highlighting the importance of the revulsion and contempt that many white administrators felt regarding the Basotho, as well as the resentment many

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[132] Sections of available texts where *liretlo* has been briefly discussed include: *Machobane, L., B., B., J., Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions, (*Basingstoke*: Macmillan, 1990),* 228-33, Coplan & Quinlan, 'A Chief by the People Nation versus State in Lesotho,' 33-37 & Edgar, *Prophets with Honour,* 33-37.
[133] Murray, C., & Sanders, P., 'Medicine Murder in Basutoland: Colonial Rule and Moral Crisis,' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 70 (2000) & Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*.
[134] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 290-291.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid, 295.
[137] Rathbone, 'A Murder in the Colonial Gold Coast,' 461 & Gocking, 'A Chieftaincy Dispute and Ritual Murder in Elmina, Ghana, 1945-6,' 197-219.
[138] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 293.

Basotho felt in being seen this way, the impact of the event is seen as minimal and the reasoning behind the moral crisis seems overly individualised when compared with other studies of colonial panic.[139] In no sense is medicine murder seen to have been impacted by nor impact upon national politics in any meaningful manner. They share, along with the other main treatise on the killings, a focus on the importance on individuals, in particular the activities of the royal regent 'Mantšebo, who ruled the kingdom as the head of state during her nineteen-year reign from 1941 to 1960, on the expansion of killings and the subsequent panic.

Elizabeth Eldredge provides the additional major work of note.[140] Her account is far more political than Murray and Sanders, she emphasises that medicine murders were a way for chiefs and an effective way to fortify their authority.[141] She places this into a wider context "in which chiefs and commoners alike strove to achieve representative governance and the dispersal of power from the centre to the periphery and the people at large."[142] Eldredge also sees 'Mantšebo as the critical figure in the whole event, the failure to arrest her being the crucial point where British authority collapsed. She argues:

> "Medicine murder became a "pattern" not because it was compatible with past or contemporaneous ideologies or accepted norms of behaviour but because British failure to act against the regent, 'Mantšebo, had the effect of making medicine murders appear to be effective in achieving the objectives of those who planned and ordered them."[143]

Eldredge's view that "British colonial rule was by definition implicated" by this association is vital and acknowledges a tangible political impact of the murders missing from other works.[144] However, she fails to acknowledge the part played by Basotho nationalists during the panic. This is to the extent that the Basutoland Congress Party (BAC), the main nationalist force spreading a counter-narrative on medicine murder, is relegated to a single paragraph that just summarises their election results; there is no mention of their views on medicine murder or why they engaged in this commentary.[145]

Aside from a recent, although not hugely relevant to this study, intervention by the legal theorist Andrew Kettler, who focused on non-visual evidence used in medicine murder trials, Eldredge, Murray and Sanders' work remains the most recent contribution to the of *liretlo* during the colonial period.[146]

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[139] Ibid.
[140] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid, 222.
[143] Ibid, 221.
[144] Ibid, 183.
[145] Ibid, 216.
[146] Kettler, A., 'Smelling-Out Anachronism: Embodiment and Hegemony in the Medicine Murder Cases of Basutoland,' *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, Vol. 45 (2019): 159-187.

Despite this, neither offers a convincing enough account. Both works place too much weight on the motivations of individual perpetrators. Crucially, neither offers a satisfying reason why the murders continued into the 1960s. If dynastic tensions were so important, why did the killings continue after the coronation of Moshoeshoe II in 1960? Subsequently, how could the removal of 'Mantšebo lead to the undermining of decades of public belief in protective medicines to the extent that the murders would cease? While these are pressing questions an even greater one remains, one that has yet to be tackled within the historiography of the medicine murder panic or the historiography of colonial panics more broadly.

That question is focused squarely on the impact of the medicine murders. Why, if as Murray and Sanders suggest, there was little or no political impact did the early nationalist movement embrace it so forcefully in their early rhetoric?[147] A full examination is needed of the impact of this specific national crisis that weakened British authority in creating space for opposition politicians to foster countervailing narratives that damaged the colonial position and built a base of popular political support. The downplaying of *liretlo* as a political, even radicalising, force that nationalist parties could use as both a recruitment and rhetoric tool to attack the colonial state demonstrate that these panics were perhaps felt even more deeply in African societies than perhaps previously thought. It was not merely the purview of a white elite, or something that stirred local terrors, but an occurrence with a significant national impact embraced by modernising nationalist parties.

Yet a perspective focused on assessing the political effects of Basutoland's panic is not only missing from the literature on medicine murder, the murder panic as a key aspect of Lesotho's national story is also erroneously missing from the broader historiography on Basotho nationalist movement. The story of Basotho nationalism has resulted in a significant volume of scholarship, albeit one that primarily focuses on the principal parties and the relatively peaceful transition to independence. The rivalry between the BAC/BCP and the BNP, particularly the divisive electioneering between 1960 and 1965, has particularly interested scholars.[148] The first wave of academic interest in Basotho nationalism emerged during the transition toward Lesotho's independence and primarily concerned the debates surrounding British policy in the region. Arthur Keppel-Jones and Jack Halpern provided historical accounts concerning the relationship to South Africa and the popular movements that resisted incorporation.[149] Works by Michael Ward, Richard P. Stevens, J. E. Spence, Ian Hammett and David Jones noted the rivalry between Leabua Jonathan's BNP and Mokhehle's BCP to be the driving force of nationalist politics, both men's strength of character being the driving force of Lesotho's

[147] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 295.
[148] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho, 1952-1965.*
[149] Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages* & Keppel-Jones, A., 'South Africa and the High Commission Territories,' *International Journal*, Vol. 6 (1951): 85-93.

independence.[150] Whilst these early studies went some way towards explaining the dynamics that drove independence, the debates within nationalist parties and the rhetoric used by nationalist politicians in their attempts to politicise the masses were marginally mentioned.

The lack of a Basotho perspective was addressed in more detail with the publication of personal accounts by Stimela Jason Jingoes, Ntsukunyane Mphanya and B. M. Khaketla, which provide an invaluable snapshot into the period.[151] They demonstrated independence to be a far more contested process than earlier scholarship showed. Jingoe's account in particular reveals a much more complicated dynamic between nationalists and chiefs than white authors previously assumed.[152] However, these individualised accounts do little to move historical thinking about Basotho nationalism forward, a focus on a specific group of nationalist leaders with no mention of why medicine murder was used so prominently in the nationalist productions produced during 1945 to 1960, perhaps in part because of the distasteful nature of the subject matter. Their explanation for the reasons why political mobilisation within Basutoland occurred when it did are lacking. They provide specific perspectives and outlooks but are not a substitute for more structural analysis.

Authors attempting to explain the underlying factors that led to nationalist mobilisation include Roger Leys, who produced a Marxist analysis of Basotho nationalism that centred it as a working-class revolt against a ruling chiefly class.[153] Leys ultimately does not adequately explain how an orthodox Marxist analysis applies to late colonial Basutoland and offers no explanation for how medicine murder fits into the equation. Advancing some of Leys' broader points on the impact of international ideological forces, Bruce Leeman argued the roots of Basotho nationalism lay within Pan-Africanist currents.[154] Leeman asserted that a "synthesis of traditional nationalism and a philosophy of liberation termed Africanism" by Southern African intellectuals in the 1940s "enabled Africans to launch nationwide agitation and violence" in South Africa and Basutoland.[155] He directly placed the success of the Basutoland Congress Party in the 1960 election as a result of this shift in the ideological paradigm.

[150] Ward, W., 'Economic Independence for Lesotho?,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vo.5, (1967), Stevens, R., P., *Lesotho, Botswana & Swaziland*, (London, Pall Mall Press: 1967), Spence, J., E., *Lesotho: The Politics of Dependence*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), Hammet, I., *Chieftainship and Legitimacy* & Jones, D., *Aid and Development in Southern Africa*, (London: Overseas Development Institute, 1977).
[151] Jingoes, S., J., *A Chief is a Chief by the People*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), Mphanya, N., *A Brief History of the Basutoland Congress Party*, (Morija: Morija Printing Works, 2004), B., M., *Lesotho 1970: An African Coup under the Microscope*, (London: University of California Press, 1972).
[152] Jingoes, *A Chief is a Chief by the People*, 186-187.
[153] Leys, R., 'Some observations on class differentiation and class conflict within the labour reserve of Basutoland,' *Collected Seminar Papers. Institute of Commonwealth Studies*, Vol.27 (1981): 87-95.
[154] Leeman, B., *Lesotho and the Struggle for Azania, Volumes 1-2*, (London: University of Azania, PAC Education Office, 1985).
[155] Ibid, 134.

However, Leeman's also highly personalised account does little to explain how the internal politics of Basutoland helped foster the nationalist movement.[156]

Scott Rosenberg presents a contrasting perspective to Leeman's, focusing on a longue durée explanation of Basotho nationalism in which the diverse forces which constitute the nation's identity were "held together by the common thread" of Moshoeshoe I's legacy.[157] Rosenberg agreed that the "popular national consciousness" within Basutoland was an "invented tradition" in the mould of Hobsbawm.[158] While right in emphasising the 19th century as having cast a long shadow over Basotho history, Rosenberg vastly overstates the centrality of symbols of the time, such as the venerated Moshoeshoe I, within Basotho politics. These symbols were not enough to generate the level of political mobilisation that he suggests. Instead, evocations of Moshoeshoe's legacy should be read as a political tactic, of many including medicine murder, within a wider political programme and not as a political programme in their own right.

On the other extreme is Richard Weisfelder who traced the evolution of the nationalist movement from the foundation of the BAC to independence.[159] Weisfelder's focus on party politics barely addresses the dynamics of colonial exploitation that lay at the heart of the old regime. It is an account that is too focused on a particular moment of political debate and does not convincingly explain how that moment was arrived at. The more structural challenges to the colonial order, most glaringly the *liretlo* panic, receive only a cursory mention. Instead, Weisfelder focuses on politicking between political groups and casts the nationalist movement as "a perpetual struggle for power" between different factions.[160] Later works on the Basotho nationalist movement, most notably its mentions by Balam Nyeko, Neville W. Pule and Stephen Gil, echo Weisfelder's suppositions and do little to advance the broader understanding.[161] Rosenberg and Weisfelder provide an ultimately limited picture of the nationalist struggle. A synthesis of both approaches, which recognises some long-term trends and the immediate context of the post-war era, is vital to understanding Basotho nationalism.

John Aerni-Flessner's recent work offers a new youth-focused interpretation of Basotho nationalism that is reminiscent of Jay Straker's work on Guinean independence.[162] Aerni-Flessner

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[156] Ibid, 361.
[157] Rosenberg, S., *Promises of Moshoeshoe: Culture, Nationalism and Identity in Lesotho*, (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2008) & Rosenberg, S., 'Monuments, Holidays, and Remembering Moshoeshoe: The Emergence of National Identity in Lesotho, 1902-1966,' *Africa Today*, Vol.46 (1999): 71.
[158] Rosenberg, 'Monuments, Holidays, and Remembering Moshoeshoe,' 50.
[159] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho, 1952-1965,* 1-11 & Weisfelder, R., F., 'The Basotho Nation-State: What Legacy for the Future?' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 19 (1981): 221-256.
[160] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho,* 11.
[161] Nyeko, B., 'The Independence Movement, 1952-66,' in eds. Pule, N., W. & Thabane, T., *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (Morija, University of Lesotho, 2002), Pule, N., W., 'Politics Since Independence,' in eds. Pule, N., W. & Thabane, T., *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (Morija, University of Lesotho, 2002) & Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*.
[162] Aerni-Flessner, *Dreams for Lesotho* & Straker, J., *Youth Nationalism and the Guinean Revolution*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990).

argues that Basotho defined independence as the promise of a better and more economically secure future because of a new generation of "Basotho politicians... who deployed the rhetoric of development to link citizenship, independence, and nationalism."[163] Because of this, Aerni-Flessner crucially argues that African nationalism in Lesotho "was both a deeper and more robust phenomenon than others acknowledge."[164] He demonstrates that Basotho nationalism was a mass movement that channelled dissatisfaction with the socio-economic conditions of colonial rule. He does not however offer an explanation for the spark from which this nationalist project emerged; his work is focused mainly on the 1960s-1980s, allowing space for a study that essentially focuses on the preceding years.

The medicine murder panic is almost completely absent from the wider story of Basotho nationalism. The ways in which the early nationalist movement made use of the colonial crisis has received no historical assessment or attention, leaving the reasons why it appears so politically resonate during the fifteen years after the Second World War unexplained. The continued inability to see the impact of medicine murder on national politics, combined with the rigid Basotho nationalist historiography, has habitually ensured that its connection to the nationalist movement has been ignored within the literature. In focused studies on the murders, there is barely any mention of nationalist politics or the broader political landscape, mirroring the lack of inclusion of the killings from more general Basotho political history. Accounts often assume the panic was a self-contained event with largely self-contained consequences instead of viewing it as having a significant impact on how Britain governed the territory. However, it was a significant event that immediately preceded the birth of the nationalist movement, where Britain lost part of its control over the protectorate's population.

The historiography of late colonial Lesotho therefore does not account for the result of the public failure of the colonial state in managing the panic. It also does not explain why nationalists made use of the killings as a rhetoric tool to attack British governance or offer commentary on how this shaped the independence struggle more broadly. There is a record of these productions by nationalists concerning *liretlo* that are of yet un-historicised. The inability to think beyond the narrow confines established by the existing historiography has therefore meant that a crucial part of Basotho nationalist rhetoric, particularly from the 1945-1959 years, has been neglected by scholars. By turning attention to the specific impacts of the medicine murder panic, the case of Basutoland can enrich the understanding of murder panics in late-colonial Africa more broadly, with a case where the killings were politicised by the nationalist movement.

By refocusing attention away from the interparty disputes of the 1960s and toward recognising the context of those critical early post-war years the political impact of the panic can be displayed. It was here the collapse in British authority over the killings influenced the conspiratorial narratives that

[163] Ibid. 11.
[164] Ibid.

surrounded medicine murder, which then became intertwined with calls for more political and economic freedom. Critiques of Britain's handling of the panic by nationalists were so resonant due to this fall in colonial authority, as the increase in murders were presented as having their roots in Britain's poor governance of the territory; directly linking colonial control to the panic. Unlike in other instances, such as the various leopard man murders, in Swaziland or in the Natal, societal dissatisfaction with how Britain was handling the panic was channelled into nationalist politics.[165] This thesis aims to give a tragic but dynamic period of Lesotho's history a new appraisal, in part with newly de-classified documents that have only recently become readily accessible.

Methodology

Government records, colonial correspondence and intelligence/police reports form a key pillar of my work, sourced largely from the extensive records kept by the Basutoland government. There is, of course, a real need to read any colonial archive against the grain. As Ann Stoler has convincingly argued, "colonial archives were both transparencies on which power relations were inscribed and intricate technologies of rule in themselves."[166] They are not just repositories of knowledge but reflect the anxieties of the regimes that collected the material in them. Stoler's work invites us to follow an approach to the analysis of colonialism that is more materialist than has hitherto been the norm.[167] Crucially for a study of medicine murder, she notes that archiving is a process that is no less a material component of a colonial rule than the collection of taxes or the suppression of revolts and that the information we are presented when researching has been curated and vetted.

It is important to remember that comparatively more extensive records pertaining to the colonial administration exist other than those that foreground African voices. In addition, such sources can make the state appear much more important to everyday life. Researchers must strike a balance when using the colonial archive that acknowledges the state's often-crucial interventions whilst also not overwhelming the voices of its African subjects. Key to establishing colonial public discussion outside of government records is the press. Journalists' "claims to stand in the eye of the nation" reveal trends that indicate wider discussions, reflecting real events or imagined rumours.[168] Some of the main Basotho newspapers during this period include *Naledi*, founded by Solomon Monne in 1904, as the nation's first independent African black newspaper, and *Mochochonono*, founded in 1911 by Abimael Tlale.[169] Both

[165] 'Transcript on BAC opposition in pitsos,' (21/01/1955), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew).
[166] Stoler, A., L., *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 20.
[167] Rutherford, D., 'Review of *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*,' *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, Vol. 10 (2009) (accessed 15/08/2022).
[168] Billing, M., *Banal Nationalism*, (London: Sage, 1995), 144.
[169] Switzer, L. & Switzer, D., *The Black Press in South Africa and Lesotho*, (Boston: GK Hall, 1979), 77-79.

acted as highly individualised, non-corporate, elite press for literate Basotho drawn from rural, usually Christian, peasant communities and developing urban areas. Other key newspapers distributed in Basutoland included South African periodicals, principally *The Friend*, published in Bloemfontein within the neighbouring Orange Free State, and various British tabloids within the administration. This thesis also makes the occasional use of memoirs from both Basotho and white observers, these aid in providing individualised first-hand accounts that support the archival researcher at specific points.

A fuller picture that demonstrates the self-conscious initiatives of nationalist actors outside of the colonial lens is also required, validated by extensive material produced in the period. The main opposition groups involved in the discussion of medicine murder are LLB, who were led by Josiel Lefela, and the BAC/BCP, who were led by Ntsu Mokhehle. These two groups were most actively engaged in the early nationalist struggle before the establishment of an electoral process and existed during the height of the medicine murder panic.[170] Like most nationalists, they articulated their perspective by promoting a "print language" and produced a significant amount of published material nationwide.[171] These private and public productions exist now in the form of essays, petitions, articles, accounts of witnesses at nationalist rallies, correspondence, declarations and records of meetings. This material provides a rich written picture of the activities of the nationalist groups who made use of colonial weakness during the medicine murder panic.

The historian can rightly question whether the written records of the colonised, which often originated from literate, educated people, necessarily reflect or portray commonly held perceptions, communal attitudes and mass opinions. The case of Basutoland provides a somewhat complex answer. Due to its long history of missionary activity and extensive network of mission primary schools, observers described Basutoland as having, at independence, "one of the highest literacy rates in Africa."[172] However, it is a safe assumption then that while rates certainly rose gradually throughout the period of this study, a large portion of the population remained illiterate.[173] Nationalists, therefore, also had to express their doctrine by harnessing the "persistence of oral traditions" within Basotho society.[174] Whether it was activists delivering political speeches and essays or reciting the newspaper aloud to report the news, reading was also a social event that spread the messages of the literate elite to the illiterate.[175] Despite potential socio-economic differences between authors and their audience, their views and productions as witnesses and active participants of the period remain invaluable. Although

[170] The BNP led by Leabua Jonathan, who would go on to lead the nation to independence, do feature briefly within this story, but as they were founded in 1959, towards the end of the panic and the beginning of inter-nationalist rivalry, they did not offer any sustained commentary on the killings.
[171] Anderson, B., *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1983), 48.
[172] Rosenberg, & Weisfelder, *Historical Dictionary of Lesotho*, 130.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*, 86.
[175] Ibid, 6.

aspects of public opinion will be assessed, including the response to the anti-*liretlo* efforts, the focus is primarily on discourse and the struggle for power between the government and its opponents.

A key decision within this thesis was to produce a study focused primarily on Basutoland and the medicine murder panic that occurred there. The present historiographical emphasis on transnationalism, as imperative to nationalism, has revealed a great deal on the subject and advanced thinking beyond a nation-state perspective.[176] The material links between emerging nationalist parties, along with the real impact of the Cold War on African decolonisation, are rightly highlighted within this scholarship.[177] As Jean Allman surmises, "African decolonisation unfolded as a transnational, not just as an imperial, story, and we must work to capture its multifaceted and multi-sited complexity, from Manchester to Bandung and beyond."[178]

The emphasis in this thesis is just on Basutoland, as opposed to any transnational survey of other instances of similar killings or nationalist groups, has been used given that Basutoland is a specific case in which a medicine murder panic appears to have a significant political impact.[179] However, mine is not purely a binary approach centring on local Lesotho history versus global, transnational history. The impact of events and ideas elsewhere on the continent also certainly had an impact on Lesotho's independence, the ideologies, and political movements elsewhere in Africa were discussed and engaged with by both sides of the political divide.[180] It would be erroneous to argue that Basutoland was unaffected by the political currents that spread across the globe in the era of decolonisation, such as Pan-Africanism or the Cold War. There were, undoubtedly, increased financial pressures on Britain that affected their effort to hold onto the territory and an influence of pan-African thought on the BAC/BCP that also shaped their ideological outlook.[181] The transnational influences that shaped the events surrounding the *liretlo* panic were also largely concentrated around South Africa and the global media

[176] Terretta, M., *Nation of Outlaws, State of Violence: Nationalism, Grassfields Tradition and State Building in Cameroon*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014), Alexander, J., McGregor, J., Tendi, B., eds., *Transnational Histories of Southern Africa's Liberation Movements*, (London: Routledge, 2020), Betz, N., *Diaspora and Nation in the Indian Ocean: Transnational Histories of Race and Urban Space in Tanzania*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2015) & Storm, H., J., 'The Spatial Turn and the History of Nationalism: Nationalism between Regionalism and Transnational Approaches,' in Berger, S. & Storm, E., eds., *Writing the History of Nationalism*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 215-239.
[177] Lee, C., J., ed., *Making a World After Empire: The Bandung Moment and its Political Afterlives*, (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2010), Connelly, M., 'Rethinking the Cold War and Decolonization: The Grand Strategy of the Algerian War for Independence,' *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 33 (2001): 221-245 & Nwaubani, E., *The United States and Decolonization in West Africa, 1950–1960*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2001).
[178] Allman, J., 'African Nationalism and Decolonisation,' 236.
[179] Larmer & Lecocq, 'Historicising nationalism in Africa,' 895.
[180] For a perspective that places Basotho nationalism into some transnational framework within a South African context, see: Leeman, B., *Lesotho and the Struggle for Azania, Volumes 1-2*, (London: University of Azania, PAC Education Office, 1985).
[181] For the relationship between the BCP and Ghana, see: Grilli, M., *Nkrumaism and African Nationalism: Ghana's Pan-African Foreign Policy in the Age of Decolonization*, (London: Palgrave, 2014), 300.

attention the medicine murders garnered that shamed the colonial regime. Although a national story therefore, there are the presence of transnational factors that greatly shaped the overall course of events.

Another choice taken in this thesis can be found in the protagonists of the story that I have chosen to focus on. Although popular responses to the murders in Lesotho are considered, when present in the available archival material, most perspectives that I highlight are 'elite' ones; namely colonial administrators, chiefs and nationalist leaders.[182] Although ordinary Basotho and non-governmental white observers such as missionaries are heard, mostly through private correspondence and in diaries, the majority of material comes from this elite grouping. Focusing on the presence and actions of this selected group allows the impact of medicine murder rhetoric on Basotho nationalism, in both a practical and symbolic sense, to be properly assessed. This framework of political participation facilitates an understanding of the competing perspectives on the killings, imagined by various competing elements of the political elite who were the primary agents of change.

It was the elites who metaphorically had the loudest voices; they appear with greater frequency in the records and are consequently published more. It is here that the major discourses and counter-discourses surrounding the murders competed. This makes a political history that largely focuses on the private correspondence and printed works of the literate elite not only logistically more practical but also thematically appropriate.[183] It allows for a detailed look into the murder propaganda of both sides, used to defend a fracturing colonial power or tear it down. Elites were the main actors competing over the Basotho state and had a big impact relative to their number. Capturing their contribution is vital in assessing the effectiveness and success of nationalist movements.[184]

We can also read these elite rooted sources 'against the grain as it were, to gain insight into the views and lives of people who fall outside documentary evidence. Broader social trends and mass opinions can be pulled from both the rhetoric of the nationalists and the concerns of the colonial elite. One obvious consequence of focusing on the largely literate chiefs, administrators and nationalists are that the views of the majority of politically active Basotho are restricted. Similar to the methodology applied by Pratten, who aimed to show what "the murders and their investigations say about life in colonial Nigeria" while mostly focusing on official criminal reports, I aim to show a broad understanding of Basotho society through official texts.[185] Despite this a significant collection of local figures (lower ranked chiefs, local party organisers, party members or members of more non-partisan

[182] See: Methodology section.
[183] The focus on elite sources has also, regrettably, been shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic and the inability to travel to Lesotho during the research period. Although never intended to be the focus of the Study, I had wanted to utilise more oral history, and greater archival searching in Lesotho. The Methodology section of this introduction expands on these logistical challenges further.
[184] Allen, C., 'Understanding African Politics,' *Review of African Political Economy,* Vol. 22 (1995): 301-320.
[185] Pratten, 20.

political groupings such as those in women's groups, to name a few) are an important background presence who certainly, at times, make themselves known.[186]

Ideally, this elite-focused archival research could be complemented with oral history techniques that ensure the views of the non-literate are directly included.[187] These would allow the voices of those not directly involved in either the nationalist movement or the administration to be heard. However, two factors have led to their exclusion from this thesis. The first is methodologically driven; the distance from the events of the medicine murder panic means that oral history cannot provide a broad enough survey to be the main group of sources for this study. The rich and varied archival material balances the lack of oral histories, which is always ideal for providing first-hand accounts. Similar to Steven Pierce's experience writing *Farmers and Land Tenure in Colonial Kano* I believe that, largely due to the events being significantly in the past, it would have been "impractical to attempt to develop a historical account by using the techniques of oral history" as the main source base.[188] The second is a logistical issue due to the coronavirus pandemic that led to my research trip to Lesotho being delayed for two years, to my final year, and the eventual expedition shortened due to time constraints, from three months to three weeks. The shortening of my research trip made even a cursory oral survey impossible, as I had to prioritise getting all the valuable archival material available. Although I had intended to attempt some oral research with interviews, these would have always been a secondary focus of the thesis compared to the archival work, meaning it did not suffer much due to this unfortunate restriction.

This elite focus, though, has consequently impacted the discussions of gender in the thesis. The nationalist elites, along with most chiefs committing the murders, were men; accordingly, male voices were the most heard. The majority of murderers being men is not necessarily indicative of masculinity being a factor in the murders; the majority of chiefs were men due to male primogeniture, so it stands to reason that more male chiefs would commit murders.[189] Medicine murder, it seems, is not a male phenomenon but a chiefly one. There are examples of women being charged with the crime or being the mastermind behind plots, most prominently the longstanding rumours that surrounded the regent 'Mantšebo.[190] 'Mantšebo is the most prominent woman in the *liretlo* story and Basotho politics during

[186] Ludden, D., in ed. Ludden, D., 'A Brief History of Subalternity,' *Reading Subaltern Studies: Critical History, Contested Meaning and the Globalisation of South Asia*, (London: Anthem Press), 1-43 & Seneviratne, D., G., P., 'Interpreting The Subaltern Voice,' *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Sri Lanka*, Vol. 50 (2004): 1-26.
[187] See Thompson, P., *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 3rd Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
[188] Pierce, S., *Farmers and the State in Colonial Kano: Land Tenure and the Legal Imagination*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 60.
[189] Of 109 persons identified who were conclusively confirmed to be instigators of a crime, only 9 were women. This ratio is in proportion to the number of female chiefs with male chiefs. See: Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 192.
[190] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*, 183.

the period and is the feminine figure who looms largest.[191] Her actions and motivations were, and still are, the subject of a significant debate that will be explored in chapter one.

However, there is a lack of less prestigious female voices in public discourse surrounding the murders and in nationalist productions. Women's participation in politics and in medicine murder occurred "largely off the public record," and consequentially, less archival material featuring their actions exists.[192] This exclusion extends the record left by the BAC/BCP, in essence the main protagonists in this story, who may have professed "a vision of society liberated from racial and sexual discrimination" but repeatedly showed during the late colonial period "an intolerance or disrespect for assertive women."[193] Women's supposed disinterest in politics has led to some outdated historiographical assumptions of Basotho women's "conservatism" or even passivity in response to the national debates at the time.[194] This view should be rejected outright and has been shown to be inaccurate by newer research, particularly that of Francis Makoa and Marc Epprecht.[195] They have demonstrated that while the colonial patriarchy may have limited women's political participation, it did not stop them from participating in public life or political organisations. Despite not leaving as large a footprint as they maybe deserved, reflective of the barriers they faced, Basotho women were a dynamic force that helped shape the medicine murder panic and the subsequent independence movement. Although men feature more prominently, due to the nature of the archival material available, the instances of female participation in politics in chapter three, which I have chosen to highlight, certainly reject the notion that women were "apathetic or conservative by nature."[196]

Lastly, I will be following a periodisation of 1945-1960 as this best represents the period of medicine murder panic, allow for some discussion of its rise, and fall. Studies of decolonization often use the end of World War Two as a starting point.[197] This reflects the reality of the event being

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[191] Jones, G., I., *Basutoland Medicine Murder: A Report on the Recent Outbreak of 'Diretlo' Murders in Basutoland*, (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1951), 15-18 & Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 338.
[192] Epprecht, M., 'Women's 'Conservatism' and the Politics of Gender in Late Colonial Lesotho,' *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 36. (1995): 55.
[193] Ibid.
[194] Ashton, H., *The Basuto: A Social Study of Traditional and Modern Lesotho, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967),* 57 & Spence, J., E., Lesotho: *The Politics of Dependence*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 44.
[195] Epprecht, 'Women's 'Conservatism' and the Politics of Gender in Late Colonial Lesotho,' 29-56, Makoa, F., K., 'Gender and Politics: A Note on Gender Inequality in Lesotho,' *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, Vol.12 (1997): 15-25 & Epprecht, M., 'Domesticity and Piety in Colonial Lesotho: The Private Politics of Basotho Women's Pious Associations,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 19 (1993): 202-224.
[196] Epprecht, 'Women's 'Conservatism' and the Politics of Gender in Late Colonial Lesotho,' 30.
[197] Hyam, R., *Britain's Declining Empire: The Road to Decolonisation*, 1918-1968, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), Darwin, J., *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830–1970*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Darwin, J., *The End of the British Empire: the Historical Debate* (New York: Wiley, 1991), James, L., *Rise and Fall of The British Empire*, (New York, St. Martin's Publishing Group, 1994) & White, N., J., *Decolonisation: the British Experience since 1945* (London; Routledge, 1999) & Roger Louis, W., M., 'The Dissolution of the British Empire,' in eds. Brown, J., et al,

something of a paradigm shift both globally and on the African continent where nationalism would only increase exponentially after the wars end.[198] I will also be adopting a post-1945 periodisation for this study; the reason for its adoption is twofold. Firstly, it represents the beginning of the period where medicine murders were said to have increased (1945-1949).[199] 1945 is the point where reports of killings began to increase in number, although preceding the height of the panic in the late-1940s it is important to show the rise before this apex and then show the fall in cases during the late 1950s. Secondly, studies that feature Basotho nationalism commonly take the post-1952 years after the foundation of the first nationalist party, the Basutoland African Congress (BAC), as a starting point, and there is very little written on Basotho politics in the 1945-1952 years.[200]

Taking 1945 as a starting point not only allows for a detailed survey of the medicine murders but also allows for the entire scope of post-war politics to be better represented. Crucially, the post-war periodisation allows the inclusion of the hitherto neglected activities of *Lekhotla La Bafo* (LLB) (1919-1970), the 'proto-nationalist' forerunner to the first nationalist party, the BAC (founded in 1952 and rebranded as the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) in 1959).[201] Therefore, including these years of the late 1940s offers a challenge to the existing metanarrative surrounding Basotho independence and better allows the medicine murder panic to be represented in its entirety; these killings are the violent heart and unfortunate soul of this study.

Most of the archival sources come from *The National Archives* (London, Kew), the largest repository of documents regarding Basutoland worldwide, which were declassified and transferred by the Foreign Office to Kew during 2012-2016. The overlooked documents in *The National Archives* pertaining to UK propaganda, during the anti-medicine murder campaigns, and the nationalist writings, which discuss medicine murder, form the heart of the thesis. Due to this aforementioned declassification, there is a chance I have viewed archives few if any have before or as complete as they are now. I did extra archival work in England at the *Institute of Commonwealth Studies* (London, Senate House Library), the *Movement for Colonial Freedom Archive* (London, SOAS) and *The Baring Files* (Durham, Palace Green Library). The Lesotho material has been drawn from the *Lesotho National Archive* (Maseru), Morija Museum, *and Archives* (Morija). While all the archives are largely from a distinctly colonial perspective, they provide a landscape from which one can produce an accurate study.

Oxford History of the British Empire Volume IV: The Twentieth Century, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[198] Austin, D., *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964), Hargreaves, J., D., *Decolonization in Africa*, (London: Longman, 1988) & Hodgkin, T., *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, (New York: New York University Press, 1956).

[199] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 60.

[200] See: Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho, 1952-1965*

[201] For a discussion of 'proto-nationalism' as a popular but distinct forerunner to nationalist programmes, see: Hobsbawm, E., *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 46-79.

Chapter Synopsis

This thesis will examine three concurrent aspects of the medical murder panic from 1945 to 1966 through a narrative stretching those years. The use of narrative is a fundamental tool for the historian, often intrinsic to the research to encourage "critical reflection and reflexivity."[202] A narrative was appropriate for this survey as it allowed the thesis to show the different aspects of the same period as interlinked occurrences: the murders, the subsequent British response, and the nationalist reaction to both that response and the murders. All three are interconnected instances and a narrative approach prevents the splitting up of the aspects of my argument and allows me to better emphasise where specific perspectives emerged.

Chapter one provides context into the issue that the nationalists would later politicise and present the origins of the murders themselves. First, it will look at the broader context to the medicine murder panic and trace the history of British administration of Basutoland from 1868 to 1945. It will assess the ways in which the territory was governed, the instruments of power and the various weaknesses inherent in the system. Next, it will trace the origins of the killings, both as a practice and how the socio-economic conditions caused said practice to grow and mutate. The murders had roots in a long tradition of medicine in the mountain kingdom that preceded colonialism, but its deadly modern application was a relatively new and distinctly political occurrence. The chapter assesses the number of dead and whether we can trust that number and the historiographical debates surrounding the origin of the killings. It will also discuss specific events and rivalries that influenced events; particularly 'the battle of the medicine horns' between the regent 'Mantšebo and the former heir Berang Griffith. The chapter is the only non-chronological one and will trace the course of the killings from their origin to better explain the panic that followed them.

Chapter two will then examine the origins of the panic that consumed the nation as the murders increased in number from 1945-1952. Basotho and white society were split over how to tackle the issue, as statements on *liretlo* became caught up in wider debates about Basotho culture. The murders became framed as a clash of civilisations, driven by representations produced by the press, missionaries, and administrators, and indicated a poor colonial understanding of what was occurring. It will then show how the spread of *liretlo* killings was met by a serious and concerted effort by the administration to end the perceived pandemic. It will analyse each of the parts of this effort. Britain's strategy to manage a perceived national crisis consisted of the mobilisation of increasing police powers along with a reform to the criminal code to make it easier to prosecute suspects. Other strategies included propaganda, arrests, and organising Basotho-led advisory boards. The early attempts to rein in the killings were in

[202] Bold, C., *Using Narrative in Research*, (London: SAGE, 2011), 2.

these early years of the panic were at best piecemeal but did establish the colonial response and set the stage for a more comprehensive attempt. Crucially, these early years saw the establishment of a counter narrative that focused in on the failures of the colonial state with the activities of the proto-nationalist LLB. The critique of colonial power articulated by the Basotho opposition would develop over the following fifteen years. However, the early development of the counter-narrative demonstrates that even at the start of the panic opponents of colonialism were taking advantage of the climate of colonial weakness to undermine British rule.

The third chapter will take the years 1952-1956 that saw the panic reach its peak as the coverage of the killings intensified further along with a more interventionist anti-*liretlo* campaign. The panic was in full force and did not appear to be abating at all yet there was a growing, better organised, opposition to the government emerging. In 1952, the founding of the Basutoland African Congress (BAC) gave the anti-colonial struggle a new impetus. They proved far better placed to take advantage of the failures of the British administration chiefly due to their more articulated nationalist vision. The party advanced LLB's *liretlo* messaging to take advantage of the disruption in governmental authority and used widespread dissatisfaction with the government's management of the killings as a tool to mobilise against colonial rule. The height of the panic was a fertile time for the group who were able to grow a great deal of support thanks to this broader context. Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates how most officials wanted a bureaucratic answer when the solution was more material. The state's unwillingness to undertake radical change ensured that the much-needed transformations needed to heal the deep-rooted causes that were causing the murders to occur did not happen. Consequently, the anti-*liretlo* efforts failed spectacularly. This public and humiliating failure irrevocably led to a decline in colonial authority and damaged British legitimacy within Basutoland. This chapter will explore the colonial perceptions of *liretlo* in-depth, revealing that the state's poor understanding of the crisis reflected its weakness and the limitations it had to project authority over a population rejecting the foundations of colonial rule.

The final chapter looks at the years 1956-1960, which saw two distinct retreats of colonial power define the final years of the medicine murder panic. The first is the end of the anti-*liretlo* campaign and the decision by the colonial state to ignore the killings instead of tackling them. This indicated a failure to recognise the limited capabilities of the Basutoland state to undertake such a campaign and overconfidence in believing it could stop the killings. The second is the beginning of the process of decolonization, thanks to the pressure caused by BAC agitation. This was through the ceding of power to the Basotho through the 1960 election and the beginning of independence negotiations, the electioneering of the campaign focused on Basutoland's future and effectively relegated the medicine murder panic to the past. Evidently, the medicine murder panic only held political relevance when the weak colonial state was trying to impose its authority; when decolonization approached the killings no longer held the same importance and the panic finally subsided. Medicine murder would not be an issue

capable of holding the nationalist coalition together, however. The signals from Britain that independence was a question of when not if, and the establishment of electoral politics led to an abandonment of *liretlo* as a political issue as it was no longer advantageous for the nationalists to attack Britain, instead focusing on each other. The establishment of the BNP in 1959 and the 1960 election proved to be the death knell of *liretlo* as a major national issue.

Chapter 1: Colonial Power, the Origin of 'Medicine Murders' and a Chieftaincy in Revolt

The murder of Johnathan Masupha in January 1945 put the residents of Tabola, his village within the Leribe district, in a state of shock. The region had experienced murders before but administrators reported the mood after this one seemed different, more sombre and reserved.[1] Masupha had been a popular man, known locally for his generosity and "good humour," and his murder seemingly left those who had known him in a daze.[2] The Leribe district commissioner reported as such upon visiting the district;

> "The villages surrounding camp are all aware of the situation and confine themselves to their huts at night, there being unprecedented stillness and lack of hilarity between sunset and sunrise… the local population is being terrorised at the moment. There is no doubt that the chiefs could stop it. I fear many of who have been killed has been to acquire medicine, a belief, apparently, still widely held. Flesh from a person who died naturally or non-violently is held to be useless."[3]

Killings like these would come to be a regular occurrence in Basutoland but in 1945, they were still relatively uncommon and not yet occurring in the sensationalist climate of moral panic that would erupt late in the decade. This may explain the shocked response to Masupha's death within Leribe.

Assailants had attacked Masupha outside near his home with various cuts made by an edged instrument, such as a knife, and missing body parts recorded by the coroner.[4] The body had been dumped over a cliff and left for animals to pick at, a common method murderers often used to dispose of bodies. The body was found by another unnamed resident of Tabola, who alerted the police who began an investigation, initially not identifying *liretlo* as the motive.[5] Officers interviewed local people, collating rumours and innuendo, with their efforts revealing some interesting conclusions. The murder it seems had been undertaken by a Chief Lagden Majara in connection to the placing of a rival, the chief desiring Masupha's flesh to fortify his own position in the face of an anticipated challenge to his position.[6] There would not be enough evidence to charge, let alone convict, Chief Majara despite him being the main suspect, leaving Masupha's murder ultimately unsolved.

Charles Arden-Clarke, then acting as Basutoland's resident commissioner, interviewed chiefs from the district to hear their response to the murder's impact.[7] He warned the chiefs that he was

[1] 'Leribe District Commissioner (DC) to Resident Commissioner (RC),' 02/01/1945, FCO 141/482, *The National Archives* (*TNA*).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] 'Tabola case notes,' (26/02/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA*.
[6] 'Leribe DC to RC,' 02/01/1945, FCO 141/482, *The National Archives* (*TNA*).
[7] 'Interview between RC and chiefs,' (08/01/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA*.

"concerned" and that they would need to "consider the matter and make suggestions as to the best method for overcoming the evil in their district."[8] Arden-Clarke called on those "in close touch with Basuto customs" to use that knowledge to ward against the crime through reminding their subjects of "the good governance of Moshoeshoe," Basutoland's first king.[9] In essence, Arden-Clarke was ordering these chiefs, nominal functionaries within the imperial administration, to aid in stamping out further murders and lessen the fear felt by the people of Leribe. This was a test of his authority, whether the chiefs would respond to this would indicate how much power he wielded over them. Ultimately, the chief's action would prove that colonial authority was not what Arden-Clarke perhaps believed it to be.

Those same chiefs interviewed would later be linked with a coordinated campaign to intimidate local peasants and quash any discussion of Masupha's premature death.[10] A report by the District Commissioner summarising the aftermath of the case noted that;

> "The reputation of those chiefs intimidating the people of Tabola are those of most quarrelsome men. There is no doubt these allegations are a thorn in the side of their prestige, many suspecting other chiefs as playing a hand in the killing. This report reflects a deplorable state of affairs in the small area concerned… it was suspected it [the murder of Masupha] was witchcraft but the perpetrators were never bought to book."[11]

It would seem then, far from heeding the advice of Arden-Clarke, chiefs in Tabola were creating the perfect conditions for another murder to occur and more flesh to be extracted at a later date. In this relatively early crime during the period of the panic, a set pattern that would be seen in hundreds of other cases was easily identifiable; murder for personal gain, police inability to identify the culprit and chiefly resistance against any attempt to limit their authority.

The killing of Masupha and the contested aftermath was one sad episode of many during the late colonial period in Basutoland. Just what exactly drove the killer's motivations and why he exactly targeted his victim is unknown. Yet, as this chapter will explore, murders like these form a pattern that reveal much about their nature. The development of medicine murder occurred in a specific colonial context of decades of British misrule; one that ensured the colonial state would struggle to manage the killings and limit their number. Medicine murder not a new or uniquely Basotho phenomenon. As stated in the introduction it is a regional phenomenon and there were cases in Basutoland from 19th century. The existing beliefs in the power of medicines, the consumption of flesh holding a "striking resonance in Basotho Folklore and history," would certainly provide what would become medicine murder a basis in existing traditions.[12] However, specific trends within Basotho would help in the transformation of a

[8] Ibid.
[9] Ibid.
[10] 'Tabola case notes,' (26/02/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA*.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Murray, C., & Sanders, P., Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho: The Anatomy of a Moral Crisis, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 177.

relatively rare, formally wartime, practice into a widespread pandemic that so deeply affected society during the 1940s and 1950s. Namely, as Eldredge states, some immediate pressures in the post war climate would help shape the expansion of killings;

> "In the 1940s Basotho chiefs threatened by a loss of privilege and power abandoned the use of rhetoric, discourse, law, and the courts to achieve their ends and found ways to use fear to accomplish their goal of retaining their positions of authority and control."[13]

In this context, medicine murder was an effective tool of control, a way to enforce compliance and gain leverage over those who believed in the power of these medicines. Even those who did not believe in the metaphysical effects of medicine could be silenced through the spread of terror. The fear created by the killings was intended to create acquiescence and assist those in power in their efforts to continue staying in power. The declining authority of the chieftaincy and the lack of broader colonial power to keep them in check shifted the nature of *liretlo* toward this alarming status quo and led to the practice becoming more widespread than before. Chieftaincy was especially important to the British system of rule in Basutoland as funds were few and far between. Colonial administrators in charge of constructing the state therefore held the assumption that "chiefs represented their people and could be used both to transmit and enforce colonial policies from the top down and transmit and support popular interests from the bottom up."[14] However, the status of chiefs within the colonial society may have rose initially but their customary position deteriorated dramatically as the colonial period went on.

Medicine murder indicates that this relationship had broken down due to decades of mismanagement, poor governance, and the immediate impact of a destructive chieftaincy reform. This context of social upheaval, within "British-style modes of indirect rule in which the identity and authority of chiefs in relatively decentralised societies was reconfigured," was identified by David Pratten as being a major factor that preceded the leopard-man murders in Nigeria.[15] Furthermore, the fact that these restless chiefs felt able to commit these killing in "a challenge to colonial authority," feeling they had relative impunity from prosecution, indicates the limits of imperial power.[16] The origins of the 'medicine murders' that shook the nation during the panic should therefore be viewed as having three components in their construction; a broad context of 'benign' neglect that established the chieftaincy as the main instrument of colonial governance; the existing beliefs in the power of flesh consumption; and, finally, the immediate context of the 1940s, particularly the chieftaincy reforms of 1938/1946 and the conflict within the upper echelons of the chieftaincy. These long, medium, and short-term factors would help create the perfect climate for a spate of ritualized killings to occur. The fact

[13] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa, Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 168.
[14] Ibid, 184.
[15] Pratten, D., *Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 22.
[16] Ibid, 217.

that it was chiefs, ostensibly the backbone of the administration, engaging in *liretlo* also meant that British authority over the protectorate would be intricately involved with their ability to stop the murders, a challenge they would ultimately prove unable to meet.

This chapter consists of five sections. The first offers a broad overview of Basutoland's colonial history immediately preceding the medicine murder panic. It pays attention specifically to the nature of the colonial state in Basutoland, the way it was fashioned, its relationship to the chieftaincy and, crucially, the many fragilities that made it particularly vulnerable to the medicine murder panic. The next three are an examination of the origins of the practice of medicine murder and how it spread to become widespread after 1945. These sections demonstrate that a combination of long, medium, and short-term factors created the conditions for the expansion of killings. The final section will assess the debate over the origins of the murders in detail and weigh up the statistical evidence surrounding the rise in cases.

Colonial Power and 'Benign' Neglect within Basutoland, 1868-1945

The dual dynamics of white colonization and colonialism through conquest, which affected Southern Africa as a region so totally during the late 19th century, moulded the fledging Basotho kingdom from its birth. Basutoland formed part of a triumvirate of states that included Bechuanaland, modern-day Botswana, and Swaziland, the recently rechristened Eswatini. These nations, which existed both in the border regions of South Africa and within the British imperial system, were dubbed the High Commission Territories (HCTs). This nomenclature refers to the fact that each was separate, somewhat autonomous, with their own Resident Commissioners, territories but under the oversight of the South African High Commissioner.[17] In each instance, British jurisdiction was extended reluctantly throughout the latter half of the 19th century, Britain annexing the territories primarily for geostrategic reasons.[18] The broader "conflict between Boer and Briton beyond the borders of the three territories made it a necessary, if not particularly attractive, move on the South African chess-board" to seize the HCTs.[19] Successive British governments argued that the future status of the HCTs was uncertain, particularly because of South Africa's repeated claim that the territories were geographically part of the Union and largely dependent on the latter's economy.[20] Similar forces shaped each HCT: all three share a common heritage in the history of being ruled indirectly by Britain within the broader orbit of South Africa.

[17] Spence, J., E., 'British Policy towards the High Commission Territories,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.2 (1964): 221-246.
[18] Gill, S., J., *A Short History of Lesotho,* (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 2010), 115-118.
[19] Spence, 'British Policy towards the High Commission Territories,' 221.
[20] Ibid.

The major ethnic group of Basutoland/Lesotho are the *Basotho*, who predominantly speak *Sesotho*.[21] An individual member of the nation is referred to as a *Mosotho*.[22] The kingdom has been noted as unusual within British Africa for existing as "a monocultural nation" before colonial rule rather than "a not yet existing nation out of a cultural plurality."[23] The reality is far more complex, as John Arnei-Flessner notes the experience of the Basotho is far closer to the rest of the continent than this rather narrow view would suggest;

> "While Lesotho is often seen as exceptional on the continent for its supposed ethnic homogeneity, the created nature of the Basotho national community… 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."[24]

Arnei-Flessner demonstrates that Basutoland's homogeneity masks a great deal of societal diversity, such as clan ties, regional identity, language or dialect differences and ethnic origin, particularly the large communities of Xhosa origin in the nation's southern region.[25] As he notes; "while most people in Lesotho identified themselves as Basotho from the nineteenth century, this term oversimplified the diverse backgrounds of the population."[26] Despite this, one can point to a strong and definable Basotho identity that emerges in the 19th century that does mark Lesotho with a particularly sturdy national consciousness. The experience of these formative years, particularly the "threat of the incorporation of Lesotho's territory into the Union of South Africa" and a powerful autonomous chieftaincy, acted as uniting forces that helped form an identifiable and integrated Sotho community during the 19th century.[27]

Before the protectorate was established, the nation underwent a period of consolidation in the wider context of the expansion of the Zulu kingdom, also known as the Mfecane, during the 1830s under the rule of its founder, Moshoeshoe I.[28] Moshoeshoe's strength lay in his ability to incorporate the existing decentralised Sotho-speaking polities under individual chiefdoms into his kingdom within a "hierarchy of chiefs."[29] Chiefs under Moshoeshoe retained their courts (*makhotla*), using these to settle subjects' disputes under their local interpretations of laws and customs.[30] For his part, Moshoeshoe

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[21] Machobane, L., B., B., J., *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), xvii.
[22] Ibid.
[23] Coplan, D., B., and Quinlan, T., 'A Chief by the People Nation versus State in Lesotho,' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (1997): 60.
[24] Aerni-Flessner, J., *Dreams for Lesotho: Independence, Foreign Assistance, and Development*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 19-21.
[25] Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 66-68.
[26] Arnei-Flessner, *Dreams for Lesotho*, 19-21.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 65.
[29] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966*, ix.
[30] Maliehe, S., 'Money and Markets For and Against the People: The Rise and Fall of Basotho's Economic Independence, 1930s-1930s,' in ed. Hart, K., *Money in a Human Economy*, (New York: Berghahn, 2017), 233.

held himself accountable to the chiefs and made it clear he was also subject to customary law; his public actions invited scrutiny and discussion. The *pitso*, customary gatherings where commoners could air their opinions on chiefly or government decisions, became a major check on royal power and a byword for accountability.[31] The institutions and traditions formulated by Moshoeshoe helped create a consolidated authority with a strong decentralised chieftaincy.

Chiefly authority over land proved to be a key marker of the nation's autonomy from its neighbours and "was very closely linked to Basotho's political independence."[32] This may have Moshoeshoe's most important legacy as it played a more significant part in ensuring the Basotho were not swallowed up like their African neighbours by the white states of the region. Basotho chieftainship "became an expression of national identity… which reflected the realities of people's existence on the margins of a regional society," as chiefs were commoners' main conduit to any countrywide authority.[33] Unlike their compatriots, the Swazi, the Basotho never saw any large-scale movement of settlers into the kingdom.[34] The land remained firmly within the control of the nation through the chiefs and the "traditional land tenure arrangements" they held with their subjects.[35] Chiefs could allocate available lands under them to whoever was deemed and were the ultimate authority in any disputes, making them powerful local figures.[36]

This customary control provided stability and shaped the Basotho chieftaincy into a hierarchical and hereditary institution; headed by the decedents of Moshoeshoe with their various sons below them. Its ruling caste can broadly "can mapped family accurately onto the genealogical structure of the house of Moshoeshoe."[37] The hierarchy of Basotho chiefs can broadly be divided into an upper chieftaincy, consisting of the district chiefs and the royal family, and a lower chieftaincy.[38] The lower chieftaincy was a much more diverse grouping, from senior ward chiefs with thousands under their authority, with lesser chiefs underneath them stretching to headmen who were barely above an ordinary commoner.[39] The rest of Basotho who did not have a hereditary title can be grouped broadly under the heading of commoner. This classification is diverse and covers anyone from a peasant employed in labouring or

[31] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966*, ix.
[32] Thabane, M., *Who Owns the Land in Lesotho'! Land Disputes and the Politics of Land*, (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 1998), 1.
[33] Quinlan, T., 'The State and National Identity in Lesotho,' *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, Vol.28 (1996): 392.
[34] Macmillan, H., 'Swaziland Decolonisation and the Triumph of Tradition,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 23 (1985): 643-666.
[35] Thabane, *Who Owns the Land*, 6-9.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Hammet, I., *Chieftainship and Legitimacy: An Anthropological Study of Executive Law in Lesotho*, (London: Routledge, 1975), 25-26.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.

subsistent farming to a member of the middle-class *bahlalefi*, largely western educated professionals such as teachers.[40]

The paradigmatic model for chiefs was Moshoeshoe himself whose rule, in particular, stood apart in the minds of Basotho from the lax morals of the later colonial chiefs. Basotho held a great deal of admiration for this pre-colonial period for the chieftaincy, as this Lekhotla La Bafo (LLB) praise song from 1939 illustrates:

> The leadership of ours
>
> The chieftainship of the Basotho
>
> The leadership that safeguards
>
> The rights of the nation
>
> It originates from Moshoeshoe.[41]

National leaders therefore have held this pre-colonial period as a golden age for chieftaincy. Although this view is certainly idealised and detached from the actual experiences for the 19th century, as will be seen later in this chapter, compared with what the chieftaincy became, it is not entirely inaccurate.

After twenty years of lobbying the British for an alliance, under siege from Boer forces from the Free State, the 80-year-old Moshoeshoe received a letter in January 1868 that informed him the queen had been "graciously pleased" to welcome him and his people as "subjects of the British Throne."[42] The white settlers had desired the fertile land that Basotho occupied between the Vaal River and the Caledon River; territory that constitutes a large portion of the current Free State province in South Africa.[43] The threat to Basotho security was so great that Moshoeshoe was willing to concede significant territorial claims for the sake of peace, the final borders of his kingdom stretching from the Cape to the Orange Free State. Requesting to become a British protectorate was, therefore, a calculated decision on the monarch's part. Having observed the seizure of African land within the Natal, the Basotho had a "preference to be colonised by the Cape or England" as "the Natal government not only destroyed the political institutions of those it ruled but also alienated their land."[44]

British negotiators interpreted this inclination to mean the nation should not be ceded to the crown but should become a protectorate, effectively a colony with nominal internal autonomy, with the retention of the pre-colonial hierarchy.[45] However, British officials saw little difference between a

[40] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966*, 187.
[41] 'LLB Praise Song' (1939) in Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, 12.
[42] Sanders, P., *Throwing Down White Man: Cape Rule and Misrule in Colonial Lesotho, 1871-1884*, (London: The Merlin Press Ltd, 2011), 11.
[43] Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 105-110.
[44] Thabane, *Who Owns the Land*, 1.
[45] Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 108-109.

colony and a protectorate and believed the treaty signing guaranteed absolute British sovereignty over the kingdom. As the British foreign secretary noted in a 1946 memorandum to the Basutoland colonial administration; "despite the status of a protectorate bestowed upon Basutoland, the kingdom doesn't have special status and is should be administered as ably as any crown colony."[46] For the Basotho, however, this request had a far greater political significance; Britain was expected only to "protect, not control," something which inevitably did not come to pass.[47] The treaty's signing gave Basutoland the unique experience of being referred to by different historical actors concurrently as a colony, a protectorate and a kingdom, with all this nomenclature technically being correct.[48]

During the early years of British rule, the indigenous administration governed as if the institutions of governance worked "without marked deterioration from the way they worked in the past."[49] In actuality, there were significant changes and the establishment of an administrative system that, while reformed and expanded, would last until independence. The governmental pattern established by Moshoeshoe, had balanced "oligarchic and democratic facets," allowing "both upward and downward communication between ruler and ruled" and also seemingly reconciled both "centralizing and centrifugal forces."[50] Nevertheless, this style of rule would not survive. The underlying features of this system meant that its foundations were "intensely personal, rather than institutional" meaning that the death of Moshoeshoe in 1869 as Britain established the bare outline of colonial institutions ended the old style of rule.[51]

In its place was a more legalized hierarchy, with defined regional divisions and limits on the legal authority of the king. At first, the country was split into three districts that was soon increased in 1871 to four; Leribe, Berea, Thaba-Bosiu and Cornet Spruit.[52] The number of districts would gradually increase throughout the years, reorganisation expanding the number to six in 1905 and then nine in 1944; Berea, Butha-Buthe, Leribe, Mafeteng, Maseru, Mohale's Hoek, Mokhotlong, Qacha's Nek and Quthing. Each district was headed by both a District Commissioner and a senior chief. Under each were subordinates, in the Commissioners case various magistrates and aides who helped him run the district and in the senior chief's case a hierarchal network of other chiefs.

Above these was the Resident Commissioner and the king, in an unequal partnership that greatly favoured the British. While the king could petition and request changes to national policy, his authority was severely limited;

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[46] 'Letter from foreign secretary,' (02/06/1946), DO 35/1177, *TNA* (Kew).
[47] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, x.
[48] Spence J., E., 'The New States of Southern Africa,' *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 5 (1967): 541-555.
[49] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, x.
[50] Weisfelder R., F. quoted in Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 115.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Sanders, *Throwing Down White Man*, 20.

> "Although the indigenous government of Lesotho was allowed to view itself as making laws, and notwithstanding the fact that those laws applied in the indigenous courts, they were not recognised as part of the general law."[53]

Neither the Resident Commissioner nor the king were the ultimate authority in the protectorate, however. At the head of the administration was the High Commissioner based in South Africa, also shared by the administrations of Bechuanaland and Swaziland. These High Commissioners, while not directly involved in the day to day running of the administrative affairs, could have a significant influence on Basutoland. High Commissioner Evelyn Baring for example, in the role from 1944-1951, largely determined the medicine murder response for the years he was in charge.[54] The level of influence that various Resident and High Commissioners held in relation to the other would fluctuate throughout the years, depending on the personalities of individuals and other regional factors, but both were vital to Britain's control of the subjugated kingdom.

In 1871, with the aim of reducing the cost of administrating the territory on Westminster, Basutoland was handed over to be governed by the Cape colonial government who further weakened the social institutions and relative autonomy Basotho had managed to retain since Moshoeshoe's death.[55] The Cape government introduced laws to undermine Basotho's economic autonomy through the Mercantile Law of 1871, which made it obligatory to have a licence to conduct trade and, most crucially, the Peace Preservation Act in 1878, which required Basotho to surrender their arms to the state.[56] A successful Basotho rebellion from 1880-1881, termed the Gun War, resulted from this attempted suppression and the Cape's military failure resulted in it retroceding the territory back to Britain in 1884.[57] Following consultations with senior chiefs, the nation again became a protectorate under a British High Commissioner.[58] Peter Sanders has described the victory of Basotho rebels over the Cape military as "one of the great turning points of the Basotho's history" and the "triumph of the chiefs" who opposed the annexation.[59] The Gun War's legacy is significant as it ensured that Basutoland's status as a protectorate remained intact. Its long reach can be seen nearly eighty years later in LLB leader Josiel Lefela's 1961 petition to the United Nations; "we are not a colony of England, and we debate we have ever been."[60]

The Gun War ensured Basotho had kept their land independent, but it had another significant impact. The victory over a centralising Cape, which imposed a much more direct governance of the

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[53] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, 200.
[54] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho,* 93.
[55] Maliehe, S., 'Money and Markets For and Against the People,' 236-237.
[56] Maliehe, S., 'An obscured narrative in the political economy of colonial commerce in Lesotho, 1870–1966,' *Historia*, Vol.59 (2014): 31.
[57] Sanders, *Throwing Down White Man*, 259-270.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Lefela, J., 'Basutoland Memorandum,' (April 1961), ICS 4, *Institute of Commonwealth Studies* (ICS), London.

kingdom, ensured that chiefs "retained much of their old power" under the re-established indirect British one.[61] Britain reinforced this power in 1903 by creating the Basutoland National Council (BNC), a forum of chiefs that replaced the national *pitso*, the only Basotho voice within the colonial government aside from the king until 1960.[62] Members of the BNC hoped to facilitate the formation of the protectorate's internal policy "to effect a two-way communication between the colonial staff and the people" through the chiefs.[63] In actuality, the council cemented the confusing status of parallel administration between the indigenous institutions and the administration. The status of the council was constitutionally anomalous, it was not intended to have legislative functions, and could officially only offer advice to the Resident Commissioner. Regardless, it passed numerous customary laws whose legal status was unclear.

The legal system was similarly muddled, the General Law Proclamation on 29 May 1884 divided Basutoland's legal system between the "native administration" and the British crown.[64] The chiefs applied the "Laws of Letrotholi" in their courts, which the BNC codified in 1903, that dealt with customary matters such as land ownership or succession.[65] This indigenous tradition ran parallel to the colonial legal system, which based itself on Cape Common Law, a synthesis of Roman-Dutch and English legal traditions, and had authority over matters outside the chief's local jurisdiction, such as serious crime.[66] The debate over whether Sotho customary law was a proper legal code or a set of customs, therefore part of statutory law, was a constant bugbear for the administration and one they would never truly solve. The administration rejected an opportunity in 1944 to create a single legal system, after which white courts reserved the ultimate "authority to dictate what does and what does not correctly set out customary law; yet still devolved a lot of the responsibility for the day to day application of local law to the chiefs."[67]

Chieftaincy therefore remained at the heart of colonial power transactions, the ways in which Britain negotiated their control, as the leading intermediary between Britain and the Basotho.[68] Chiefs were vital for the British government to administer the kingdom, from the national to the local level, partly due to the adoption of "benign neglect" as a governing philosophy.[69] In essence, Britain had

[61] Sanders, *Throwing Down White Man*, 6.
[62] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, 76.
[63] Ibid, xi.
[64] Beardsley, J., E., 'The Common Law in Lesotho,' *Journal of African Law*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (1970): 128.
[65] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, 89.
[66] Beardsley, 'The Common Law in Lesotho,' 135.
[67] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, 211.
[67] 'Teyateyaneng DC to RC,' (02/01/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[67] Beardsley, 'The Common Law in Lesotho,' 128.
[67] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, 89.
[67] Beardsley, 'The Common Law in Lesotho,' 135.
[67] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho*, 211.
[68] Rosenberg, S., *Promises of Moshoeshoe: Culture, Nationalism and Identity in Lesotho*, (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2008), 1-16.
[69] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 13-16.

implemented an indirect rule policy that aimed at providing the Basotho with the opportunity, without much British funding, to develop "sanely and securely along their own ethos."[70] Colonial administrations that followed this principle aimed to preserve what they saw as traditional institutions, often at the expense of creating a functioning state or economy. British power rested on adapting these traditional elements for new purposes, and British rule transformed how the Basotho experienced the application of state authority.

The colonial administration could never hold precise control over the population without the support of the indigenous elite.[71] Basutoland, on its own terms, was not a well-run administration as, on the ground, the theoretically co-dependent relationship of chiefs and administrators was "implemented haphazardly," but in many ways, that was by design.[72] One instance of this poor governance can be found in the failure of the state to adequately provide funds to the Basutoland Cooperative Banking Union, established with government cooperation in 1958 to help farmers modernise their agricultural methods.[73] Despite having support from the highest echelons of the Basutoland governance the state failed to provide financial support, leading to the enterprise relying on £20,000 from Oxfam famine relief to prevent it from failing.[74] The whole enterprise was described by Jack Halpern as being "a telling commentary on the British Government's unimaginative meanness towards Basutoland."[75]

Beyond occasional British rhetoric that it was guarding the Basotho way of life, there was an absence of material investment and a severe lack of long-term planning of what to do with the kingdom. As M. Thabane reinforces, the development of a modern functioning state was not to the benefit of the colonisers, hence a continued policy of neglect;

> "Although Basotho were seen as a potential market for British goods, an important source of labour for various colonial construction projects and suppliers of grain to settler communities, Lesotho had no known mineral resources that could be developed. This in turn meant there was no need to build an infrastructure to facilitate the exploitation of such resources."[76]

The question of incorporation into South Africa also hung over any discussions of the territory's future and likely aided in the malaise that defined the British administration. Although there were attempts at reform, notably the chieftaincy reforms of the 1930s and 1940s, they were either too late or applied

[70] Ibid.
[71] Lawrance, B., N., Osborn, E., L., and Roberts, L., R., eds., *Intermediaries, Interpreters, and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2015).
[72] Machobane, *Government and Change*, xii.
[73] Halpern, J., *South Africa's Hostages: Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland*, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), 192.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Thabane., M., 'Aspects of Colonial Economy and Society, 1868-1966,' in eds. Pule, N., W. & Thabane, T., *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (Morija, University of Lesotho, 2002), 103.

hastily. Even more so than its contemporary Bechuanaland, which saw some significant infrastructure investment during the 1930s, Basutoland can be considered a largely peripheral "Cinderella colony."[77]

It would be wrong to say that colonial rule was a passive force in Basutoland, however. It changed a great deal despite a generalised lack of investment in the territory. The shifting nature of economic relations toward a capitalist market exchange and the flow of Basotho labour to South African mines were transformative trends beyond the scope of individual policymakers.[78] Although there were no laws that insisted on this labour migration, the colonial state was ultimately to blame. An amalgam of factors, primarily colonial taxation, the promise of higher wages and the unregulated market of private labour recruiters, led to large numbers of Basotho moving abroad throughout the late 19th and early 20th century.[79] However, from the 1920s onward, there was a shift, and this migration became necessary rather than discretionary. The reason for this can be found in the changing fortunes of Basotho agriculture and a British government who did little to protect their new, nominally autonomous subjects, from hostile outside economic forces.

The Basotho people, like the other indigenous peoples of the area, practised a mixed economy of cultivation, pastoralism, hunting, gathering, and raiding.[80] In general however, despite the importance of domesticated animals such as cattle within society as a symbol of status, Basotho throughout the late 19th century and the early 20th were far more dependent upon cultivation than pastoralism for their survival. This was in part a result of the difficulties faced in the physical environment, the kingdom being largely mountainous, making large scale cattle farming difficult, and a direct outcome of the loss of the best grazing lands in 1869 to the Boers. Basotho primarily planted sorghum, beans, peas, maize and wheat, which are still the principal crops of Lesotho to this day, and were regularly able to produce a surplus for export.[81]

Lesotho, much like the neighbouring Free State, is not well supplied with significant deposits of surface copper and iron meaning during the early colonial period it had to import ore from more mineral rich areas, primarily the Natal and the Transvaal.[82] Through this trade though Basotho produced numerous craft items, such as jewellery, tools or weapons, which were another significant export.[83] This mixed and varied economy, with a foundation in agricultural prosperity but reinforced by cottage metalwork industries, provided Basotho "a stable diet and increasing wealth."[84] During much of the late

[77] Steenkamp, P., 'Cinderella of the Empire?': Development Policy in Bechuanaland in the 1930s,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 17, (1991): 292-308.
[78] Kimble, J., *Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule in Basutoland*.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 45.
[81] Ibid, 45-46.
[82] Ibid.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid.

19th century Basotho therefore out-produced many white farmers in the region.[85] The kingdom was even described in 1863 as "the granary of the Free State and parts of the (Cape) colony," with it supplying the needs of distant mining towns hundreds of miles away.[86]

However, the agricultural boom did not last. The imposition of South African tariffs in 1911 and the lean drought years of the 1920s/1930s, worsened by the global slump during the great depression, caused the price of exported Basotho goods to drop rapidly and the price of imported goods to rise.[87] During the early twentieth century, subsistence farming was no longer the profitable or economically sustainable way of life it had been. Sean Maliehe argued that thanks to the switch in colonial commerce Basutoland had lost its "economic independence" in a relatively short period of time.[88] He suggests that the destruction of the viability of subsistence farming as a primary means of supporting a household should be viewed as the main reason for Basotho leaving their homes to work in the mines they once supplied.[89] Britain may never have forced the Basotho to mine through legislation, but colonial policy engineered an environment where working in the mines was the only way to survive or profit.

In 1911, a census recorded 25,000 Basotho seeking employment in South Africa, whilst in 1936 the same survey recorded 101,000, an increase from 5.8% of the population to 15.3%.[90] Any such survey however were limited in scope, not including workers in the informal economy, and the figure for those working abroad was likely much higher. Migration was not solely a male occurrence; women also participated in this exchange by getting employment in South Africa or moving to border areas to provide beer, engage in prostitution or run small businesses that supplied those crossing the border.[91] The state tried to regulate it with the support of chiefs and petty bourgeois, including in 1928 when a law was passed against "vagrancy" that made it a crime for women to travel without an escort.[92] These attempts had little effect, thanks partly to a passive resistance campaign that included refusing to pay fines.[93] Although labour migration broadly had a damaging impact on Basutoland, it allowed many women to escape patriarchal control within their communities and provided a previously unobtainable level of autonomous existence.

Regardless, that over 50% of adult men in 1929 were active in the South African mines indicates to Colin Murray "that most rural households had long since come to depend on migration as a necessary

[85] Germond, R., C., *Chronicles of Basutoland*, (Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Deposit, 1967), 459.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Kimble, J., *Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule in Basutoland*, 143.
[88] Maliehe, S., *Commerce as Politics: The Two Centuries of Struggle for Basotho Economic Independence*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2021), 35-53.
[89] Ibid, 178-179.
[90] Edgar, R., *Prophets with Honour*, 6.
[91] Maloka, T., 'Khomo Lia Oela: Canteens, Brothels and Labour Migrancy in Colonial Lesotho, 1900–40,' *The Journal of African History*, Vol.38, (1997): 101-122.
[92] Ibid, 117-118.
[93] Ibid.

element in their strategies of survival."[94] As Lefela argued in 1947, the colonial economic practice was "a new form of civilised brutality of an unparalleled description... In all respects, this country no longer belongs to us."[95] The extent to which the Basotho economy shrank during this period is stark. In 1926-1929 Basutoland's exports were worth £811,057 but this had declined to £301,872 in 1930-1933.[96] Basutoland's economy would not recover to its late 1920s levels until after the end of World War Two, from being a net exporter of grain at the start of the 1920s it became a net importer by the 1930s.[97]

Colonial policy and the integration of Basutoland's economy into the orbit of South African capitalism made the nation victim to market forces and global trends. As Julie Kimble argues, this economic shift had an overwhelming effect;

> "By the 1920s, conditions had changed within both the capitalist and the non-capitalist modes of production. In Basutoland, there were now diminishing returns and lowered levels of subsistence. Market prices for grain were fluctuating more and there was severe inflation at home... A man who could previously send his son out [to the mines] to earn his own tax money was now forced to send him out for twice as long."[98]

Throughout the 20th century, it became harder and harder for a Mosotho to earn a living in Basutoland. The colonial rationale that their system of indirect rule would allow the Basotho to develop along their lines had not stood the test of reality.

It took decades of steady economic and governmental decline for Moshoeshoe's kingdom to become the Basutoland of the 20th century. British rule had brought Basutoland into a wider orbit of imperial relations but also made it a part of a much greater system of exploitation. The location of Basutoland ensured it was on the colonial periphery, an unimportant backwater to policymakers in London. Still, it was paradoxically integrated into South Africa's mining economy. The ability of Basotho to earn a living through labour migration to the mines of the Witwatersrand and elsewhere removed Britain's responsibility to build a functioning domestic economy. Cheap Basotho labour, prized by labour-recruiting agencies as "Basutoland ebony," was a far more valuable resource to imperial power than anything Basutoland could produce.[99] Letting the kingdom's economy and political system decline and stagnate due to negligence benefitted the broader forces of colonial hegemony.

Compounding this trend, the continued implementation of benign neglect as a policy meant there was little actual administration within Basutoland, the protectorate was governed with a skeletal

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[94] Murray, C., 'From Granary to Labour Reserve: An Economic History of Lesotho,' *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol.6 (1980): 9.
[95] Lefela, J., 'Basutoland National Council (BNC) 43rd Session 1947,' in Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, 17.
[96] Kimble, J., *Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule in Basutoland*, 250.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Maloka, E., T., *Basotho and the Mines. A Social History of Labour Migrancy in Lesotho and South Africa, c. 1890–1940*, (Codesria: Dakar, 2004).

force that relied particularly heavily on intermediaries.[100] Within colonial administrations broadly, "the ratio of colonial administrators to the African population was proverbially slim," and this was especially true in indirect systems of rule where the said ratio was "to the point of being minuscule."[101] As Halpern quipped in 1965, the civil service "like so much else in the country, has for decades been neglected by Britain, starved of funds and prestige and hence of good men."[102] It was an underfunded administration made actual British authority over the territory particularly fragile and vulnerable to disruptions that could affect their ability to assert their authority over their Basotho intermediaries. Despite nearly eighty years of transformation within Basutoland from the days of Moshoeshoe, the chieftaincy, inefficient and restructured as it was, remained vital for any central authority's control of the kingdom.[103]

The period of colonial rule from 1868-1945 resulted in five critical weaknesses within the structure of the administration that would affect how the colony operated during the medicine murder panic. First, the reliance on chieftaincy compensated for the weak administration in Maseru but left it exposed to chiefly revolts when these occurred. Secondly, Britain lacked a long-term strategy for the constitutional development of the territory. The kingdom's position shifted throughout British rule, making it difficult for a consistent approach. Thirdly, the uncertainty over its future encouraged a treasury-led mandate to administer the territory as cheaply as possible, severely hindering the efficiency of the administration and its constituent bodies. Fourthly, the British administration was conservative and not adaptable to pressures from below. Changes came later than were politically prudent and often needed to go further. Lastly, the entrenchment of the chieftaincy as the governing class reduced the capacity of the government to reform itself. The conservative chieftaincy influenced British policy but rarely affected said policy in a manner which benefitted the nation, decades of benign neglect robbed the institution of most of its dynamism or capacity to evolve.

Alan Pim's description of the state of Basutoland's government in 1935 proves pertinent for the entire colonial period;

> "The government and native organisation still work practically independently of one another, and no attempt has been made to combine them into a real system of government, or make such modification in the native system as would render it capable of dealing with the changing conditions of modern times."[104]

The Basutoland administration was fragile, consisting of no more than a tiny white minority propping up a cheaply assembled structure for governance that relied heavily on the chieftaincy to operate.[105]

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[100] Machobane, *Government and Change*, 178.
[101] Kirk-Greene, A., H., M., 'The Thin White Line: The Size of the British Colonial Service in Africa,' *African Affairs*, Vol. 79 (1980): 26.
[102] Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages,* 226.
[103] Ibid.
[104] Pim, A., Quoted in Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages*, 118.
[105] Berry, S., 'Hegemony on a Shoestring: Indirect Rule and Access to Agricultural Land', *Africa*, Vol. 62, (1992): 327-355.

Throughout Britain's rule over Basutoland, limiting factors remained consistent impediments to creating an administration that could deal with any future disruption, like the medicine murder killings or the rise of organised political nationalism, with any actual effectiveness.[106] Central to these issues was the powerful chieftaincy, which remained the dominant governing force at the local level from Moshoeshoe's rule throughout the colonial era. The collapse of the Cape administration in 1884 and the end of a policy of 'direct rule' entrenched the power of chiefs as Britain relied on them to administer the territory cheaply and to minimise future rebellions. Halpern argues that this ensured that the position of chiefs within the colonial government "became not only consolidated but virtually unassailable."[107]

British colonialism from 1868 onward remained exploitative and skeletal, reacting to crises but doing nothing to prevent future problems from occurring. The broader climate of colonial deterioration and stagnation it created both nurtured the troubles that would damage British power and make it so any response to said crises would fail. Both nationalism and medicine murder were symptoms of the same disease, a disease which had its roots in the inability of the colonial government to fashion a functioning state. The nature of British authority in Basutoland was, therefore, especially vulnerable to disruption as it had not constructed its efficient institutions of government nor properly seized control of power from the existing indigenous elite.

Chiefs and *Liretlo*: What Compelled Chiefs to Commit Medicine Murders?

The practice of what would become known as medicine murder or *liretlo* emerged from two main dynamics; a desire within chieftaincy to re-establish a perceived loss of authority and an existing, evolving, acceptance within society in the power of medicine to affect the metaphysical. As will be explored, chiefs made use of these existing beliefs to pursue localised and short campaigns of terror to generate compliance in their subjects.[108] The disposition within Basotho beliefs in the power of consuming flesh and the abhorrent nature of the act made this an effective strategy, those who believed in medicines feared the magic while those who did not were simply afraid for their lives. Medicine murder can therefore be considered "a tool of power," a reaction to the decline of chiefs customary role under colonial rule. [109] Although born from indigenous beliefs, the practice took shape in a colonial context which left chiefs feeling insecure and enforced a peace with Basutoland's neighbours that stopped flesh being acquired from enemy warriors as it had before. It would take more than these preconditions for medicine murder to become the national issue that would consume the nation in a panic and shape the early nationalist movement. However, these longer-term factors remain an

[106] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 19-20.
[107] Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages*, 117.
[108] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 19.
[109] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*, 182.

important aspect of the broader explanation as to why medicine murder came to be the national crisis it came to be and deserve specific attention, starting with the chieftaincy.

Chiefs remain crucial to any study of modern Basotho society. It is impossible not to encounter chiefs at some point, whatever the period or aspect of the Basotho socio-political or economic system one examines. This extends to a study of medicine murder, as chiefs remain at the heart of that story. However, how we should interpret this long-standing and contested institution remains debatable. Works commissioned during the colonial period paid heed to the chieftaincy and ignored the "non-traditional" aspects of Basotho society, such as the growing educated *bahlalefi* class, as the administration bureaucratised the system for the internal government of Basutoland.[110] A wave of literature in the post-independence period further expanded the understanding of the "traditional" chieftainship within what was then Lesotho.[111]

These included Ian Hammett, whose anthropological appraisal of the legality of chiefs concludes that the de-facto importance of their roles within Basotho society means their legitimacy cannot be ascertained extrinsically for it "lies in the eye of the beholder."[112] David Coplan and Tim Quinlin identified the chieftaincy as a "coercive autocracy" which provided a ruling authority that was "both accessible and accountable."[113] Motlamelle Anthony Kapa conversely unequivocally argues for recognising the "high degree of legitimacy" that chiefs held in Lesotho and criticises authors such as Mahmood Mamdani, who explicitly calls for the abolition of the institution.[114] The literature on Basotho chieftaincy and the role of chiefs demonstrate it certainly to be an institution that is still, to this day, debated and contested. However, it is hard to fully agree with Kapa's recent assertion, particularly in a study of medicine murder, over Coplan and Quinlin's. The Basotho chiefs of the mid-20th century who participated in the murders better fit the model of an insecure coercive force than an institution with unassailable legitimacy.

External and internal pressures are largely to blame for a slide within chiefdoms toward the "decentralised despotism," which attempted to rule through fear, seen during the period of the panic.[115]

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[110] Ashton, H., 'Political Organization of the Southern Sotho', *Bantu Studies*, Vol. 12 (1938): 287-320, Ashton, H., *The Social Structure of the Southern Sotho Ward*, (Cape Town: University of Cape Town, 1946), Jones, G., I., 'Chiefly Succession in Basutoland', in Goody, J., (ed.), *Succession to High Office*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) & Hamnett, I., 'Koena chieftainship seniority in Basutoland,' *Africa*, Vol.35 (1965): 241-251.

[111] Thompson, L., *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho, 1786-1870*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976) & Sanders, P., *Moshoeshoe, Chief of the Sotho*, (London: Pearson Education, 1975).

[112] Hammet, I., *Chieftainship and Legitimacy: An Anthropological Study of Executive Law in Lesotho*, (London: Routledge, 1975).

[113] Coplan, D., B., & Quinlan, T., 'A Chief by the People Nation versus State in Lesotho,' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (1997): 32.

[114] Kapa, M., A., 'Chiefs, Democracy, and Popular Participation: The Case of Lesotho,' *African Studies*, Vol. 72 (2013): 121 & Mamdani, M., *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 22-23.

[115] Mamdani, M., *Citizen and Subject*, 35.

From the founding of the Basotho kingdom a strong chieftaincy was central to the nation's socio-economic and cultural life. Moshoeshoe established chiefs as guarantors of the nation's land on behalf of the people, only worthy of their positions if they remained responsive to their subject's needs. In return commoners were expected to provide free labour to local chiefs in return for protection, termed, *mantsema*.[116] The expectations of a chief are reflected in the popular Sesotho saying *morena ke morena ka batho* (a chief is a chief by the people).[117] Society at large expected a chief to protect his community from material deprivation and rule impartially in return for receiving support from their subjects. Chieftaincy was not a guaranteed right, and leaders had to meet the demands of their people to maintain authority.[118] The advent of British rule in 1868 saw these rights and duties of chiefs remain, on paper, largely the same, controlling grazing; allocating lands, regulating the movement of people and holding their courts.[119] While British officials liked to portray themselves as "disinterested caretakers," an underlying part of their role in Lesotho was facilitating the transformation of a capitalist economy.[120]

After the Gun War of 1881 for instance, chiefs were allocated their traditional "judicial and executive functions" along with the responsibility for collecting tax, from which they kept 5%, which was "ostensibly for the tribal good" but was practically a cost-saving measure.[121] These taxes grew in importance for chiefs as they saw their stewardship of the land slip away from them, as the Basotho agricultural sector declined in the early 20th century. The practice of 'placing,' whereby a chief would split his holdings between his sons upon his death execrated this and also placed a heavy toll on the land; as an increased proliferation of chiefs divided the nation into smaller and smaller, less productive, household plots.[122] This created a scarcity in good agricultural fields, leading to over-farming and soil erosion, putting even more pressure on the land.[123] Within Basutoland's "constricted boundaries," tariffs, inflation, drought and declining prices combined with increasingly new and arduous taxation led to many former agricultural workers leaving their homes for the mines they once supplied.[124]

The decline of Basutoland's agricultural production and "layer after layer of chiefs placed on top of the people" helped create, as Stephen Gill argues, a "systematic impoverishment" within the countryside.[125] Materially, therefore, there were many more, poorer chiefs in Basutoland in 1900 than

[116] Machobane, *L., B., B., J., Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions,* (Basingstoke*:* Macmillan, 1990*),* 227.
[117] Mekenye, R., O., 'Re-Examination of the Lekhotla La Bafo's Challenge to Imperialism in Lesotho,' *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, Vol. 2 (2012): 79.
[118] Edgar, R., *Prophets with Honour a Documentary History of Lekhotla la Bafo*, (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1988), 12.
[119] Hammet, I., *Chieftainship and Legitimacy: An Anthropological Study of Executive Law in Lesotho*, (London: Routledge, 1975), 63.
[120] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, 5.
[121] Halpern, J., *South Africa's Hostages: Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland*, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), 118.
[122] Quinlin, 'A Chief by the People: Nation versus State in Lesotho,' 30-38.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Germond, R., C., *Chronicles of Basutoland*, (Morija: Morija Sesuto Book Deposit, 1967), 459.
[125] Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 184.

there had been in 1869, whose grasp on the land was more tenuous that in Moshoeshoe's time. Chiefly authority was built on the stewardship of the land. A decline in the availability of agricultural land invariably weakened their positions.[126] Previously, if a chief wanted to retain his followers, he would have to provide them with sustenance or protection and consult them on their wishes. Now, there was little keeping his followers, particularly young men, from staying under said chief instead of seeking employment in the South African mines.[127] By the 20th century, this movement of commoners, who no longer seemed bound to the lands of their chief, encouraged historian and Basotho chief L. B. B. J. Machobane, a contemporary of that period, to reflect that "the structure of indigenous government appeared to have loosened and virtually broken down."[128]

Despite all this change, chiefs still retained a significant degree of importance across Basotho society due to their "hereditary positions, authority in matters of traditional law and stewardship of the land."[129] In many instances, commoners revered chiefs as symbols of the nation's autonomy; many shared the view of Stimela Jingoes, who noted, "if the Basotho ever lose their chiefs... they will become a faceless nation."[130] What the chieftaincy represented, however, and its actions were a world apart by the end of the 1930s. Their relationships with their subjects had shifted, and the "old easy informality" between elites and commoners had stopped "to be replaced by more deference and formality."[131] This trend is best seen in the changes to the *pitso*, a customary male forum akin to a local council where different chiefs made decisions. Throughout colonial rule the *pitso* gradually stopped functioning as an uncensored "medium of political socialisation," and it instead became a way for chiefs to merely relay messages from the administration.[132] Instead of a participatory symbol of a chief's mutually beneficial, legitimate, position at the head of a community, it was merely an indication of the extent to which their customary role had declined.

The deteriorating powers of chiefs spurred a further weakening of their societal position. Whilst in the 19th century stewardship of the productive agricultural land had allowed a chief to retain a large amount of peasant subjects, who provided the chief material tribute, by the twentieth century this was no longer the case. The impact of broader economic forces, namely labour migration and an agricultural decline, exasperated by issues within the chieftaincy itself, primarily the system of placement, left chiefs

[126] Quinlin, 'A Chief by the People: Nation versus State in Lesotho,' 30-38.
[127] Although some Basotho would immigrate permanently to South Africa, many would undertake seasonal work, leaving their families behind. Many migrants would return on occasion, even if they spent a long time in South Africa. However, while these migrants technically stayed subjects of that chief, there was little the chief could extract from them when they were abroad. See: Kimble, *Migrant Labour and Colonial Rule in Basutoland,* 129-131.
[128] Machobane, *L., B., B., J., Government and Change in Lesotho,* 126.
[129] Thabane, *Who Owns the Land*, 6-9.
[130] Jingoes, J., quoted in Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 23
[131] Ibid, 21
[132] Weisfelder, R., *The Basotho Monarchy: A spent force or a dynamic political factor?*, (Ohio University Centre for International Studies: Athens, 1972), 20,

poorer and weaker. While not a necessarily a desperate position, individuals still held hereditary positions and had access to far more resources than most commoners, most chiefs in the 20th century could not leverage the same authority their fathers could before. By the 1920s, an unsustainable dynamic had been entrenched where chiefly "grievances mounted," but the "political role in the management of their own affairs diminished."[133] As Eldredge underlines, by the 1940s these dynamics had intensified to the point where many chiefs felt truly "threatened by a loss of privilege and power" and decided to do something about it.[134]

A small minority of Basotho chiefs responded to their new roles in the self-financing administration by committing murders, adapting the custom of using human flesh acquired during times of war in medicine, in an attempt to reaffirm their positions within society [fig 1]. One of the first recorded cases of medicine murder was the killing of Daniel Makenyakenya at Buthe Buthe in 1895, believed to be "at the instigation of a Zulu witchdoctor" who died in jail before coming to trial.[135] The first case where the killer was convicted occurred more than a decade later, in 1907, with the arrest of a headman Makope Likelile for the murder of an elderly woman, Mampuo.[136] Classifying these as the dates for the first medicine murder and medicine murder conviction, 1895 and 1907, broadly that, it would appear medicine murder emerged at the tail end of the 19th century and became known to the administration by the early 20th century.[137] By the early 1940s, the crime was established within police records; the then Resident Commissioner Charles Arden-Clarke, for instance, was not surprised by an occurrence of it in 1942.[138]

Decade (1890s-1930s)	**Suspected murders**
1890s	2
1900s	3
1910s	4
1920s	5
1930s	10
Total	25

Fig 1: Murders pre-1940 identified by G.I. Jones.[139]

[133] Ibid.
[134] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*, 168.
[135] Ibid, 78.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 59.
[138] 'Letter to Arden-Clarke from High Commissioner,' (17/10/1942), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[139] Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder*, 78-85.

This strategy would not have been operative or repeated so often if there was not already a widespread belief in protective medicines (*lenaka*) within Basotho society. From the 19th century onward, most Basotho believed that these cures not only had the power to heal sickness and disease but affect the wider world; the medicines were "as much psychological as physiological."[140] Medicines prepared by trained doctors could change the weather, bring luck, make an individual brave, protect against witches and, crucially, increase one's power.[141] Hugh Ashton argued that the Basotho did not distinguish between magic and medicine. In contrast, not one in the same medicines could provide comfort and assurances beyond merely being cured of ailments.[142] For many individual Mosotho success and security was connected to medicine; without it, they felt "at a disadvantage, exposed and vulnerable."[143]

While many individuals prepared and used their medicines, the most significant were used to protect villages and chiefdoms. A community's health was directly tied to the chief having the most powerful medicines available in his 'medicine horn,' an animal horn that stored and transmitted the medicines' external power [fig 2]. Often a chief's medicine would be smeared on wooden pegs called *lithakhisa* and placed at specific points around a village for protection. In times of hardship, they took new meaning to reinforce cultural ties and offer hope for renewed prosperity. Even during the height of the murder panic, few doubted that a chief who wanted to advance the interests of his followers had to keep his medicine horn properly stocked.[144] A chief might be horrified by the thought of instigating a medicine murder and yet see it as his duty.[145]

Chiefs resourced or facilitated the services of those who knew how to produce charms, often travelling doctors specialising in creating a certain type of medicine. While later, during colonial rule, the administration created a distinction between herbalists and 'witchdoctors,' the Basotho did not make that distinction. The erroneous term 'witchdoctor' had no corresponding synonym in Sesotho, yet continued to be used by white observers from the 19th century until independence.[146] Practitioners were known as *lingaka* and were mobile and autonomous members of a community; many travelled far to learn new medicines and impress upon their community their knowledge and authority.[147] These practitioners used a wide range of different ingredients to prepare medicines acquired from various animals and plants, with the properties of those ingredients imbued in the medicine. The 19th century French Missionary Eugene Casalis noted the use of acacia thorns to create an impenetrable barrier, tuffs

[140] Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder*, 12.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ashton, 'Political Organization of the Southern Sotho', 312.
[143] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 53.
[144] Kuper, A., 'Like Cutting a Cow,' *London Review of Books*, Vol. 28 (2006): 5-7.
[145] Ibid.
[146] Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder*, 22.
[147] Ibid.

of lion's fur for courage and hair from the base of a bull's horn for strength.[148] The doctor making the medicine burnt the ingredients and mixed the ashes into a paste with animal fats, known as *mohlabelo*, which would be placed in a horn to be applied later. Where the medicine was then applied would depend on the circumstance; sometimes it would be spread onto pegs, other times applied directly onto a chief's skin and most commonly consumed.[149]

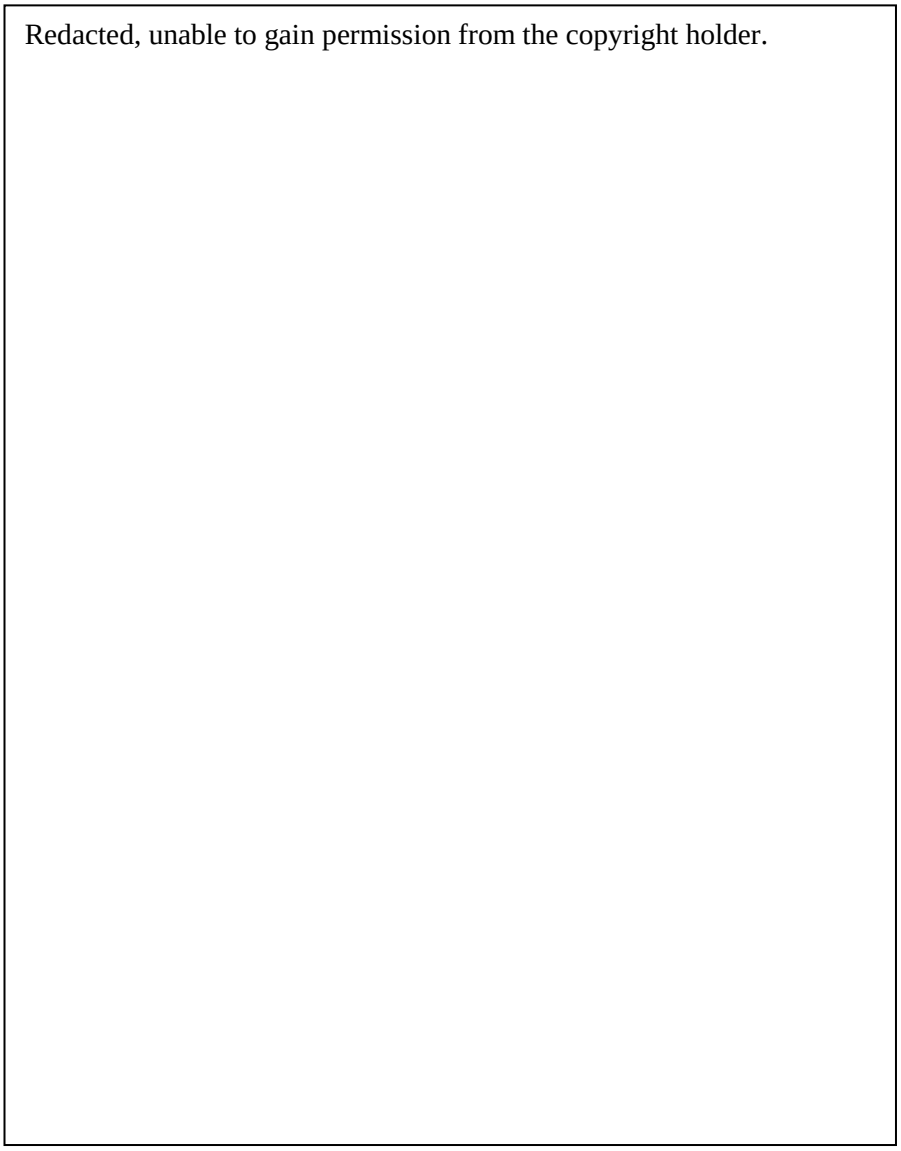

Fig 2: A photograph of the implements used in traditional Basotho medicine printed in a Paris Evangelical Mission (PEMS) newsletter. A medicine horn used in murders is the second object on the bottom row, left to right.[150]

This process had a definite medicinal value that should not be overlooked. Chiefs believed there would be both metaphysical and material effects after a *lenaka* had been prepared and applied.[151] These

[148] Casalis, E., quoted in Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 54.
[149] Ibid.
[150] 'Basutoland Witness,' (April-June 1952), *Lesotho National Archives* (*LNA*) (Maseru).
[151] Horton, R., 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science. Part I. From Tradition to Science,' *Journal of the International African* Institute, Vol. 37 (1967): 69.

charms and medicines had a tangibility that emerged from decades of practice. As Robin Horton has asserted, it was clear "the theoretical models of traditional African thought [including magic and supernatural medicine] are the products of developmental processes comparable to" western medicine and science.[152] Horton's point was echoed more recently by Robert Baum, who notes that indigenous African religions seek "to enhance the physical, economic, and cultural well-being of their adherents in this world rather than a world to come."[153] These reflections are certainly relevant to the beliefs of a great number of Basotho chiefs during the mid-20th century, who believed that their use of *lenaka* would bring them prosperity and influence in their positions and dealings with their subjects.[154]

That is, of course, only one aspect of the practice of medicine murder, the other was the killing of individuals to make medicine from their flesh. Human flesh became an integral part of these practices because of the belief that medicines embody the properties of their ingredients. Humans were seen as the mightiest and most intelligent creatures, providing the most power to the individual.[155] The use of human flesh in medicine was present across Southern Africa and recorded cases by missionaries dating back to the 1820s.[156] Within the Basotho during the 19th century body parts and cut flesh were commonly taken from defeated warriors during conflict; it was considered taboo to take flesh from an innocent victim.[157] The practice was certainly widespread during the wars with the Free State in the 1850s.[158] The removal of Boer body parts prompted fierce reprisals, destroying several border villages and leading Boer leaders to take precautions to retrieve their dead during conflict quickly.[159]

Many believed these practices emanated from Zulu practitioners that were imitated by Basotho doctors, although the evidence to support this, beyond rumours, is lacking.[160] Ultimately, the only source of proof for this theory is "rumour, innuendo, and circumstantial evidence."[161] The relative peace between Basutoland and its neighbours after the conclusion of the Gun War in 1881 seems to have played a clear part in turning this wartime practice into the 'medicine murder' seen after 1945. It was some years after the Gun War that the first mentions of Basotho killing to acquire the flesh and organs needed for medicines emerge, this long period without war left many medicine horns empty and a new generation.

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[152] Ibid, 68.
[153] Baum, R., M., 'Indigenous African Religions,' in John Breuilly (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism, ed. John Breuilly., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013),* 281.
[154] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 294-295.
[155] Gill, S., J., *A Short History of Lesotho*, (Morija: Morija Museum and Archives, 2010), 188.
[156] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa,* 177.
[157] Ibid, 178.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Moruti Tsiu, W., *Basotho Oral Poetry at the Beginning of the Twenty-first Century*, (Malete, Nigeria, Kwara State University Press, 2010), 29.
[160] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa,* 179.
[161] Ibid, 180

The practice of taking flesh from a defeated enemy therefore changed, and those who wanted medicines used the bodies of murder victims instead. The idea of medicine murder being an evolving belief is not a new assertion and was theorised during the panic. G. I. Jones noted it was not quite "the continuation of an ancient custom," neither was it an imported belief but something "between these two extremes."[162] While perpetrators could have taken the flesh from the recently deceased, it would appear that "killing… was essential to the process."[163] The peacetime shift reflected a change in the desired outcome for creating the medicine. Instead of being a method to affirm communal protection and prosperity, it became a method by chiefs to enforce despotism and ensure a measure of uneasy compliance from their frightened subjects. The change to a more arbitrary version of chieftaincy was precipitated by the solidification of borders, seen elsewhere in Africa, such as in 1930s Sudan.[164] Due to the enforced peace caused by the *Pax Britannica* within Southern Africa after the South Africa War, the enemies of chieftaincy became individualised and internalised as external threats lessoned. The relative peace contributed therefore heavily to facilitating the shifts in chiefly practices towards flesh consumption.

By the 1940s, the killings came to follow a specific method. First, the chiefs selected victims based on certain attributes that the perpetrators demanded. A group of people would carefully plan the murder at the instigation of a ringleader. Vulnerable people, sometimes drunk, who could be lured away from population centres, were frequently targeted.[165] At a pre-arranged site, the victim would be stunned, and flesh extracted while the victim was still living; although, in some cases, this occurred after death.[166] The victim would then be killed with their body given the appearance of having suffered a fatal accident and hidden - often this was in a different location to the murder site but not always.[167] Often the victim's deformities would be blamed on carrion animals or decay before being classified as medicine murder; in one notable case in 1946, the body's missing eyes, nose and lips were blamed on crabs.[168] Researchers have also identified rare cases of other individuals committing killings, such as doctors who wanted the flesh for *lenaka* or opportunists who sold body parts but the vast majority of perpetrators were chiefs.[169]

Most cases encountered by police and researchers followed this pattern, and it remained consistent throughout the supposed murder panic. From the earliest cases, such as February 1945 in

[162] Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder,* 13-4.
[163] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho,* 58.
[164] Leonardi, C., 'The Poison in the Ink Bottle: Poison Cases and the Moral Economy of Knowledge in 1930s Equatoria, Sudan,' *Journal of Eastern African Studies,* Vol. 1 (2007): 34-56.
[165] 'Three different cases in Quacha's Neck,' (09/05/1952), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[166] Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder,* 16.
[167] Ibid.
[168] Murray & Sanders, 'Medicine Murder in Basutoland: Colonial Rule and Moral Crisis,' 61.
[169] G.I. Jones only identified a few cases that fit these more unusual perpetrators in his 1951 survey; at least five cases of doctors acquiring medicine and two opportunists driven by monetary concerns. Most of the perpetrators identified in a hundred or more cases were chiefs of various ranks. See: Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder,* 16.

Tabola, where chiefs were accused of "intimidating peasants," to later cases, such as the prosecution of 'Mantšebo 's right-hand man chief Matlere during the early 1960s, a set pattern of murder, extraction and disposal was followed.[170] Why this ritualistic pattern remained so consistent, and uniform likely reflected the continued and widespread belief within Basotho society that acquiring medicines made from human flesh was an effective method of accruing influence. Chiefs likely saw no reason to deviate from this relatively recent but established practice. Accomplices to murderers who later gave evidence in court cases continually affirmed that stories of murders inspired the killings they were involved in, and chiefs copied the representations of *liretlo* passed down throughout society.[171] The question of what chiefs got out of this and how committing a 'medicine murder' addressed their concerns over the decline of their positions within society remain.

Fundamentally, the act was about acquiring medicine, spreading fear, and generating compliance. Chiefs, by means understood in a widely believed Basotho discourse on power, believed that strength could be obtained from "medicine horns" containing, among other ingredients, human flesh and blood.[172] The existing beliefs, which predisposed Basotho into believing the power of these medicines, meant this was an effective means of ensuring submission. The power of the medicines produced with human flesh was often enough to keep subjects in check, most commoners who had not received a mission education believing that the effect of these medicines had rejuvenated the chief's spiritual power and material fortunes.[173] The loss of followers and influence that had accompanied the bureaucratisation of chief's roles and the declining importance of agriculture seemingly could be addressed through a strong medicine.

However, medicine murders were also called "ritual murders" because of the common presence of witnesses within the processes used in the formulised process in the murder.[174] These witnesses would spread rumours and whispers of the act to let others know that the chief had powerful medicine. These rumours would often make their way back to administration, who would be obliged to investigate, but more commonly, especially before reforms to policing would allow officers to intervene in chiefly affairs, they would stayed entirely localised.[175] Chiefs especially, before the period of the panic, seemingly did not fear the colonial state finding out about their actions, trusting perhaps, not incorrectly, that the poorly run Basutoland Mounted Police (BMP), which was in its early years effectively a border defence force, would not investigate the crime.[176] Although there was of course a risk of being

[170] 'Tabola case notes,' (26/02/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Chief Matlere: Basutoland,' (1960-1961), ICS88/2/3, *Institute of Commonwealth Studies* (*ICS*) (London).
[171] 'Criminal Records High court,' (1947), ICS88/2/3, *ICS* (London) & 'Summary of two medicine murder trials,' (1948), ICS88/2/5, *ICS* (London).
[172] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*, 168.
[173] Ibid, 176-177.
[174] Ibid.
[175] 'Circular that outlines the new police powers from 1946 reform,' (30/07/1947), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[176] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 164.

discovered, it seems for many the rewards of a renewed, although grim, prestige far outweighed the fear of arrest.

Despite feeling as if their positions were less secure or as important, it was these positions that facilitated members of the indigenous elite in committing a murder. Chief's continued prestige and economic advantages over commoners explain why it was, almost, exclusively chiefs who undertook murders to get powerful medicine. As Eldredge argues;

> "It simply would not have been possible for a commoner to commit or order a medicine murder and get away with it in the community. Commoners could never mobilise participants and sustain secrecy; their attempts to increase their power would have so threatened a chief that a chief would indeed have stopped and punished them."[177]

This connects to another more material aspect of the killings, beyond the spiritual, in the very real terror that they induced. Even sceptical and educated commoners who refused to believe the medicines held any supernatural power recognised that the killings held a certain power. Chiefs attempted to generate compliance through fear one's personal safety, create a climate of suspicion, rumour and disappearances, and make those who may doubt the power of the chiefs' medicine be afraid or even respectful of the chief regardless of any disbelief in the medicine. The specific ritualistic way in which the murders occurred facilitated the spread of rumours and made them a "particular form of terror," a terror that could not help but inspire at least some dreadful awe within a community.[178]

Whilst chiefs risked the wrath of the colonial administration, who of course looked dimly upon them after their wonton butchery, this was a secondary concern to restoring their customary legitimacy in the eyes of their subjects. Notwithstanding assertions that this institutionalisation and weakening of the Basotho chiefship was borne most by the common people, the chiefly embrace of *liretlo* killings shows that a restless elite can inflict great harm to their subjects.[179] These restless elites saw medicine murder as a way to inflict terror and accrue some form of authority over their subjects, with some even admitting that a desire to return to a more "tradition" based style of rule that chiefs had enjoyed before had motivated their actions.[180] When they could not get the support or love of their subjects, it seems, chiefs settled for the next best thing; their fear and obedience. Some chiefs who were accused of committing murders acknowledged that their "standing had fallen" within their communities and that a full horn could restore that prestige.[181] The murders were, for the chiefs, about status and control. It was a way to facilitate the continuation of an archaic style of rule that had ceased to be as important as a result of the colonial administration and changes to the protectorate's economy. The effectiveness of

[177] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa,* 184.
[178] 'Letter from commoner,' (19/06/1956), FCO 141/738, TNA, (Kew).
[179] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa,* 184.
[180] 'The Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland Court of Appeal: Regina v Lepekola Joel and Others,' (01/04/1958-16/04/1958), DO 119/1189, *TNA* (Kew).
[181] 'Suspected murder of two girls in Leribe,' (28/06/1950), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).

this strategy can be debated, whether fear is ever a sufficient motivator to ensure actual compliance surely being no substitute for a reciprocal communal relationship, but for those chiefs who committed the killings they certainly appeared to have believed it to be. This is why it became a formulized and recordable practice by the early 20th century.

The medicine murders that would inspire the post-war panic, therefore, did not come out of nowhere. They were part of a long adaptation of Basotho beliefs in traditional medicine and the power of human flesh, amplified by the impact of Basutoland's decline on the chieftaincy. Specifically, from at least the late 19th century, certain key components laid the groundwork for the murders of the panic. These were, first, the widespread belief in the supernatural qualities of medicine, secondly, the use of human flesh in said medicines to increase their potency, and, thirdly, the shift away from using the body parts of fallen warriors to ordinary people and a restless chieftaincy who believed their authority had been eroded during colonial rule.[182] A synthesis of these preconditions created the environment where what became known, as 'medicine murder' became a definable phenomenon. Nevertheless, this alone does not explain the increase in these incidences during the 1940s nor why a panic occurred. To answer this, we must turn to the specific short-term socio-political triggers that preceded the statistically significant rise in deaths. Without these more immediate sparks, medicine murder may have merely remained an anthropological curio and not a major colonial panic.

Chieftaincy Reform and Royal Tensions: What Medium to Short Term Factors Made the Medicine Murders a Widespread Phenomenon after 1945?

Moving on from the roots of how the practice of medicine murder took its modern form, certain specific political events were key to the sudden increase in reported cases and require focused assessment. While not wholly responsible for creating the conditions where medicine murder emerged, they are a vital immediate context for why the 1940s and 1950s saw a spike in murders. The first was the twin restructuring of local governance through the reforms in 1938 and later the creation of the Basotho National Treasury in 1946.[183] The native administration intended these overhauls to make the running of the chieftaincy more efficient by vastly reducing the numbers of chiefdoms and their powers relative to the state.[184] In practice, it left many chiefs destitute, leading many more to fear they were next. As Robert Edgar stated, "there was no question that the reforms were a significant catalyst in the upswing of *liretlo* or medicine murders that occurred in the post-war period, as chiefs sought refuge in medicinal solutions."[185]

[182] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 52-59.
[183] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho,* 228.
[184] Ibid, 187.
[185] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour, 35*

The earlier 1938 reforms were, the more consequential of the two administrative overhauls. It resulted from years of lobbying by more progressive elements within the administration and the educated Basotho elite.[186] The educated Mosotho *bahlalefi* press, principally through the independent newspaper *Mochochonono*, had for decades recognised that "chiefs could not mend their ways on their own initiative."[187] Throughout the 1910s and 1920s, educated Basotho were at the forefront of this move towards reform, placing pressure on the government to impose some modernising change which could limit chiefly excess and corruption.[188] Draft proclamations produced in 1928 to limit the proliferation of chiefs had elicited such strong resistance that the proposals had to be shelved, but the issue did not go away.[189] Reform proposals for addressing the perceived decline of the chieftaincy continued to be the major political issue of the day. The popular press debated the issue, with commentators divided between those who favoured rapid change and those who were more cautious.[190] Literate chiefs engaged in this debate; one in July 1929 anonymously declared he was "scared" by the talk of reform but could not resist change.[191] The eventual reform package, dubbed Proclamation 61 and 62, was implemented in 1938 and dramatically changed how chieftainship functioned.[192]

Proclamation 61 restructured the 'native' administration so that the hierarchy within the chieftaincy was more clearly defined; with the paramount chief at the top with 1330 chiefs, sub-chiefs and headmen under them.[193] Proclamation 62 limited chiefs from organising local courts to only those who had been gazetted by the administration, effectively ending a major source of revenue for those who were not approved and made it, so the paramount chief had to approve future placements.[194] These reforms, like much of the colonial policy in Basutoland, were introduced suddenly and without a trial.[195] Despite the administration being prudent of the need for a strong chieftaincy within colonial governance, the immediate impact of these reforms for chiefs was severe. The experience was described as "traumatic" and had a "shattering impact" on chiefly income and prestige, especially for chiefs at the lower end of the hierarchy, such as sub-chiefs or headmen.[196] Despite this impact, internally within the administration, officials did not wish to be understood by the Basotho public as undermining the institution of chieftainship; fearing potential backlash. However, there was a widespread view within

[186] 'Police report that blames placing for killings,' (16/08/1948), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[187] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho,* 187.
[188] Ibid.
[189] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour,* 34.
[190] 'Mochochonono article,' (09/10/1929), s3/16a/5/1, *LNA* (Maseru), 'Comet article,' (25/09/1929), s3/16a/5/1, *LNA* (Maseru) & 'Leselinyana article extract,' (16/08/1929), s3/16a/5/1, *LNA* (Maseru).
[191] 'Leselinyana article,' (19/07/1929), *LNA* (Maseru) & 'Mochochonono article,' (06/05/1929), *LNA* (Maseru).
[192] Machobane, L., B., B., J., 'The Political Dilemma of Chieftaincy in Colonial Lesotho with Reference to the Administration and Courts Reforms of 1938,' *ISAS occasional paper,* Issue 1 (1986): 1-36.
[193] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour,* 34.
[194] Ibid.
[195] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho,* 126.
[196] Ibid, 186-187.

the administration and the *bahlalefi* that these reforms did not go far enough.[197] This view would later translate into further changes to the indigenous government.

During the Second World War, the administration lobbied the senior chiefs to offer their support for further changes. In a meeting on 28 November 1944, High Commissioner Evelyn Baring acknowledged the "anxiety and uneasiness" surrounding the issue but he argued that further reform could only "strengthen the power of chieftainship."[198] In private, however, Baring effectively acknowledged this as a lie.[199] The real purpose of further reform was "to limit the power of the chieftainship and thereby improve the lot of the common man" to avert the potential for "violence against constituted authority" from disgruntled commoners.[200] Consequently, the 1946 reforms were more explicitly favourable to the upper echelons of the chieftaincy, the administration using their support to push the reforms through the National Council, whilst also more explicitly damaging to the chieftaincy's lower ranks.

This post-war reform package dramatically reduced the number of 'native' courts from 1,340 to twelve; it also established a central National Treasury that received court fees, fines, and taxes.[201] The court fees and fines had previously been collected and retained by local chiefs, which were a major part of their income. The treasury would then be responsible for allocating these meagre resources, in 1946 estimated at only £22,000 per annum, across each region.[202] To balance the decrease in chiefly revenue, the administration allocated the twenty-four principal chiefs' large annual stipends of around £15,000. Those who belonged to the newly created division of 'sub-chiefs,' responsible for more than 350 taxpayers, received 5% of the taxes they collected, around £50 per annum. The remaining chiefs and headmen who did not meet these criteria received nothing, leaving them with whatever they could farm, extract from *mantsema* labour or get in wages from mine labour for their subsistence.[203] The reforms left most minor chiefs little better off financially than their subjects. Although individual chiefs consistently denied their crimes in court, there were still admissions from some, such as Chief Lepekola Joel in his July 1958 trial for murder, which revealed that these "administrative matters" were a key source of local tension.[204]

Despite the immediate reports back to Baring after the reforms that the changes were broadly popular and chiefs were not openly causing trouble, the reality was far less harmonious.[205] The lesser

[197] 'Meeting between principal chiefs and HC,' (28/11/1944), GRE/I/10/1-40, *PGL* (Durham).
[198] Ibid.
[199] 'Private letter from HC to Secretary of State,' (21/12/44), GRE/I/10/1-40, *PGL* (Durham).
[200] Ibid.
[201] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour,* 34.
[202] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho,* 241.
[203] Ibid, 227.
[204] 'The Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland Court of Appeal: Regina v Lepekola Joel and Others,' (01/04/1958-16/04/1958), DO 119/1189, *TNA* (Kew).
[205] 'Report on public opinion of the 1946 reforms,' (24/06/1947), GRE/I/11/1-100, *PGL* (Durham).

chiefs and headmen who had been impacted most and had lost "position, prestige and money" became isolated from the colonial government and jealous of their higher-ups; the reforms had left them feeling "insecure, they were scared. They were bitter."[206] Broadly there was less opposition than in 1938 within the press to the treasury reforms, which likely connects to the continuation of wartime powers that limited freedom of speech, but chiefs, regardless, deeply felt the effects of these reforms.[207] Machobane declared this to be the "single most devastating event on the chieftaincy" during the late colonial period.[208] The devastation was especially acute for those who lost out altogether and became bitter for having their customary income taken away due to an arbitrary colonial formula. The chieftaincy reforms, however, were not the only major preceding political event to have a material impact on the rise in murders after 1945. Another event sparked an internal fratricide between chiefs that would have violent consequences.

That event was the dynastic conflict that began in the late 1930s between different factions of the royal elite and continued until the ascension of Moshoeshoe II on 12 March 1960. The dispute had begun after the death of the previous paramount, Nathaniel Griffith Lerotholi, usually referred to just as Griffith, in 1939. Griffith was himself a controversial figure. He was Basutoland's first Catholic king in a nation where the educated elite was largely protestant or Anglican. However, more importantly, he usurped his assigned position as regent to place himself on the throne upon the death of his brother Letsie II in 1913. Griffith had humorously stated he would only sit on the throne "with both buttocks," implying that we would not be satisfied as a mere regent and would not depart the paramountcy, an ambitiousness that his sons would later emulate.[209] His nominal heir was Seeiso, born the eldest of Griffith's second wife, but Griffith favoured his younger brother Bereng and designated him his successor. The government, however, refused to recognise this switch and much preferred the western-educated Seeiso. White officials particularly praised his enthusiasm for outdoor sports as a key indicator of his masculine virtues and suitability for the throne.[210] When Griffith died in 1939, the British government lent their support to Seeiso. Seesio's coronation, therefore, occurred to the great consternation of his brother.[211]

The coronation of a new king would not end the disunity. Seeiso shared a vice shared by many other Basotho chiefs during this period, his heavy drinking and fondness for imported brandy. His alcoholism greatly affected his health and was pointed to by government doctors as being the reason for his sudden death in 1940.[212] However, despite nominally being next in line, more courtly

[206] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho,* 227.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid, 220.
[209] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 30.
[210] Ibid, 33
[211] Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*, 188.
[212] Ibid.

machinations prevented Bereng from taking the throne. Due to the previous succession dispute, there was significant distrust towards him from other senior members of the chieftaincy. While Britain claimed that Bereng would be "entirely acceptable," they also did nothing to stop the schemes against him.[213] The most powerful of the upper chieftaincy, who had never warmed to Berang, declared Seeiso's infant son Constance Bereng Seeiso, the future king Moshoeshoe II, Sessio's successor. The chiefs also selected the late king's senior widow 'Mantšebo as regent until Moshoeshoe II reached maturity.

As the introduction suggested, 'Mantšebo is one of the more intriguing and influential figures to emerge during the late colonial period. She has at times been described as a "shrewd" political operator whose resoluteness protected "national interests" and elsewhere a ruler perceived to "have no great personal dignity" with far less authority and legitimacy than her predecessors.[214] Elements of misogyny and racism certainly shaped white observers' appraisal of the regent; administrators privately made fun of her overweight appearance and girlish giggle.[215] What they read as "unpredictability," "rudeness," and "obstructiveness" could equally be read as a canny ability to use the low opinions of her intelligence to pursue her independent agenda.[216] Whatever the case, establishing her authority was certainly made difficult by such a powerful active rival in Bereng, as the former heir and a still senior chief. 'Mantšebo's allies would accuse Berang repeatedly of plotting to overthrow her throughout the 1940s. Soon two camps in the royal elite emerged as those around Bereng and 'Mantšebo jockeyed for control of the kingdom.

Medicine murder was a tool used by each faction within this conflict and was pointed to as a contributing factor to the increase during the 1940s. G. I. Jones would classify the conflict between Bereng and 'Mantšebo as the "battle of medicine horns" as both factions used *liretlo* to fortify their power and position.[217] 'Mantšebo relied heavily on her cadre of close advisors and favourites to govern, some of which, including her rumoured lover Chief Matlere of Mokhotlong, were certainly involved in murders even if she was not.[218] Maltere was described by a district official as painfully obvious in his liretlo dealings, stating, that "it looks as if Maltere will hang himself, given time, metaphorically and perhaps literally."[219] On the other side, Bereng and his right-hand man Chief Gabashane would be found guilty and executed for their participation in numerous murders, along with some of their principal supporters.[220] The conflict was a clandestine, hidden war between different groups of elites which made

[213] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 34.
[214] Rosenberg, S. & Weisfelder, R., *Historical Dictionary of Lesotho*, (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 302–303 & Murray & Sanders, 'Medicine Murder in Basutoland: Colonial Rule and Moral Crisis,' 56.
[215] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 35.
[216] Ibid, 35-36.
[217] Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder*, 15-18
[218] 'Public reaction to Matlere case,' (20/03/1953), FCO 141/850, *TNA* (Kew), 'Attorney general on Matlere case verdict,' (23/03/1953), FCO 141/850, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Matlere Lerotholi judgement,' (23/02/1953), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew).
[219] 'Letter on Matlere case,' (11/01/1949), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[220] 'Historical Notes on the Case of Basutoland Chiefs Executed,' (1949), ICS88/2/3, *ICS* (London).

use of medicine murder as a tool to gain more powerful medicines, which could increase their power through the medicines' supposed metaphysical effects and inflict terror on enemies.

While there is a broad agreement that the reforms and the dynastic tensions are the principal immediate causes for the rise in murder, which factor is more to blame has led to a vibrant debate. Jones, in the 1950s, was certainly on the side that the reforms were the main problem, arguing the chiefs "would never have resorted to *liretlo* if they had not been deprived of their authority by the reforms of 1938 and 1946.[221] He did acknowledge that the dynastic conflict had "almost certainly" encouraged lesser chiefs to follow the example of the greater chiefs in using *liretlo* to increase personal power but emphasised the reforms as the more important factor.[222] On the other hand, Eldredge, Murray and Sanders emphasise the dynastic tensions as the primary factor and, as mentioned in the introduction, despite some discrepancies they mostly agree with the role 'Mantšebo played in this.[223] 'Mantšebo was certainly connected to certain murders but to expand her role as a perpetrator into a leading force that drove the rapid expansion of the killings is misplaced due to the lack of documentary evidence. While the conflict between 'Mantšebo and Bereng gave many perpetrators their motivations, it did not create the climate where a great number of chiefs had become willing to murder their subjects. The dynastic tensions were important but the immediate shock of the reforms, within a context where these killings had already become an established practice to regain customary authority, appear the primary underlying cause in many more instances.

Cases such as headman Lazarus Mosuoe Letsie's, a lesser chief at the bottom of the indigenous hierarchy, who acquired medicine to reinforce his position, reinforce how the loss of prestige and an insecure economic position due to chieftaincy reform was a motivator to commit murder.[224] Letsie committed a murder within Quiting District, his victim was left unnamed but referred to within the administrative report as a "young man."[225] A member of Letsie's district, an unnamed woman, interviewed stated that he had been left "much poorer" by the administrative reform and was struggling to fulfil his role as local headman.[226] While the accuracy of administrative reports can be debated, often reflecting a colonial mind-set that disparaged the Basotho way of life, this revealing testimony demonstrates that the 1949 reform had hurt the headman greatly. Letsie's acquisition of flesh for *lenaka* was a direct response to this pressure, as the same report noted "the headman (Lazarus Mosuoe Letsie) made insinuations to witnesses that he wanted to fill his horn" to reacquire "prosperity."[227] Dislocation

[221] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 121.
[222] Jones G., I., quoted in ibid, 122
[223] Eldredge, E., quoted in ibid, 288 & Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 289
[224] 'Contemplated medicine murder in the Quthing District,' (09/01/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[225] Ibid.
[226] 'Political significance of murders,' (28/01/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[227] Ibid.

due to the chieftaincy's restructuring looms large here with Letsie attempting to improve his position in society in the aftermath of the reforms.

Other select individual cases reveal how many murders were shaped by these new political contexts and reactions to local tensions. The murder of a young road worker on 14 August 1951 near Mafeteng by three commoners, overseen by a chief named Mokhethi Molepe who had ordered the killing, certainly fit this pattern.[228] Despite the colonial report erroneously stating that there was no "political significance behind the crime," the same report as noted that Molepe had been disposed from his position within Mafeteng by the 1946 reform and, through interviews with some of his subject, he desired more "authority" in the district. [229] Another report corroborated this witness statement, claiming the chief had not known the victim and he had only "wanted to fill his horn" to bring "great strength" for himself.[230] This demonstrates how the colonial government often missed the significance of the crime occurring. The murder clearly had a political element based on the available testimony, as Molepe was concerned over his position with in Mafeteng as a result of the treasury reform, and he had embraced *liretlo* as a way to restore his prestige.

Another instance that demonstrates the corrosive immediate impact of the reforms occurred during July 1950 when the murder of two unnamed murdered girls was blamed on a Leribe based "sub-chief," a lesser chief directly under the authority of a more senior district chief, named Lejone.[231] Both girls had been buried by Lejone without him informing the police of their deaths and it was believed both had been killed in a *liretlo* murder, with the coroner's report corroborating this. [232] Witnesses to the crime placed Lejone at the scene at the time of murders and he was arrested. When interrogated Lejone was a rare case of a chief who admitted some level of accountability, conceding that he had wanted to "fill his horn" to advance up the chieftaincy and restore his ability to levy fines; although he also contradictorily denied that he was the one who actually killed the girls.[233] Regardless, his concession that filling a horn to increase a position was a motivator for chiefs demonstrates it as a key incentive for the murders after 1945. Numerous other cases, to various degrees depending on the available evidence, support this view that victims were largely targeted by chiefs with malicious intent to recover prestige lost due to administrative restructuring.[234]

Both the tension between 'Mantšebo and Bereng along with the chieftaincy reforms helped heighten existing tensions and anxieties within the chieftaincy to create the climate where the panic

[228] 'Political significance Molepe vs Rex in Mafeteng,' (23/10/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[229] Ibid.
[230] 'Suspected Murder Mafeteng,' (18/12/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[231] 'Suspected murder of two girls in Leribe,' (28/06/1950), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[232] 'Post mortem of suspected murder of two girls in Leribe,' (14/07/1950), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[233] 'Suspected murder of two girls in Leribe,' (28/06/1950), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[234] 'Murder in Teyateyang,' (12/06/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew), 'Murder in Mafeteng,' (12/06/1951), FCO 141/581 *TNA* (Kew), 'Murder in Leribe,' (13/08/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Two suspected murders Leribe, (22/09/1952), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).

would emerge. However, it was the restructuring of the indigenous administrative apparatus that more directly caused a spike in killings. It had a national impact, affecting chiefs in every district, and corresponded to the existing reasons chiefs took murders in the early 1900s; namely to restore customary prestige through powerful medicines and compliance through terror. The dynastic tensions were fed by this context of insecurity and while they certainly were the motivator for many perpetrators, they alone would not have been enough to increase the number of killings to the extent it did without the more structural impact of the chieftaincy reforms within the wider climate of mismanagement. This point on the increase in deaths does raise an interesting question on just how murders do we know to have occurred and was there actually a rise in cases after 1945? Certainly, just why the killings in Basutoland became a national panic that absorbed so much of the government's attention, compared to other cases, has much to do with the longevity of the spike in medicine murders and the, comparatively, large number of them.

How Many Medicine Murders Occurred During the Panic?

The question of how many murders there were in Basutoland during the period has received significant scholarly attention. This data set produced by Jones in 1951 was the first quantitative evidence that demonstrated that the rise in cases could be tangibly proved, not merely assumed or alluded to [fig 3].[235] Jones used local police records and interviews with administrators in his methodology. Although a somewhat flawed approach, relying on patchy colonial record keeping, this was likely to only way to get some to gather a data set as he did because there was a serious reluctance by chiefs and commoners to discuss the issue. His figures only went up to 1949, the year his research concluded, but noted that murders increased from nine in 1945 to twenty in 1948. The total number from the 1940s was sixty-nine, far more than the twenty-five recorded during the 1930s.[236] Interestingly, his figures also suggest a great deal of fluctuation between the years of the 1940s, falling in 1946 and 1948, demonstrating that the murder trend was not an even one.[237] Jones argued that these figures demonstrated that the increase in murders was real and formed the backbone of his influential report on the topic.

While helpful in establishing a rise during the 1940s, historians should not accept Jones's figures as absolute. Two immediate causalities cast Jones's conclusions in some doubt. The first was the commoners increased enthusiasm to challenge their chief and report the crime.[238] Previously, the Basotho knew that their chief held much more material sway over their day-to-day lives than the government. Going against that chief risked ostracisation from that community. A combination of the

[235] Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder*, 104.
[236] Ibid
[237] Ibid
[238] Ashton, H., quoted in Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 65.

chiefs' societal roles weakening and the reforms damaged this hold and made them more distant from their subjects. Individuals were more willing to challenge their chiefs therefore for a number of reasons. Men and women had alternative economic opportunities to the traditional communal land exchange with their local chief, through employment in labour recruitment schemes, there was less potential material reprisal; as an individual's economic fortunes was not tied to their chief's.[239] The increase in murders during the 1940s and the growing awareness of the crime made more commoners aware of the signs of medicine murder. Although the panic was a misdiagnosis of what was occurring, as the coverage it produced focused so heavily on cultural issues, it did take the crime out of the shadows and into the revolted minds of many.[240] The masses, therefore, became freer to make accusations without the same level of reprisal as before. This willingness from some commoners to make accusations against their guilty chiefs also demonstrates that the power of liretlo was not total and that chief's attempts to bolster their political legitimacy did not work in the eyes of every individual.

Year (1940-1949)	Number of Murders Recorded by Jones
1940	1
1941	3
1942	3
1943	5
1944	7
1945	9
1946	2
1947	12
1948	20
1949	7
Total:	69

Fig 3: Number of murders recorded by G.I. Jones in *Basutoland Medicine Murder: A Report on the Recent Outbreak of 'Diretlo' Murders in Basutoland*.[241]

The other, more important, point is the improvement in police tactics and efficiency during 1946.[242] Previously the officers were required to discuss the details of the crime being investigated with the ward chief when entering his territory; many representatives to help police in cases assigned by chiefs would later be accused themselves of murders. The lax policing policy changed when 'Mantšebo agreed to remove this requirement and allow police to investigate without the interference of chiefs.[243] The freedom of police investigations combined with more political pressure to do so resulted in more

[239] Ibid.
[240] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 88.
[241] Ibid
[242] Ibid
[243] 'Mantšebo circular,' (04/11/1947), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).

reported cases. Whether these were new cases or merely previously unrecorded ones is unknown but is not an unthinkable proposition. Certainly, the police arrested more people after this shift than before and all police figures after 1946 must be viewed within this context. These factors are important to emphasise why perhaps more murders were not reported during the pre-1940s, and they cast some doubt on the exact accuracy of Jones's figures.

Period (1895-1969)	**Cases Recorded by Murray and Sanders**
1895-1939	29
1940-1944	25
1945-1949	61
1950-1954	45
1955-1959	27
1960-1964	12
1965-1969	11
Total:	210

Fig 4: Number of murder cases verified by Murray & Sanders in *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho: The Anatomy of a Moral Crisis*.[244]

That does not mean that his conclusions should be thrown out completely. The colonial hysteria and widespread conviction across society that medicine murder rates were increasing did not emerge from nowhere. Murray and Sanders's extensive research, building on an analysis of Jones's research, has demonstrated that whilst the rise in cases during the 1940s was less extreme than Jones suggested, the rise appears to have been real [fig 4].[245] Cases almost all had multiple culprits, and the case number is not a definite number of the number of Basotho involved in the murders as perpetrators or accomplices. Murray and Sanders estimate this figure stood at over one thousand Basotho.[246] Unlike Jones, they benefitted from data from the 1950s and 1960s, from judicial and newspaper records, which allows for a better range and clearer trend lines to independence and the immediate aftermath. Murray and Sanders concur with Jones that 1948 was a high point but reveal that the colonial administration reported at least two hundred and ten confirmed murders.[247] They argue that 74% of all cases occurred within 24 years, from 1945 to 69. They show that Jones underrepresented the amount of dead in the

[244] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 60.
[245] Ibid, 63.
[246] Ibid, 256.
[247] Ibid.

1940s, believing there instead to have been eighty-eight murders instead of the sixty-nine Jones recorded.[248]

Their dataset is vital and revealing but also may not be a conclusive analysis of the number of *liretlo* victims. They acknowledge a greater rate of cases reported to the government during the last decade of colonial rule, 1956-66, and in the immediate aftermath of independence.[249] They do not include the majority of these later murders in their final count, as they could only identify two-fifths of them due to a lack of evidence explained by a "loss of official enthusiasm for investigation and prosecution of crime."[250] While they encourage a healthy scepticism over the accuracy of these figures, they stress there should be a recognition that this data shows a substantial rise in killings from the late 1940s onwards. The increased willingness of commoners to report on their chiefs and the changes to policing does not seem to have undermined the point that a real increase in cases drove the medicine murder panic. As Murray and Sanders state, "Both sets of figures [theirs and Jones's] would appear to vindicate the observation, common at the time, of a dramatic increase in medicine murder in the mid-to-late 1940s."[251] Adam Kuper agrees with Murray and Sanders's research, arguing that it has demonstrated "that in the middle of the 20th century an increase in medicine murders" occurred "in a particular context of insecurity."[252] It seems that there is no significant reason to doubt that, despite some caveats in terms of the exact accuracy of the figures, this increase in killings was real and that it has been recorded in the available statistics.

While the number of dead was not as high as some other crises in late-colonial Africa, such as various wars, famines or other humanitarian disaster, it is a lot higher than any other ritual murder epidemic during a similar period of time; something that compounds the relative significance of the occurrence. This can be seen in the two instances geographically closest to Basutoland. The number of cases identified by the Natal government during the 'Muti Murder' panic from 1910 to 1948, over a similar period to the medicine murder panic, for instance was only thirteen.[253] Similarly, the Swaziland Attorney general estimated in 1949 that murders "slightly over one per annum" for the first four decades of the twentieth century were not worthy of widespread concern or national response.[254] However, in 1954 there was an increase in the number of killings to an estimated four per annum. While not as dramatic as in Basutoland, this increase still proved "disturbing" to the colonial administrators.[255]

[248] Ibid, 61.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] Ibid, 60.
[252] Kuper, 'Like Cutting a Cow,' 6.
[253] Turrel, R., '*Muti* Ritual Murder in Natal,' 21-22.
[254] Thompson A., C., quoted in Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 300
[255] 'Letter from T.V Scrivinor on the causes of Medicine Murder,' (25/11/1955), DO 119/1406, *TNA* (Kew) & 'HC letter clarifying whether MM has increased,' (24/10/1955), DO 119/1406, *TNA* (Kew).

Evidently, *liretlo* within Basutoland occurred at a much higher rate per annum than these other examples; something that reinforces how impactful it was for the protectorate.

Conclusion

In assessing how, why and in what number the murders occurred, a clear outline has been formed. The use of human flesh in protective medicines taken from murder victims was perceived by chiefs and commoners as a genuine, if terror-inducing and distasteful, way to cement power throughout the 20th century and was embraced by greater numbers of chiefs after 1945.[256] The ritual that accompanied *liretlo* was part of a long tradition that stretched back to the pre-colonial years but within the specific contexts of post-war Basutoland represented the wider expression of insecurity and powerlessness felt by chiefs under British misrule. They became an exaggerated, exoticised and misrepresented discursive device used by white observers to demonstrate their cultural superiority. However, at their heart, they were a formalised ritual practice shaped by a colonial context that expanded due to the material impact of administrative restructuring on chiefs. Whilst the relative lack of testimony from chiefs regarding their motivations, who more usually denied committing the crime, makes this difficult to prove conclusively; what evidence there is certainly points in that direction.

While *liretlo* was certainly an effective instrument of power, as most commoners believed in the power of protective medicines, the expansion of killings was born in a specific environment.[257] Decades of socio-economic change, the subsequent decline in the chieftaincy's customary social role and the shock of the chieftaincy reforms, created the conditions where instances of *liretlo* could evolve and even thrive during the late 1940s. Murders acted as an instrument of control and a way to restore the authority of chiefs who had materially suffered due to a loss of resources and prestige. The absence of a strong centralised colonial power and the devolution of a lot of governing responsibility to the chiefs though ensured that the chieftaincy channelled their discontent felt after the damaging reforms into alternative ways to restore their local power. The act of murder was a challenge to imperial rule, a way to subvert the hierarchies established by the administration by embracing the existing grim legacy of flesh consumption.

The murders stressed the existing cracks within the Basutoland administration as the chiefs and headman who committed murders were the backbone of British local rule; their actions invariably damaged the already fragile authority that underwrote colonialism and ensured *liretlo* was, from the start and long before any nationalist intervention, directly political. Akin to the killings identified by Rathbone and Gocking in Ghana, the medicine murders "cannot be neatly divorced from that broader

[256] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*, 183.
[257] Ibid, 221.

national picture."[258] The killings were not a primordial tradition, but the expansion of killings after was a response to modern phenomena and pressures. There is a necessity to recognise the long, medium, and short trends that affected the chieftaincy, which helped create the conditions where medicine murders increased significantly during the late 1940s, and not merely blame individuals; as Eldredge does by focusing so squarely on 'Mantšebo's influence.[259] Although numerous short-term factors would affect the murder rate, principally the reforms, it is important to emphasise as well that this would alone would not have caused a significant rise in deaths without the existing belief that murders were a way to restore customary prestige and the existing issues within Basutoland's governance.

This heredity rural aristocracy were at the foundation of colonial rule; their revolt against said rule would inevitably damage the ability of Britain to administer the territory. Understanding that medicine murder, as an act, functioned as a medium through which the discontent of a restless chieftaincy against the conditions of British colonial rule could be expressed, connects it to the wider struggle for power within the colony.[260] Chiefs used their positions in society to take advantage of the existing belief in the power of *lenaka* made from human flesh by seeking out such medicines, mobilising participants to help them commit murders and, crucially, often getting away with it.[261] Britain's eventual framing of the killings, therefore, as a moral panic would have major ramifications for how it responded.

[258] Rathbone, 'A Murder in the Colonial Gold Coast,' 446.
[259] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa,* 213
[260] Ibid, 183.
[261] Ibid, 184.

Chapter 2: The Early Years of the Panic and the Proto-Nationalist Response, 1945-1952

On 3 August 1949 Basutoland's government hanged two chiefs in the administrative capital Maseru, an act that became a defining moment within the nation's modern history. They had been implicated in the murder of a local man Paramente, "caught at night as he came out of his lover's hut."[1] Paramente had been drugged, taken to another house, kept there for a day, and then moved to a final hut. At this final location, the killers brutally murdered him in front of a crowd of witnesses ordered to be there.[2] Parts of the victim's body were removed while he was still alive to make medicines, which would supposedly enhance the power of the chiefs who ordered the killing. Later testimony from the perpetrators revealed the premeditated nature of the crime. One accomplice, Mapeshoane, stated that it "had been announced to us that we were going to kill a man. In that case, I knew we were going to kill a person and that it would be a ritual murder."[3]

The crime rocked the nation and drew international attention. For several years, within the British press, Basutoland increasingly became associated with "pagan beliefs… more in keeping with the writings of Rider Haggard than with the spirit of the Atomic age."[4] The hanged chiefs, Bereng Griffith Lerotholi, and Gabashane Masupha were two of the most senior chiefs in the nation. Bereng was the former heir to the throne who had twice lost out in succession disputes which had denied him access to the levers of power.[5] The execution of two high-profile chiefs, the administration hoped, would have "a good effect in checking these murders" by shocking the indigenous elite and demonstrating the extent of British authority. [6] However, a few years later, the Resident Commissioner would have to concede that this tactic had failed to offer any long-term prevention, as "their incidence has again increased."[7]

The murder of Paramante is the most famous killing that occurred during the murder panic due to its political significance and the high positions of influence held by both perpetrators; consequently, it is already well covered.[8] More than any other execution during the panic, the hanging shook the

[1] Murray, C., & Sanders, P., *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho: The Anatomy of a Moral Crisis*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 6.
[2] Eldredge, E., *Power in Colonial Africa, Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 170.
[3] Ibid.
[4] 'Daily Telegraph article,' (09/07/953), FCO 141/579, *The National Archives* (*TNA*) (Kew).
[5] 'Report on investigation into Paramante's murder,' (02/04/1948), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[6] 'Letter to Resident Commissioner (RC),' (15/08/1952), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[7] 'Letter from High Commissioner (HC) on the arrest of Berang and Gabashane,' (23/07/1946), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Report on public reaction to arrest of Berang and Gabashane,' (06/08/1946), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[8] See: Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 6-7 & Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*, 168-184.

nation's elite, yet three years later, little had changed; murders were still being committed at similar rates and using the same template. One such case occurred on 15 June 1952. A young man Valelo Mbuvusa was attending a feast in Quthing when he became intoxicated, witnesses reporting he had left in a "very drunken state… but persisted in riding away, saying he was going home."[9] His body was found three days later. The flesh had been removed from the whole of the face, the neck and the upper part of the chest; the inquest declared these wounds had been "caused by animals," a familiar incorrect initial diagnosis seen repeatedly in police reports.[10] With no leads, the police closed the case on 10 September, but it would not remain closed for long.

An anonymous tipster pointed detectives in the direction of a herd boy Motsamai Rakotola, who admitted to being an accomplice in Mbuvusa's murder, along with four others under the direction of the local headman Mohlori.[11] Further testimony revealed the premeditated nature of the murder; perpetrators had waited for Mbuvusa to leave and carried him off on his horse a quarter of a mile to a house. While at the house, the murderers took cutting from Mbuvusa's still living body. Police reasoned this because a pool of vomit was found in the hut and so it seems unlikely that Mbuvusa's corpse could have been carried for a quarter of a mile to regurgitate beer.[12] Marks were made with a fork to simulate animal scratches, and the body was dumped in a river to be taken downstream from the murder site.[13] Despite suspicions from the police that linked Headman Mohlori and another local chief Tsepo Qefate, the lack of evidence meant neither would face trial. The murder of Mbuvusa was no less violent than the murder of Paramante, whose killing was described in lurid detail by members of the international press, but is perhaps a more representative example of how most murders remained unsatisfactorily unresolved. Years passed between the murders of Paramante and Mbuvusa. However, there is little indication that much had changed between each. The forces driving the killings remained. The seemingly irrational nature of the murders and their apparent stark rise in prevalence created widespread panic across Basutoland's society.

The immediate post-war years of 1945-1952 were defined by a burgeoning panic that established the main narratives and counter narratives that would continue later into the decade. Key moments that defined the immediate post-war period were the lifting of Lekhotla La Bafo's (LLB) ban in 1946, the execution of Bereng and Griffith in 1949 and the publication of the Jones Report in 1951. While never accepted by Basotho society, with the majority of the population believing them to be abhorrent, the medicine murders would not have been amplified into a panic without the context of colonial rule. The presentations of Basotho's moral inferiority within the international press pressured the administration to act and created an official view that the killings were a conflict between western

[9] 'Murder in Quthing,' (29/10/1952), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

civilisation and African barbarity. The colonial government was caught therefore between the crosshairs of bad international publicity and internal disquiet. From this period onward, for the next decade, the panic became a much more prominent feature of Basotho life and opened Britain up to criticism in being "ineffective in curbing the wave of murders."[14]

In response the colonial government attempted to manage the panic and stop the number of killings by launching an 'anti-*liretlo* effort.' This consisted of five interlinked but separate initiatives that aimed to infiltrate into multiple strata of Basotho life. They were the production of propaganda, an increase in police powers, the establishment of Basotho advisory boards, the reorganisation of the courts and the production of numerous reports into the causes of medicine murder. Although there was no official start date for the largely decentralised undertaking, broadly, these different initiatives evolved from 1945 onwards. Prejudices ensured that the need for more cogent analysis of the economic pressures and political dissatisfaction experienced by populations was ignored in favour of a strategy that affected tangibly little, despite inflaming tensions. Crucially, the creation of numerous reports into medicine murder formalised an 'official narrative' into the killings that proved deeply unsatisfactory to many within Basotho society. These early years therefore saw this strategy take form whilst also becoming a lightning rod for some Basotho to focus their anger regarding the colonial state.

Basotho depictions of what was occurring to their nation would later be reflected in the counter-narratives produced by colonialism's opponents. The first group in Basutoland to recognise the potential for politicising the killings were the political association LLB, founded in 1919 by Josiel Lefela. The group attacked Britain's handling of the crisis and built on their existing ability to establish conspiratorial narratives to argue that there was a hidden British agenda focused on eliminating the Basotho through murder hysteria.[15] From 1945 to 1952, LLB closely integrated a discussion of medicine murder into their rhetoric and enjoyed brief but significant success.[16] LLB is often neglected from the story of Basotho nationalism and, just as with *liretlo*, it is often seen as a footnote. However, it was a vital precursor to the later nationalist parties who would mirror much of their politicisation of the medicine murder panic, not seen elsewhere in other murder panics.[17] The presence of medicine murder discourse within their productions reinforces that this murder panic had a deep impact on the nation's politics, beyond what has been previously assumed.

This chapter consists of three sections. The first examines the early years of the panic and the presentation of the murders by observers to assess the debates happening in print and in everyday life. These often sensationalist productions would ultimately shape the colonial administration's response to

[14] Eldredge, E., *Power in Colonial Africa*, 183.
[15] 'Report on BAC meeting,' (05/01/1953), FCO 141/887, *TNA*, (Kew).
[16] 'Subversive Statements made by Josiel Lefela,' (16/01/1950), FCO 141/502, *TNA*, (Kew).
[17] Edgar, R., *Prophets with Honour a Documentary History of Lekhotla la Bafo*, (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1988), 40-41.

the episode. The second section examines the early attempts by the colonial state to stop the killings, indicating some of the factors for its eventual failure. It looks at the attempts by the colonial state to better understand the phenomenon of medicine murder through commissioning reports on what was occurring. The chapter culminates by focusing on the activities of LLB from the end of World War Two until the foundation of the BAC in 1952. It will explore how LLB laid the foundations for constructing a counter-narrative to the government's claims over the origins of *liretlo*. It will show how the group agitated against the state by involving themselves directly in ongoing *liretlo* investigations, which indicates the extent to which even at these early years of the panic the response to these killings cut deeply into the body of Basotho politics.

Administrative Concerns, Press Sensationalism and Missionary Moralising: The Birth of the *Liretlo* Panic

The increase in medicine murders during the 1940s would be presented by observers as demonstrative of a civilisational clash between paganism and rational progress and helped create something akin to a "moral panic… defined as a threat to societal values and interests."[18] A panic was born when the consensus on the killings shifted from acknowledging that these kinds of murders sometimes occur to those same murders being an uncontrollable national crisis.[19] Two factors encouraged a view that the killings were something existentially threatening to the protectorate. The first was political; the murders were committed by the chiefs underpinning the colonial administrative apparatus and therefore had the potential to disrupt the established colonial order. Britain greatly feared the ramifications of the killings spiralling out of control, hence their heightened anxiety and fear over the occurrence. This political concern intersected with the second factor, racist observations of Basotho beliefs and inferior morality emanating from administrators, the missions and, particularly, the press.

From 1945 officials were expressing concern that chiefs, the backbone of colonial authority, were the ones committing the crimes:

> "It is of the opinion of most intelligent Basotho that this type of witchcraft is on the increase in Basutoland… The local population is being terrorised at the moment. There is no doubt the chiefs could stop it, but I fear many of them are at the back of it."[20]

The Resident Commissioner expressed apprehension in a letter that year to 'Mantšebo, requesting that she reissue Moshoeshoe's 1855 anti-witchcraft law and encourage chiefs to aid in police

[18] Cohen, M., *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: Third Edition*, (Routledge: New York, 2011), 1.
[19] 'Letter to Kennan Warning of murders in Teyateyaneng,' (02/01/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[20] Ibid.

investigations.[21] The prevailing belief was that the murders were an issue contained within the chieftaincy, and the chiefs could solve the crisis.[22] Referred to within official correspondence at this point as "witchcraft murders," there was a prevailing sense that the government strategy, warning chiefs of legal reprisals and appeals to Christian morality, was active enough to counter it.[23] Government concern was "in no way exaggerated or sensational," and they did not publicly view the need to express any major concern.[24]

The release of a circular from the paramount's office in July 1946, likely at the instigation of the Resident Commissioner, warned chiefs that murders would not be tolerated by the royal authority or the administration: "I feel I cannot tolerate them and the government will also not tolerate them."[25] This statement reflected colonial thinking at the time, a recognition that *liretlo* was occurring but an emphasis that this was not an issue for the administration as "responsibility lay with the chiefs."[26] Government concern in these early years remained relatively measured, far from the panic it would become, and it would take external pressure from elements of the media to begin whipping this low level apprehension into national mania.

The domestic press played a key role in spreading information about the murders and sensationalising them during the early years of the panic. By the summer of 1946, the spate of murders was claimed in the celebrated *Mochochonono* (the comet), the only newspaper independent of the administration and the monarchy, to have "increased to such an alarming extent" that "this surely cannot continue."[27] Writers in *Mochochonono* made no excuse for chiefs' actions and raised the question of whether there was a future for the institution within modern Basutoland; "Let us hope that our chiefs if they value their positions, will heed this strong warning and keep off these evil practices which debase them and their people, otherwise the days of the chieftaincy are numbered and they will have nobody but themselves to blame."[28] This reflects how the Basotho-led press was a key part of laying the groundwork for the narratives that fuelled the panic within society, no matter however more measured and open to debate the coverage was than the white press.

Early killings, even unsolved ones, were reported to the nation by the national gazette, *Basutoland News*, which ensured that any resident who read English, or knew someone that did, could follow the developments in each case. *Basutoland News* was a key source of news for many in the territory and offered sustained commentary throughout the period. The paper, while not usually

[21] 'Letter from RC to paramount,' (27/12/1945), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew).
[22] 'Paramount letter to RC,' (10/01/1946), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew).
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 88.
[26] Ibid
[27] 'Mochochonono,' (27/07/1946), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew).
[28] Ibid.

containing the lurid details found in other areas, offered a detailed window into the crime that likely shaped the perception that it was pervasive and showed "no sign of abating."[29] The outcomes of medicine murder trials were a regular column in the newspaper, and it recorded how many were acquitted or executed.[30] The detailed, although usually dispassionate, court reporting provided the English reading public with the raw numbers of just how many were involved in murders.[31] Some trials did receive a detailed and descriptive overlook, such as the case of the accused murderer 'Mapti which received the entire front page. 'Mapti was a "middle aged Basotho woman" accused of murdering her late husband's controlling brother to be with her new lover, enlisting others in a scheme that would also provide the group *lenaka*.[32] Although the scandalous nature of the case may account for its particularly detailed coverage, the attention it received demonstrated there was an appetite for such stories. Murders, trials, acquittals, executions and even the occasional gory detail from cases, such as the case of Chief Mohlaoli, whom the paper accused of consuming "blood to strengthen himself," were dispassionately relayed back to the public throughout the panic through *Basutoland News*.[33]

The coverage of the murders overseas was far more sensationalist. *Reuters* portrayed the killings as a clash between Christian values and "pagan rites," a misrepresentation as indigenous Basotho and Christian beliefs were certainly not mutually exclusive, and most chiefs were Christian.[34] The wider international press commonly held up the backwardness of African education as the chief factor explaining the killings. South African press reporting formed the most influential newspaper coverage and it provided often detailed coverage of the killings, arrests, and subsequent murder trials that occurred. These reports were commonly less lurid than those in the other international press, despite still upholding some of the same racist tropes.[35] The Bloemfontein newspaper *The Friend* in particular offered the most accurate international coverage, often giving a level of nuance missing in other non-Basotho reports, recognising for instance, unlike the wider international press, that Christians were just as likely as non-Christians to commit murder.[36] While this coverage did not impact the debates occurring between Basotho significantly, only a few hundred Basotho had mail orders for various South

[29] 'Basutoland News,' (18/03/1958), *Morija Museum and Archive* (MMA) (Morija).
[30] 'Basutoland News,' (02/09/1958), *MMA* (Morija), 'Basutoland News,' (11/02/1958), *MMA* (Morija), 'Basutoland News,' (11/03/1958), *MMA* (Morija), 'Basutoland News,' (01/04/1958), *MMA* (Morija) & 'Basutoland News,' (06/05/1958), *MMA* (Morija).
[31] 'Basutoland News,' (19/08/1958), *MMA* (Morija), 'Basutoland News,' (28/08/1958), *MMA* (Morija), 'Basutoland News,' (07/10/1958) & *MMA* (Morija), 'Basutoland News,' (21/10/1958), *MMA* (Morija).
[32] 'Basutoland News,' (25/11/1958), *MMA* (Morija).
[33] 'Basutoland News,' (16/06/1959), *MMA* (Morija), 'Basutoland News,' (23/06/1959), *MMA* (Morija), 'Basutoland News,' (11/08/1959), *MMA* (Morija), 'Basutoland News,' (01/09/1959), *MMA* (Morija) & 'Basutoland News,' (15/09/1959), *MMA* (Morija).
[34] 'Reuters article,' (05/10/1946), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew).
[35] 'The Friend,' (07/11/1946), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew), 'The Friend,' (08/11/1946), FCO 141/586, 2 *TNA* (Kew), 'The Friend,' (11/11/1946), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew), 'The Friend,' (18/11/1946), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew) & 'The Friend,' (15/11/1946), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew).
[36] 'The Friend,' (01/06/1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).

African papers, members of the white elite consumed the coverage.[37] Their views were certainly shaped by it and it affected how the administration responded.

Sensationalist stories, such as an unnamed "native woman" selling her husband's head for £50, created an image of the state in crisis, a nation torn apart by "crimes of superstition."[38] Along with reports and circulars from the administration that instructed chiefs to hold *pitsos* to make the fight against liretlo "broadly known," the nation was well informed of a view that the killings were getting worse.[39] News of more murders spread freely as reports about numerous conspiracies fed back to the administration.[40] A greater sense of urgency was settling in as police investigations revealed more cases and plots; "there is no time to lose," declared a government official interviewed in *The Friend*.[41] Stories within the press it seems, sensationalised outside of Basutoland, was putting pressure on the colonial administration, which looked within media reports to be entirely out of control.[42]

Due in part to this reporting, correspondence from residents of Basutoland during the late 1940s paints the picture of a society beginning to fracture under the weight of suspicion and ill-will. Chief Nkuati Letsie wrote to the Resident Commissioner in February, fearful for his life, angry that he was being investigated and perplexed that the government was ignoring his allegations against another rival chief; "Basutoland is sick with an epidemic... Basutoland has no chiefs... we are living like a bird which in its puzzlement goes twittering for fear of its life is to be taken in cold blood yet being innocent before god."[43] Nkuati's terror is reflected in another letter sent two months later by a commoner named Mothepu Ntho; "people say they fear to tell out the names of murderers, because they will be killed, and that the Government is allowing ritual murders."[44] Another commoner, Elliot Ramaola, similarly offered an apocalyptic image of the nation's future if the murders were left unchecked; "I can see that we Basotho will be finished do to this action of the chiefs."[45] While commoners such as Mothepu and Ramaola were critical of the British, some chiefs saw salvation in direct British intervention. Chief T. O. Ntamelle, for example, wrote to the British Parliament to "save my country from destruction."[46]

Not all correspondence was alarmist. Chief Goliath of Mohale's Hoek held the view that "indiscriminate references to ritual murder in ordinary conversation are gradually leading people... to

[37] Weisfelder, R., F., *Political Contention in Lesotho, 1952-1965*, (Roma: Institute of Southern African Studies, 2002), 72.
[38] 'Press cuttings,' (10/06/1947), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew), 'Press cuttings,' (08/10/1947), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Press cuttings,' (25/10/1947), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew).
[39] 'Circular on vigilance committees,' (31/12/1948), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[40] 'Crime at Teyateyang,' (03/01/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[41] 'The Friend,' (17/01/1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).
[42] 'Arrest of policeman for medicine murder,' (14/11/1946), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew).
[43] 'Letter from angry chief,' (23/02/1940), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[44] 'Letter from citizen to RC,' (12/04/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[45] 'Letter from commoner on murders,' (20/07/1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).
[46] 'Chief letter to British MP,' (01/04/1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).

look on the matter as an every-day part of their existence," recognising that the burgeoning hysteria was not reflecting the lived experiences of most Basotho.[47] His proposal to criminalise casual talk of the topic to ensure society did not "lose sight of its seriousness and evil" was unworkable but demonstrated that there were countervailing voices at this stage in the crisis urging caution.[48] However, T. O. Ntlamele's summation of a hopeless situation is far more representative of the growing mood within the nation; "a state of fear and consternation exists more than ever in Basutoland. Nevertheless, still more murder cases are being brought forward."[49] Even some white observers, such as the 19 year old American doctor Jeff Baker, privately reflected on the impact that hearing so many murder cases had on his patients, describing it to be an "evil be a plague on the health of the people or a famine on the land."[50] The nation was moving "towards a climate of public despair," a climate that was only going to worsen with the execution of Berang and Gabashane.[51]

The execution of these two senior chiefs was, in many ways, the single event that had the most influence in the intensifying the panic. It greatly undermined the trust between Basotho society and the administration whilst also intensifying dangerous, for the British, rumours that the government had ulterior motives. The colonial government recognised the sensitivity of trying this case and "the contradictions of diagnosis and policy" that arose from it. [52] Despite upholding a strong chieftaincy being the goal throughout the 1940s, the execution of two of its most senior members sent quite the opposite message. Senior officials were determined to assert their authority in the matter as, despite the issues that might arise, the threat to the state's authority by not putting them on trial was too great. Consequently, the government hung the two chiefs on 3 August 1949.[53]

The case drew the intention of the international press; the *Sunday Express* produced a detailed overview that covered the trial extensively and compared the hanging of the two chiefs to the equivalent of "the hanging of a Prince of Wales."[54] Few had imagined that the government would go so far as to hang them and consequently the alarm, already felt by chiefs accused of murder, turned into terror.[55] Concerns over the subversion of the chieftainship by the administration were heightened, and conspiratorial theories grew in prominence.[56] Albert Brutsch, a subject of Gabashane interviewed in 1966, would record the execution as a major turning point in turning concern over the murders within

[47] 'Letter from Chief Goliath, 07/07/1949, FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).
[48] Ibid.
[49] 'Who is behind the ritual murders in Basutoland,' (1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).
[50] Baker, J., *African Flying Doctor: A Young Man's Living Journal*, (London: W. H. Allen, 1968).
[51] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 96.
[52] Ibid, 6.
[53] 'Interview with Albert Brutsch,' (1966), ICS88/2/3, *ICS* (London).
[54] 'Daily Express,' (06/08/1950), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[55] 'Police report on Berang and Gabashane case,' (21/10/1948), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[56] Ibid.

society into a major panic.[57] In the immediate aftermath of this hanging, the press and administrators, in their private correspondence, reported more stories of plots, conspiracies and aborted murder attempts.[58] The early years of the panic were therefore shaped greatly by the press coverage and the immediate impact of the hangings, but not totally. Here we must turn to another institution of Basotho life, which also had a major influence on shaping the moral dimensions of the panic, the Church and various Christian denominations.

The three main Christian denominations in Basutoland, the Catholic Church, Anglicans, and the Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS), placed additional pressure during these years on the colonial state to act. Naturally, the churches could not ignore the moral or theological implications of the occurrence and "participation in *liretlo* was strongly condemned from the pulpit."[59] Medicine murder was not a new phenomenon in the eyes of the religious establishments within in Lesotho, the PEMS missionary Eugene Casalis in 1868 had for instance recorded the use of flesh in medicines.[60] However, instead of merely providing pastoral support to victims, church leaders increasingly framed the presence of *liretlo* as an indication that indigenous culture was "a full-bodied 'doctrine' opposed to Christianity."[61] Almost immediately after press reports on the seriousness of the murders emerged, missionaries increasingly began to preach this line from their pulpits and in pamphlets added to a broader sense of panic.[62] This had the effect of reinforcing many of the same assumptions being presented within the press and the administration, as Craig Hincks reinforces, as the most respected intermediaries between the state and the people, missionary viewpoints held a particular weight.[63]

A key missionary pamphlet shaping the burgeoning anxiety over Basotho immorality was the *Basutoland Witness*, produced by the PEMS and distributed nationally. The pages of Basutoland Witness became inundated with horror stories over the killings. In the single year 1952, each issue of the quarterly magazine prominently featured a story about medicine murder and was often the opening headline article. The January to March issue called for "a spiritual campaign for humiliation and repentance," similarly, the following April to June issue declared the murders "a challenge to the Christian church in Basutoland."[64] These pamphlets explicitly used *liretlo* as an example of why the

[57] 'Interview with Albert Brutsch,' (1966), ICS88/2/3, *ICS* (London).
[58] 'Letter to paramount,' (28/05/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew), 'Police investigated, gave credence to claims,' (08/06/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew), 'Suspected murder of two girls in Leribe,' (28/06/1950), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Postmortem,' (14/07/1950), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[59] Hincks, C., W., *Quest for Peace: an Ecumenical History of the Church in Lesotho*, (Morija: Christian Council of Lesotho, 2009), 521.
[60] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 53.
[61] Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 521.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid, 520.
[64] 'Basutoland Witness,' (January-March 1952), *LNA* (Maseru), 'Basutoland Witness,' (April-June 1952), LNA, *LNA* (Maseru), 'Basutoland Witness,' (July-September 1952), *LNA* (Maseru), & 'Basutoland Witness,' (October-December 1952), *LNA* (Maseru).

Christianisation of Lesotho is not yet complete and argued against "associating culture with race."[65] The PEMS, through their connection to the educated protestant elite, who dominated Basutoland's few professional roles, had an oversized influence on printed discourse. The PEMS adopted a perspective that focused heavily on the need for Basotho Christians to encourage good behaviour in their fellow compatriots. They saw moral failings, such as drunkenness being at the root of the crimes.[66]

Christian views were far from uniform, however. The other two major denominations held rather different perspectives, although all shared a broad concern over the state of the nation. The Anglican Church broadly saw the killings as a result of poor education, believing "Christian teaching should go hand in hand with Christian practices."[67] Unlike the PEMS, however, Anglicans were far less pessimistic in their outlook. They framed the killings as a result of the failure of Christians to challenge "certain heathen customs sufficiently."[68] Both Protestant denominations blamed the Catholic Church for deviating from Christian doctrine and helping create an environment where pagan superstitions, like the belief in the power of the medicine horn, were permitted.[69] Craig W. Hinks, in his far-reaching survey into the Christian church of Lesotho, upholds this allegation and argues that protestant missionaries spread lies about the connection between Catholic "Romanism" and murder.[70] Mirroring the blame directed towards them by Protestants, Catholic priests also reported that communities had blamed Protestants for the killings.[71] In a sense, the murders were playing a small part in different missionary groups' global tussle for souls.

The official Catholic line did little to dissuade the more militant Protestant denominations. Of the three churches, the Roman Catholic Church appeared to be most relaxed about medicine murder, arguing that missionaries should acknowledge the similarities between some Christian rites, particularly the sacrament, to Basotho practices:

> "Let the iconoclasts and the puritans of all ages then blame Christ for leading us into the temptation of superstition and magical rites! One would also have to blame our lord for the gift of the sacraments since essentially, they appeal to our senses."[72]

To counter medicine murder, Catholics advocated for their missionaries to substitute "pagan 'rituals'" with more appropriate Christian ones, such as encouraging Christian burial rites.[73] Despite some nuance

[65] Ibid.
[66] 'Basutoland Witness,' (October-December 1952), *LNA* (Maseru).
[67] Hincks *Quest for Peace*, 1007.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid, 565.
[71] 'Letter to priest from commoner,' (30/06/1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).
[72] Ibid.
[73] 'Report repeating information received from a 'Father Sheddick',' (30/08/1948), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).

in how the Catholic Church addressed the issue, they still framed the issue as a conflict between pagan and Christian beliefs.[74] As Murray and Sanders suggest, missionaries argued: "that only when the nation genuinely embraced Christianity would medicine murder come to an end," which aided in creating a climate where moral panic had emerged.[75] Lieutenant M. C. Van Straaten, a policeman involved with investigating murders, noted in 1949, a view that these killings represented a reversion to barbarism had become prominent within the administration. He claimed the killings were "the undercurrents of strong primitive feelings that still exist despite the African's development under European guidance."[76]

Various aspects of Basotho heritage came under attack for not being Christian by all denominations, who linked many of these "pagan" traditions with medicine murder.[77] Chief among these were the initiation schools, often erroneously referred to as circumcision schools, whose purpose was to train boys as warriors and acted as a key cornerstone of a Mosotho's transition to manhood.[78] Despite no evidence of these schools' increasing murder rates, missionaries, who likely saw these as a rival to their educational system, erroneously claimed they were partly to blame for the murders.[79] The claims that schools were connected to murders would have a significant impact on the perception of them within the colonial government. Numerous officials were quoted as insinuating something to do with medicine murder in reports from 1949 to at least 1955, and it became a widely established rumour.[80] Initiation schools became just one part of the growing debates over moral values spilling over into the administration and wider society.

The press and the Christian churches shared a similar moralising approach that helped frame the killings as a clash of civilizations and heighten the panic. The majority of press observers and church leaders "expressed themselves openly," at the pulpit or the opinion page, that "*liretlo* was with an immense evil… this evil, though extreme, was not exceptional, but rather an integral part of Sesotho medicine and belief."[81] This shaped the existing perception within the administration on the root causes of the killings. Administrators throughout the government wrote that the murders were "symbolic of regressive trends" within Basotho and the rise in murder cases were something to be "gravely concerned" over. [82] However, this alone was not enough to create a panic. Press sensationalism and missionary speculation heaped further pressure on the state to act and acted to heighten existing

[74] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 130.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Van Straaten, M., C., quoted in Ibid, 129.
[77] 'Police report,' (10/12/1946), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew).
[78] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 56.
[79] 'Circumcision and Initiation Schools and Rites,' (1949-55), ICS88/2/3, *ICS* (London).
[80] Ibid.
[81] Hincks, *Quest for Peace*, 521.
[82] 'Letter to gov sec,' (13/11/1945), FCO 141/586, *TNA* (Kew).

tensions. Both largely ended up supporting the "official government narratives" on the murders and encouraged "desperate measures" to curb the killings.[83]

The Campaign to End Medicine Murder: Establishing an Official Narrative

The government efforts to limit the excesses of the panic and reduce the number of killings ran counter to the previous approaches to the murders that had existed in earlier decades. As chapter one observed, medicine murders in the modern sense only emerged properly in the late 19th century.[84] Consequently, while ordinary Basotho in the grassroots rarely condoned these murders and most "found them incompatible with their religious and moral beliefs," there was no organised or codified indigenous response to the killings, legal or otherwise, outside of a colonial context. [85] Perpetrators were always, of course, fearful of being caught and of retribution. However, the central authority, be that chiefly or colonial, before the 1940s did not see the need to target medicine murder as a specific crime.[86] Police had "vigorously pursued and prosecuted" individual crimes, such as in Mokhotlong in April 1928, where the accused received a fifteen-year sentence.[87] However, medicine murder was not treated any differently than 'regular' murder. While the killings were, almost universally, "condemned by the Basotho," there does not seem to be any direct mechanism used by those to oppose the killings to limit their spread within society until the anti-*liretlo* effort.[88] Hence, the responses against medicine murder formulated in the late 1940s were new and not built on existing approaches.

Although the murders had been a presence in Basutoland for decades, January 1945 appears to be the year that officials in Maseru began to openly express a level of tentative, if not overly worried, concern. District administrators from Mokhotlong and Teyateyaneng, informed the High Commissioner in Cape Town that chiefs were likely committing murders, and this was a part of "native custom" to make medicine.[89] At this stage though, any desire to move against the murders with a broad strategy targeting medicine murder specifically remained low. The administration rejected a broad strategy against the killings because there was little "strong evidence" that this was a widespread phenomenon.[90] A true recognition that these crimes were a signifier of something more, a dangerous trend within the

[83] Ibid, 521.
[84] Murray, C., & Sanders, P., *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho: The Anatomy of a Moral Crisis*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 58.
[85] Eldredge, E., *Power in Colonial Africa,* 198.
[86]Murray, & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho,* 58
[87] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa,* 179
[88] Ibid.
[89] 'HC letter on the reported increasing number of killings,' (20/01/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[90] Ibid.

chieftaincy, emerged later in 1945 as officials showed a far greater concern over their existence and District Commissioners reported increases in "witchcraft killings."[91]

Unsubstantiated rumours were making their way back to the central administration from their intelligence sources and the press, such as a report of a party of naked men with white clay on their faces engaged in some dark ritual at the site of a previous *liretlo* killing, which heightened a general feeling of hysteria.[92] In response, the Resident Commissioner tentatively proposed formulating a strategy to find "the best method of overcoming the evil."[93] Reinkowski and Thum offer a definition of "imperial failure" that proves pertinent in analysing what would become the anti-*liretlo* efforts in action; "Imperial failure thus can be defined as the incapacity to overcome the… resistance of the colonised, to maintain the support of public opinion for imperial projects even in moments of crisis."[94] The state established, in these early years of the panic, new propaganda targeting *liretlo*, an amplification of police powers, created Basotho advisory boards, and restructured the courts to better fight medicine murder. These would remain the main prongs of the effort until the campaign ended.

As with any public relations campaign, colonial or not, propaganda was a key tool mobilised by the state to assert its narrative within society. This propaganda was produced in a few different forms, such as circulars, a national anti-*liretlo* holiday, badges, education initiatives, and pamphlets, from the end of 1945. The broad aim of this propaganda was to "reduce the number of deaths" and increase the "willingness of the Basuto public to co-operate with government and police efforts.[95] In theory, this could have been a major advantage for the state, particularly in its ability to control the narratives surrounding the source of the killings. However, in practice, like elsewhere in colonial Africa, the attempt to use "propaganda" to convince an African audience of the government's legitimacy was ineffective.[96] The lack of equitable concessions and the patronising nature contained within the Basutoland government's propaganda was indicative of a "response to political paranoia and insecurity in the face of an uncertain future" and proved "not effective enough to fully counter alternative opinions."[97]

Circulars, which instructed chiefs to relay information from the government in Maseru back to their subjects, formed the earliest kinds of anti-*liretlo* propaganda produced by the government. These early circulars focused on the regulation of medicine and the new measures that chiefs should follow to

[91] 'Letter for Mokhotlong District Commissioner (DC) on killings in his district,' (30/11/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[92] 'Report by of naked men with mud on faces scaring travellers,' (03/03/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[93] 'Interview between RC and paramount chief,' (08/01/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[94] Reinkowski & Thum, 'Introduction,' 11.
[95] 'Report on roundtable conference on *liretlo*,' (22/10/1954), FCO 141/738, *TNA* (Kew).
[96] Misindo, E., ''Winning Hearts and Minds': Crisis and Propaganda in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1962–1970,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.35, No.3 (2009): 681
[97] Ibid, 663.

self-police, such as requiring two witnesses if a doctor administers medicine in his home and providing more direct support for policemen investigating in their district.[98] Officials requested the paramount send out numerous letters warning the nation not to engage in such acts and also reissued the text of a law passed by Moshoeshoe in 1855 that banned witchcraft, giving the effort more legitimacy.[99] Laws that repeated the ban on those who "pretend that they have supernatural powers" continued throughout the late 1940s, illustrating a growing concern over the murders but a poor understanding of what was causing them.[100] While there was a requirement for district officials to have a basic understanding of Sesotho, with "three language examinations" required, there was concern within the upper echelons of the administration during the late 1940s that officials' language skills were too poor to deal with their subjects effectively.[101] Administrators, against regulations, often relied on literate chiefs and interpreters to relay circulars and instruct commoners on the new *liretlo* regulations.

Officials recognised early on that medicine murder cases brought their own set of challenges and obstacles. In 1945 the High Commissioner's office wrote to the Resident Commissioner Charles Arden-Clarke, highlighting the difficulties faced in what was then known as witchcraft trials;

> "Generally… in witchcraft cases where several persons ae involved either there is a witch doctor in the background or there are indications that one of the culprits was the prime mover… In strict law no doubt all are equally guilty of murder, but in a native tribal society it is difficult to believe that all in fact were equally guilty."[102]

The colonial legal system was not necessarily designed to handle complicated cases with different levels of culpability. Officials often held the assumption that accomplices were under the control of the chiefs and therefore had limited culpability.[103] There was also a concern that witnesses were committing perjury to cover their crimes and placing the blame on other suspects. As testimony was such important evidence in getting convictions, this could have damaging consequences. Often in medicine murder cases, there were many individuals involved; determining who was at fault for what and the appropriate level of punishment was a key job of the courts.

This made dealing with murder cases especially difficult for the state, as often evidence did not meet a high standard. Consequently, the state instituted and instructed some changes to how *liretlo*

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[98] 'Circular from paramount,' (10/01/1946), FCO 141/618, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Circular from paramount,' (20/06/1946), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[99] 'Circular from paramount,' (31/07/1946), FCO 141/618, *TNA* (Kew), 'Circular – Moshoeshoe's witchcraft laws,' (04/07/1946), FCO 141/618, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Circular from paramount,' (04/11/1946), FCO 141/618, *TNA* (Kew).
[100] 'Circular on witchdoctors,' (24/06/1947), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Circular from paramount,' (09/04/1948), FCO 141/618, *TNA* (Kew).
[101] 'Minutes of RC meeting,' (04/11/1949), s3/6/9/1, *LNA* (Maseru).
[102] 'Letter from HC on difficulties in coming to a decision in a 'witchcraft trial',' (17/10/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[103] Ibid.

cases were tried to increase the conviction rate alongside severe punishments for those found guilty.[104] Senior officials hoped this would make the prospect of going to trial daunting to would-be murderers and discourage them from committing the act. However, the reforms did little to meaningfully impact the conviction rate.[105] Officials during this early period of the panic often functioned in a nation clouded in opaque silence, one where the "majority of cases never come to light."[106] Michael Lobban notes that across the British Empire, administrators, particularly those within protectorates like Basutoland, "did not want to exercise simple sovereign power" but at the same time still wanted to legitimise their actions through "quasi-legal proceedings."[107] Colonial authorities wanted to use the appearance of a "legalistic process" to enforce their authority and impart lessons to the local community.[108]

Throughout much of 1946 and 1947, though, while many letters of "concern" were written, there were few tangible proposals on what actually to do to stop the killings.[109] An interview between the Resident Commissioner and the regent 'Mantšebo on 29 May 1947 produced a new procedure for dealing with what was then known as witchcraft killings;

> "(a) That the practice of witchcraft should be entirely prohibited. (b) Anybody found practising witchcraft or giving out that he had supernatural powers would be imprisoned without the option of a fine for a minimum period of six months. (c) Medicine men, that is to say people practising the cure of sickness by using herbs, should receive a certificate form the Department of Medical Services to say that they might do so... (d) Medicine men should stay in their village and practise there, and not wander about practising."[110]

These procedures were, however, rather fanciful, not even close to how the murders were committed and were practically unenforceable. The distinction between a traditional Basotho 'medicine man' and a 'witchdoctor' was purely colonial, with no basis in how the Basotho viewed their practitioners.[111] This demonstrates a lack of knowledge of what was occurring and reflects an assumption that subversive elements were at the root of the violence, not systemic factors. [112]

The colonial obsession over 'witchdoctors' within the 1947 procedures reflected a lack of proper research into the roots of the crisis. However, their impracticality was not lost on some officials.

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[104] Ibid.
[105] 'BMP Annual Report,' (1952), 2494/6, *LNA* (Maseru).
[106] 'Teyateyaneng DC to RC,' (02/01/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[107] Lobban, M., *Imperial Incarceration: Detention without Trial in the Making of British Colonial Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 37.
[108] Ibid.
[109] 'RC letter to paramount on concern over killings,' (25/06/1947), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[110] 'Interview between RC to paramount,' (29/05/1947), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[111] 'RC letter on legislation requiring herbalists to register with their DC,' (02/11/1949), 870/1 II, *LNA* (Maseru).
[112] 'Draft application for herbalists,' (31/10/1949), 870/1 II, *LNA* (Maseru).

The High Commissioner called them "interesting" but believed them to not be useful.[113] Instead, he believed these "ritual murders" were firmly within the capacity of the state to control, thanks to new police powers that allowed for more thorough investigations of suspected crimes.[114] These measures included an *ad hoc* surveillance campaign to prevent killings before they occur by secretly spying on the population through numerous informants.[115] The confidence of the High Commissioner in the competence of the police proved to be misplaced. In a letter on 13 May 1948, he lamented that the improvement in the nation's predicament had not "materialised," He was now prepared to authorise "drastic and extraordinary action" to curb murder rates.[116]

In a 1948 letter, Resident Commissioner A. D. Forsyth Thompson complained that the government's "laisser-faire" propaganda policy was ineffective and circulars proved to be "ineffectual without further measures to support" them.[117] Despite this criticism from the administration's top, there was little immediate change regarding the state's propaganda efforts.[118] The Resident Commissioner continued to release personal circulars that requested Basotho "assist the government to save Basutoland from rotting away and from the widespread disagree in which it is."[119] Circulars from the regent 'Mantšebo commonly warned local chiefs that the state would replace them if their behaviour did not improve; these pleas largely fell on deaf ears. [120] Her appeals' ineffectiveness was due to her closeness with the colonial state, her orders nearly identical to those released by the Resident Commissioner, and her lack of standing in the nation.[121] Criticisms over the use of circulars grew throughout 1948 and into 1949. The reality of the public ignoring messages intensified the disapproval of the endeavour within the administration. An anti-*liretlo* tour in March 1949 by 'Mantšebo in regions with a high murder rate marked one of the few active efforts during these years to influence the populous.[122] However, her tour was deemed "utterly ineffective" by a committee of District Commissioners. Four years after it occurred, they noted its damaging effect on their districts and blamed her for their failure to bring murder rates under control.[123]

In aid of these propaganda efforts, the government attempted to draft some citizens into the wider state apparatus by creating Basotho-led advisory boards. This involved the creation of a new

[113] 'Letter from HC,' (22/07/1947), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[114] 'Ritual Murder - prevention and investigation,' (24/06/1948), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[115] 'Preventive measures,' (01/07/1948), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[116] 'Letter from HC to RC,' (13/05/1948), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[117] 'RC letter discussing anti-murder tactics,' (02/07/1948), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[118] 'Circular to DC's and commissioner of police,' (16/07/1953), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew).
[119] 'Notice on medicine murder', (November 1948), FCO 141/618, *TNA* (Kew).
[120] 'Circular on custom of entering a village,' (01/09/1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew), 'Circular from paramount,' (1950), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Circular on behalf of paramount chief,' (01/07/1953), FCO 141/618, *TNA* (Kew).
[121] 'RC asking paramount to redraft her circulars,' (19/07/1950), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Paramount Chief's Speech at the Opening of the 45th session of BNC,' (10/09/1949), s3/20/2/1, *LNA* (Maseru).
[122] 'Mantšebo's itinerary for an anti-MM tour,' (29/03/1949), FCO 141/538, *TNA* (Kew).
[123] 'Strategy to tackle *liretlo* from DC's meeting,' (04/02/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).

administrative apparatus, responsible to the resident commissioner and the police, who would report back on the anti-*liretlo* activity in their immediate district or area. The role and titles of these boards would shift over time, but they ultimately shared the same goal throughout their existence. By bringing prominent Basotho into the anti-*liretlo* effort, the state could both increase support for its position and use this free manpower to increase the surveillance of the public.[124] While aspects of this can be seen as somewhat progressive in the context of late colonial Basutoland, offering a potential new forum of political expression for those involved, the lack of trust given to the committees and a flawed selection process greatly limited their effectiveness.

First termed vigilance committees in 1948, they were conceived from the start by administrators as a way to engage more Basotho directly in the anti-*liretlo* effort;

> "I suggest that large vigilance committees be formed consisting of the Chiefs and leading commoners: that large meetings of the people should be held and they should be made to feel that they are every single one of them concerned with the crime until they are caught."[125]

These committees were also expected to offer the police more support, help prevent witness intimidation, act against evidence tampering and remind Basotho they were "Christians."[126] After being approved by the BNC in October 1948, there was a delay in their implementation, leading to a frustrated 'Mantšebo in December to directly order her chiefs to form committees;

> "That you, chiefs, should hold meeting for the purpose of electing village committees which will examine and advise in the matters of ritual murders and which should meet periodically for advice… Chief, treat this matter as urgent for it is a long time since my order was given and yet you have so far not yet carried it out."[127]

The Resident Commissioner instructed the District Commissioners to approve the committee members selected by chiefs, ideally selecting those Basotho who supported government efforts and could be trusted to act with impunity.[128] A key reason for the formation of the committees was the failure of the *pitso* as a way to reach the wider population, a Government Secretary in Maseru referencing the "laxity" in turnout at *pitsos* as a major factor in driving their creation.[129]

Nominations for this first wave of committee members within the nation's nine districts were put forward in January 1949 by chiefs and by administration members, ideally choosing those Basotho who supported government efforts and could be trusted. [130] Police and other officials vetted individuals

[124] 'Vigilance committee meeting report,' (24/01/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Vigilance committee meeting report,' (26/01/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[125] 'RC letter to DC's on vigilance committees,' (11/12/1948), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[126] 'RC letter to DC's on vigilance committees,' (15/01/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[127] 'Letter from chief,' (02/12/1948), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[128] 'Circular to DC's,' (11/01/1958), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew).
[129] 'Vigilance committee meeting,' (21/01/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[130] 'Vigilance committee meeting report,' (24/01/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).

before being selected to sit on the panel.[131] These selection reports provide a telling insight into the official mind-set. The criteria of who was deemed acceptable were often inconsistently applied due to political pressure and administrative bias. In June 1949, the police submitted the results of their investigations into five individuals nominated by Chief Moeketsi Mokhehle.[132] Three were deemed "trustworthy" with "nothing known against" them and appointed; the police were unable to collect enough information on another named Mohlonga but the final applicant, Makubuyase Lebotsa, was not immediately accepted on the grounds he had made a public comment on 2 January 1949 that he wanted a medicine horn.[133] Despite a signed affidavit to the contrary declaring he should not be rejected out of hand for it, the police acknowledged the statement might have been made in jest, a grim joke if true, with the context was unclear, as there was no mention he wanted flesh for his horn, he was still denied participation.[134] Other cases demonstrate that the stringent criteria that excluded anyone close to *liretlo* were often not enough to be rejected from joining. The vigilance committees were never as effective as the administration had hoped, and many Basotho refused to participate, such as when the residents of Mokhotlong boycotted proceedings in 1949.[135]

The High Commissioner publicly expressed his reservations over the government's current policy to the Basutoland National Council (BNC) in September 1949.[136] He noted that new efforts to stop the killings would be sustained until the situation was resolved, saying that "There is a very long way to go before it can be said that the stain of ritual murder has been removed from Basutoland. The government is doing and will do everything in its power to bring the perturbations of this crime to justice."[137] This effort would be conducted until "the horrible and barbarous crime of ritual murder has entirely ceased in Basutoland."[138] Although hopeful in tone, the High Commissioner offered a hollow warning to the nation. Britain would only tolerate so much: "if ritual murder does not cease, the Government may be compelled, though very unwillingly, to impose collective punishments or take action on some similar lines."[139] In reality, the state's capacity meant that such an action would be near impossible to implement, but it does indicate the strength of the government's feeling. Following this speech, the central administration began working on a new draft set of instructions to send to District Commissioners to "get the situation under control."[140]

The new instructions sent to the various districts were an adaption of the previous procedures, however they abandoned the focus on witchdoctors and instead on strengthening "popular support" and

[131] 'Vigilance committee meeting report,' (26/01/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[132] 'Vigilance committee appointments,' (25/06/1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 96.
[136] 'HC's Speech at the Opening of the 45th session of BNC,' (10/09/1949), s3/20/2/1, *LNA* (Maseru).
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] 'RC to HC correspondence,' (21/09/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).

preserving "the authority and character of native institutions."[141] With no actual mechanism to measure this support with no elected parliament, it was left largely to the Basutoland Nation Council (BNC), which consisted mainly of chiefs, to provide commentary on the officials' decisions.[142] While the 'anti-*liretlo* campaign' at this time remained relatively informal, the various strategies used by the government from the late 1940s onward, which intersected and reinforced each other, were beginning to constitute a unified effort. The proposal for an intensification of these efforts was shown to the regent Mantšebo' for her "to consider" in December 1949. Although her approval was largely nominal, with the colonial administration having ultimate authority in the protectorate, the support of the upper chieftaincy was recognised to be vital for success.[143]

The propaganda and vigilance committees aimed to be conciliatory to the broader public and were only one part of the wider strategy. The colonial government observed the need for a more coercive approach to accompany it, so it turned to the existing police apparatus. Just as in other colonial states, whose government often desired the imposition of "rigid systems of internal security on the lives of their subjects," the Basutoland Mounted Police was viewed by the administration as the most important line of defence against medicine murder.[144] This description would prove ironic, as Basotho increasingly associated the institution with violence and intimidation. The police held both a preventive role and an investigative one regarding *liretlo*, meaning an expanded force would ideally be able to visibly arrest guilty culprits and restore the public's trust in the administration more broadly. However, a greater capacity for the state to project their authority did not occur. Underfunding combined with poor police practices would poison any relationship the force had with ordinary Basotho, making it one of, if not the most, hated institution in Basutoland until independence.

Policemen during this era were exclusively male and often accused of having acquired a "love of their office chairs," spending most of their time organising the collection of taxes.[145] Officers often refused to investigate murders and instead asked members of the victim's village to take bodies to a local magistrate for further investigation, a journey in remote areas that could sometimes take days. After the Second World War, there was a shift in police strategy and an intensification of the police's presence in ordinary citizens' lives as the Commissioner pushed officers to investigate crimes and make arrests. 'Mantšebo's 1946 allowance of more police oversight into chiefly affairs had given officers authority to conduct enquiries without a representative of the chieftaincy present. This shift was described by the anthropologist Hugh Ashton as an "almost revolutionary innovation."[146] The Police

[141] 'Instructions to DC's,' (1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[142] 'Anti-*liretlo* pitsos in Matsieng,' (16/02/1951), FCO 141/738, *TNA* (Kew).
[143] 'RC meeting with paramount,' (17/12/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[144] Berridge, W., 'Sudan's Security Agencies: Fragmentation, Visibility and Mimicry, 1908–89,' *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 28 (2013): 845.
[145] Murray & Sanders *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 64-65.
[146]Ashton, H., quoted in Murray & Sanders *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 66.

Commissioner wrote a lengthy treatise in May 1947 that outlined the new procedure police should follow in dealing with murder cases, in improving "efficiency" and making civilians realise their "civic responsibilities."[147] He lamented the chiefly interference that ensured the "scales of justice are heavily loaded against the police" and pushed for a more interventionist approach;

> "If it is proposed that the services of the police force should be utilised to their fullest advantage to counteract ritual; murder, the earliest adoption of the following measures is strongly recommended:-
>
> > (i) That all members of the community should not only be permitted, but also required, to make reports of crime direct to the nearest Police Station and not necessarily through any other medium:
> >
> > (ii) That all members of the community should be required to afford every assistance at any time and place to a member of the Police Force engaged in the investigation of Crime without first having to obtain the permission of any other member of the community:
> >
> > (iii) That it should not be essential for an investigating policeman to be accompanied by the representative of a chief or headman."[148]

The Resident Commissioner accepted these recommendations. He then sent a circular to chiefs informing them that "vigorous action" was to be taken against those who obstructed the investigation of any crime and bodies were "not be disturbed" until an officer was on the scene.[149]

These orders established an interventionist precedent that would last throughout the height of the murders. Police had far more autonomy and authority and had, in theory, the legal power to undermine any opposition to their investigations. Police had a direct remit to protect witnesses, something seen as vital to the anti-*liretlo* campaign as witness testimony was such key evidence for prosecution.[150] In practice, however, police officers still faced significant barriers to their investigations. Their relatively small number meant there was still a tacit reliance on the compliance of local chiefs not to disturb bodies or intimidate witnesses without the police's knowledge. During the early 1950s, only sixteen white officers and 347 African policemen were on active duty, already deemed by the government to be insufficient for the sparsely populated mountain nation.[151] Recognising manpower was a key factor, there were some attempts to augment the police's presence, such as establishing additional police posts in ten villages in 1949. However, staffing shortages were never truly addressed satisfactorily until after independence.[152] There was some hesitation within society that this expansion of the police's remit would lead to a backlash, with Basotho going "back to the old secrecy" surrounding

[147] 'Ritual Murders – police prevention and investigation,' (30/05/1947), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[148] Ibid
[149] 'Circular that outlines the new police powers from 1946 reform,' (30/07/1947), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[150] 'Letter from Mokhehele on police methods,' (25/01/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[151] 'Basutoland Mounted Police (BMP) Annual Report,' (1950), 2494/2, *LNA* (Maseru), 'BMP Annual Report,' (1951), 2494/5, *LNA* (Maseru) & 'BMP Annual Report,' (1952), 2494/6, *LNA* (Maseru).
[152] 'Proposal for more police in certain districts,' (14/04/1949), FCO 141/538, *TNA* (Kew).

murders.[153] However, the administration believed that with a firm hand, they could squeeze them out.[154] A broad consensus existed that a stronger police presence was necessary as medicine murder was "the most serious crime the police had to contend with."[155]

In their expanded role after 1946, the Basutoland police arrested far more individuals for *liretlo* related crimes than before. Police acted as a part of the larger disciplinary power, the colonial authority, and the main arm of the wider surveillance state. The powers and reach of the police, therefore, expanded past any point before in Basutoland's history with a much greater potential for intervention in everyday people's lives. This shift was the intention of the police's new procedures. As the 1950 Basutoland Mounted Police annual report declared,

> The investigation of crime and offences requires hard work and long hours of duty, but penetration into every part of the country and a great measure of success was achieved, thus enabling all of the force to maintain the high standard of efficiency which is expected of them."[156]

The police became much more prominent in the public eye, representing the agents of government who best represented the administration, but this shift would have consequences that proved extremely damaging to the government.

In attempt to target these meagre resources used to stop the killings more evenly, the government made use of academic reports to attempt a continuous evolution their strategies. Panics were often spread by a poor understanding by officials of the indigenous culture they found themselves ruling, thus creating "the fault-lines of (mis)communication that permitted the spread of panic."[157] Correcting this was therefore a vital way for colonial regimes to manage periods of crisis. The first official investigations into the medicine murders were undertaken during the late 1940s and established the clear link between the killings and the chieftaincy. A 1947 report conceded that "ritual murders are nearly always connected in one way or another with the office or powers of a chief or headman" and primarily recommended the opening up of "mountain areas" to prevent further killings.[158] These reports constructed large areas of Basutoland as frontiers that needed to be tamed to "control and stamp out ritual murders."[159] This early reporting helped establish the link between chiefs and murders in the administration's mind. However, while it offered some statistical support for its claims, it remained a relatively small piece of research that later reports soon surpassed.

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[153] 'Letter on proposed *liretlo* solutions,' (18/06/1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).
[154] Ibid.
[155] 'BMP Annual Report,' (1952), 2494/6, LNA (Maseru).
[156] 'BMP Annual Report 1950,' *2494/2 Annual Report 1950, LNA* (Maseru).
[157] Fischer-Tiné & Whyte, 'Introduction: Empires and Emotions,' 11.
[158] 'HC report on witchcraft in Basutoland,' (21/05/1947), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[159] Ibid.

In March 1949, two memorandums were published that examined the roots of the crisis and made concrete recommendations for what the government should do next. The first was produced by the anthropologist Hugh Ashton, who offered an extensive explanation of how murderers committed the murders, the historical background, and proposals for plans to reduce tensions.[160] The report's sensationalist tone was more concerned with the salacious details of the killings than presenting a scholastically rigorous overview of the occurrence, stressing above all else that the killings were a repugnant feature of "primitive communities."[161] Attorney-General A. C. Thompson produced the other report and placed the situation in Basutoland into a wider regional context that also addressed the similar murders occurring in Swaziland.[162] It established a set of considerations for police and prosecutors for handling murder cases aiming to be "of assistance to crown counsel in London."[163] Both reports reflected a growing need from within the administration for knowledge on Lesotho; however, they were conducted ad hoc from mostly anecdotal evidence. While they helped reinforce the evolving strategy with some coherency, neither author intended their work to be definitive as officials knew that the government was commissioning a far more reaching enquiry.

That enquiry was the 1951 'Jones Report,' officially titled 'Basutoland Medicine Murder: A Report on the Recent Outbreak of 'Diretlo' Murders in Basutoland.' The survey was decided on after a "tortuous" consultation, where local officials conceded that it must be conducted publicly to ensure its credibility.[164] Jones pursued a broad survey of Basotho public opinion along with collecting every case of *liretlo* that he could identify and analysing said police records for details on each case. He conducted group interviews with commoners and members of the educated elite but not chiefs, government officials or the other whites living in Basutoland.[165] The British press reports on his investigation were typically drawn to the unusually gory nature of the crimes; The *Daily Mirror* proclaimed "he's paying the ju-ju men a call," "Sherlock Holmes Fights Voodoo" dubbed the *Daily Mail*; lastly, the *Daily Herald* warned, "Mr Jones walks into a wave of terror."[166] Jones took nearly two years to write up his findings, and the final report was hotly anticipated by the administration, who hoped "the impending anthropological investigation" would be able to produce "a more authoritative statement" on the subject of medicine murder.[167] This anticipation reached the very top of the British government. A cabinet

[160] 'Memorandum on Certain aspects of Ritual Murder in Basutoland,' (March 1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[161] Ibid.
[162] 'Memorandum on Ritual Murder in the High Commission Territories,' (March 1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).
[163] Ibid.
[164] Murray & Sanders *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 119.
[165] Ibid, 120.
[166] 'Press Cuttings,' (1949), DO 119/4158, *TNA* (Kew).
[167] 'Memorandum on Ritual Murder in the High Commission Territories,' (March 1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).

report in March 1951 recommended they hold off any actions against the murders as there was confidence that the Jones Report would offer tangible solutions.[168]

The cabinet did not have long to wait. In April 1951, Jones published the final report, within which he argued that the primary cause of the killings was the belief in the efficiency of human remains in medicine, but the reasons why the rates of murder had increased were due to three secondary factors.[169] The first was the unchecked placement system which had led to an over-proliferation of chiefs. The second was the conflict over the paramountcy between Berang and 'Mantšebo. Thirdly, he argued that the prosecution of Berang and Gabashane had encouraged the belief that these medicines were effective and that the political reforms had not remedied the situation as intended but vastly intensified it.[170] Crucially for the anti-*liretlo* effort, Jones argued that the state could not remedy these factors purely with propaganda, but that stronger action was also required. He called for extra police, the removal of Mantšebo's powers and, most crucially, the establishment of a hierarchy of local councils so ordinary people could be involved in politics. Jones's recommendations remained broadly punitive and were steeped in a colonial attachment to imperial law and order, a belief in the value of coercion, which blinded him to the corrosive nature of the colonial state.[171] However, his proposed political reforms were radical and aimed to ensure "the greatest measure of self-government that was possible."[172]

The immediate responses to Jones's findings within the administration and wider Basotho society were mixed. The report made little impact on Basotho public opinion, partly because the government never translated it into Sesotho.[173] Within the government, though, there was a much more positive response. Administrators largely accepted it as a competent report and an entirely fair assessment of Basutoland's situation, mirroring the critiques that Baring, Forsyth Thompson, and others had already vocalised.[174] Soon after its publication, British Prime Minister Clement Atlee received a prophetic letter from the Lord Privy Seal. That letter warned that the report's recommendations had to be taken "promptly," or it could cause the administration significant embarrassment and give fuel to the nation's opponents.[175] Lord Hailey argued that Jones was too focused on this structural change and lenient on 'Mantšebo.[176] Despite this pocket of criticism, there was a general acceptance by the

[168] 'Cabinet report on medicine murders,' (27/03/1951), PREM 8/1309, *TNA* (Kew).
[169] Ibid, 209-211.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa,* 198.
[172] Murray & Sanders *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho,* 124.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Ibid.
[175] 'Letter from Lord Privy Seal to Clement Atlee,' (09/04/1951), PREM 8/1309, *TNA* (Kew).
[176] Hailey, M., H., *Native Administration in the British African Territories Part V. The High Commission Territories: Basutoland, The Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland*, (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1953), 130-132.

government of its conclusions, although there was little commitment to implement the recommendations.[177]

Resident Commissioner Edwin Porter Arrowsmith noted in correspondence for instance that Jones's ideas were laudable but "impractical" and "unworkable" and the more significant proposals Jones recommended to forestall more killings were ignored.[178] For example, Jones had privately lobbied the Resident Commissioner for the immediate removal of 'Mantšebo but caveated: "this should not be done by direct government action, but if the Basutos themselves would do it then the cessation of ritual murders is possible."[179] Despite officials desiring her removal, the colonial government recognised that removing her without a legal basis would lead to destructive political consequences, and it would be "unwise to depose her."[180] Jones's calls for restructuring local government were never put into effect, and while his calls for more punitive action were, an expansion of the police force's manpower did not follow.[181] The Jones Report looms largest as the most far-reaching enquiry during the crisis but, similar to the 1959 Devlin Commission in Nyasaland, the more transformative remedies it recommended were ignored.[182] The state did not take advantage of the major investigative advantages it had to create an effective strategy that could better limit the more damaging aspects of the panic and reduce the harm it was causing to the administration.

Overall, these early thrusts of the anti-*liretlo* effort from 1945 to 1952 established the main ways in which the colonial state would attempt to manage the panic and handle the issue of medicine murder. By 1952 however it was already it is apparent the effort had major structural issues that would hamper its development later in the decade. Principally, the engagement with the moral aspects of the murders and the lack of consideration on wider causes to the murders would ensure that these efforts would fail. These early years of the anti-*liretlo* effort also established the ways in which the nationalist parties would find faults in the effort and use its failings to attack the edifice of British power. Dissatisfaction at aspects of the campaign, most prominently in response to the vigilance committees and police behaviours, demonstrated that even in these early years the public response toward the administration flexing its authority to stamp out the killings was one of frustration rather than deference.[183] This confusion and difficulty in establishing an effective medicine murder strategy was in part a factor in the government desiring to understand medicine murder better, there was a reasoning

[177] 'Review of Jones report in African Studies,' (December 1952), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew).
[178] 'RC letter on Donald and Majara report,' (20/07/1953), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew).
[179] Jones, G., I., quoted in Ibid, 126.
[180] Ibid.
[181] 'Minutes of DC's conference,' (12/11/1957-16/11/1957), FCO 141/740, *TNA* (Kew).
[182] Simpson, B., 'The Devlin Commission (1959),' *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2002): 51.
[183] 'Letter from citizen to RC,' (12/04/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).

within the administration that they needed to understand the killings better if they were going to stop them.[184]

The resulting Jones report was not, as Eldredge has suggested a "deliberate British colonial cover up" of the factors driving the killings nor an attempt to protect the royal elite, namely 'Mantšebo.[185] This somewhat deceptive and disingenuous assertion ignores the intent of the colonial state in commissioning these reports and takes the reasoning behind their creation with more bad faith than is necessary. Murray and Sanders's observation that the Basutoland administration merely used Jones to give their existing viewpoint legitimacy is more apt; "Despite his [Jones] worthy academic reputation ... it is hard not to escape the feeling that he was used by the colonial authorities to prove what they already suspected and hence to justify what they already wanted to do."[186] Far from being a moment that drew a line under the issue of medicine murder, the government's opaqueness and reluctance to share its contents with the nation likely encouraged a view that there was a conspiracy against the Basotho. The official narrative within the Jones report would prove unsatisfactory to many Basotho, who would turn to the opponents of colonial rule to offer an alternative.

Lekhotla la Bafo: Establishing a Counter-Narrative

The burgeoning panic and the formulations of the administration's response were not the only forces offering sustained commentary on the nature of the killings. Opponents to colonialism viewed the panic and response as an opportunity to expand their influence and undermine the tenets of British rule. The group central to this anti-colonial agitation during the period 1945 to 1952 was the Council of Commoners, known more commonly in Sesotho as *Lekhotla La Bafo* (LLB), founded in 1919 by Josiel Lefela (1885-1965). Commoner, non-chiefly, opposition politics within Basutoland truly began when LLB was established and Lefela, from its inception, fashioned LLB into the nation's first self-declared movement of "mass politics" for "the uneducated many."[187] They played a vital role in forming a counter-narrative on *liretlo* and laid the foundation for the BAC's success, providing a model that could be emulated and expanded upon. Crucially, during the imemmediate post-war period, the association were the main opposition force challenging the government on their approach to *liretlo*. This has commonly been overlooked. Within Basotho nationalist historiography, LLB is attributed only with

[184] 'HC report on witchcraft in Basutoland,' (21/05/1947), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[185] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*, 16.
[186] Ibid.
[187] Davidson, B., *Modern Africa: A Social and Political History*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 74.

minimal importance.[188] However the group had an integral role to play in the process that led to independence.[189]

The only Basotho political organisation that existed before LLB was the elitist, educated, and professional Basutoland Progressive Association (BPA), a non-nationalist educated middle class pressure group formed in 1905 to lobby for Basotho interests. The BPA became mostly "appreciated" by the colonial establishment as "enlightened" intermediaries.[190] LLB on the other hand was much more populist and backed primarily by peasants, migrant labourers, and small shopkeepers. The group's ideology covered a range of tenets, including a belief in a strong chieftainship, commoner rights, and equitable economic access, along with a cultural and spiritual revival.[191] Resembling other movements that emerged across Southern Africa during the interwar period, LLB mobilised "continuing traditions, although deprived of material basis," such as the evocation of the supposed golden age of the Basotho chieftaincy.[192] Lefela placed a great emphasis on the protectorate agreement signed by Moshoeshoe and argued throughout his life that this treaty was proof of Basutoland's independence.[193] This position would not shift from the group's foundation until Lefela's death. LLB did not advocate for a complete break with Britain as they believed their autonomy was a legally guaranteed fact, despite the evidence in front of their eyes to the contrary. Lefela summarised the group's view in 1957 when he argued that Basotho should not negotiate with Britain over Lesotho's sovereignty as "a man does not request what is his."[194]

References to ceremonies, such as the *pitso*, along with historical symbols, particularly Moshoeshoe and his unconquered mountain fortress of Thaba-Bosiu, were prominent in LLB doctrine and the national political tradition they wanted to reinvent.[195] The association believed negative trends, including chiefly corruption, predatory capitalism, and missionary influence on society, could be challenged by embracing how Moshoeshoe had led the Basotho.[196] They wanted a new future for the Basotho based on the models of governance contained in an idealised past.[197] Hugh Ashton described the group as "politically unbalanced… [with a] lack of ideological content or positive purpose," while

[188] Edgar, R., *Prophets with Honour*, 41.
[189] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho,* 1-4.
[190] 'HC responding to BPA,' (28/01/1919), s3/22/1/2, *LNA*, Maseru & 'Mochochonono,' (13/07/1921), s3/22/1/2, *LNA*, (Maseru), Machobane, L., B., B., J., *Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 181 & Epprecht, M., Women's 'Conservatism' and the Politics of Gender in Late Colonial Lesotho,' *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 36. (1995), 43.
[191] 'LLB Meeting,' (02/08/1930 to 05/08/1930), DO 35 380/1, 10667/21, *TNA* (Kew) & 'LLB letter to Prince Frederick asking for the creation of a council of commoners,' (25/08/1923), CO 417/696, *TNA* (Kew).
[192] Landau, P., S., *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400 to 1948,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xiii.
[193] 'Report on LLB Meeting,' (12/03/1930-14/03/1930), DO 35 379/8, 10667/5, *TNA*, (Kew).
[194] Lefela J., quoted in Khaletla, B., M., *Lesotho 1970: An African Coup under the Microscope*, (London: University of California Press, 1972), 39.
[195] Rosenberg, S., *Promises of Moshoeshoe*, (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2008).
[196] Haliburton, G., M., 'Walter Matitta and Josiel Lefela,' *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. 7 (1975), 126.
[197] Ibid.

Roger Edgar cast them more fittingly as "progressive traditionalists," holding an attachment to the past but also an ambitious programme for the future.[198] Their ideology was syncretic, sometimes contradictory, but channelled popular distrust toward colonialism into a political programme that looked both backward and forward. LLB, therefore, did not practice "polite politics" or believe in tactics of "gentle persuasion."[199] Instead, Lefela's group remained deeply critical of colonialism's impact throughout its existence and mobilised to oppose its excesses, an outlook that would shape their view of the *liretlo* killings.

Before *liretlo*, conspiracy theories formed the mainstay of LLB's rhetoric. From its foundation, the organisation regarded all colonial activities as part of a wider plot to destroy the country and incorporate it into South Africa.[200] Missionaries, in particular, were seen as the most corrosive colonial agents and a part of this wider conspiracy to undermine the Basotho people through cultural assimilation; "our missionaries urge us to turn our spears into plough shares and pruning hooks."[201] An indication of their strength of feeling was their claims that "the government's savages is exceedingly more than Satan's" and their allusions to "cannons at Maseru facing towards Thaba Bosiu [the traditional capital]… instead of facing towards the Boers."[202] Lefela linked wider conspiracies surrounding Britain to the material hardships facing the nation. He drew a link between government regulations and poor agricultural output: "the government is intruding in our food: today we are hungry, our country is taken away from us."[203]

The ability of LLB to evoke emotions within Basotho society through falsified narratives was certainly not lost on local officials before the panic became a national issue. Many echoed the fear that the "constant denunciation of authority by LLB may turn… localised unrest into anti-European demonstration with the local police forces unable to cope."[204] Those operating at the district level, in particular, cautiously warned that while LLB was not a threat during the interwar years, their messages may prove influential; the "alarmist statements made by Josiel Lefela and others should, in my opinion be put to a stop as there is no knowing what effect they may ultimately have on the younger generation."[205] However, senior officials remained largely dismissive of LLB and baselessly questioned the intellectual capacity of Josiel Lefela, arguing he was "mentally deranged… incapable of grasping

[198] Ashton, H., The Basuto: A Social Study of Traditional and Modern Lesotho, 2nd ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), Xvi & Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, 40.
[199] Davidson, B., *Modern Africa: A Social and Political History*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 74. & Hodgkin, T., *Nationalism in Colonial Africa*, (New York: New York University Press, 1956), 144.
[200] 'LLB Letter to Mantšebo,' (08/02/1942), DO 35 912/5, Y168/13, *TNA* (Kew).
[201] 'Letter to Colonial Secretary,' (23/05/1930), DO 35 380/1, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Petition from LLB,' (29/09/1930), DO 35 380/2, *TNA* (Kew).
[202] Ibid.
[203] 'Report on LLB Meeting,' (24/05/1930-26/05/1930), DO 35 380/1, 10667/9, *TNA* (Kew).
[204] 'Letter from Resident Commissioner on LLB libellous claims,' (31/07/1930), DO 35 380/1, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Colonial View on LLB,' (13/08/1930), DO 35 380/1, 10667/14, *TNA* (Kew).
[205] 'J. H. Simms correspondence,' (02/03/1931), DO 35 380/2, 10667/28, *TNA* (Kew).

facts."[206] The government's indifferent attitude toward LLB would change during the Second World War. Despite initially not holding a strong opinion on the conflict, LLB soon became a focal point of anti-war activism, publicly denouncing the poor treatment of Basotho soldiers and the predatory impact of labour recruitment.[207]

In a precursor to his later campaign attacking the government's anti-*liretlo* efforts, Lefela and his subordinates toured the nation to spread their anti-colonial conspiracy theories and undermine the war effort.[208] Lefela and other speakers spread rumours in an attempt to disrupt labour recruitment. They falsely claimed that "orders have been given to kill LLB members and chiefs" and soldiers' pay was going to be "withheld," even making the provocative allusion that Basutoland was becoming "a concentration camp" full of Basotho dead.[209] Police intelligence reports seemingly affirm the impact LLB had on labour recruitment for the war effort in the Middle East and Italy, calling these rumours "largely responsible for the unrest and misunderstanding which resulted in recent desertion."[210] Government officials affirmed to their superiors that the group had created "an atmosphere of fear and unrest" that seemingly had permeated even the "respectable" sections of Basotho society.[211] The group's misinformation even reached the desk of future Prime Minister Clement Atlee, who wrote to the Basutoland government to enquire whether the rumours he heard were true.[212] Consequently, a ban was placed on LLB activities from 1941 until 1946, with key members, including Lefela, interned.[213]

After 1945 both LLB and Basutoland faced a new world.[214] The socio-economic impact of increased absentee rates, returning soldiers, and the treasury reforms of 1946 created a more unsettled political climate than the interwar years.[215] In August 1946, the *Manchester Guardian* ran a scathing report on the Basutoland government's treatment of the "anti-fascist" LLB, calling for lifting the restrictions placed on Lefela and his group.[216] The colonial state was coming around to removing restrictions as there was a prevailing belief that LLB was "unlikely to survive long in its present

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[206] 'Letter to Resident Commissioner on LLB,' (24/07/1930), DO 35 380/1, 10667/16, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Government secretary report,' (25/08/1930) DO 35 380/1, 10667/21, *TNA* (Kew).
[207] Ntabeni, M., N., *War and Society in Colonial Lesotho, 1939*-45, (Ontario: Queens University, 1996), 39.
[208] 'Report on 'The Prophetess'' (19/05/1942), FCO 141/499, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Letter by Seike' (05/01/1941), DO 35 912/4, *TNA* (Kew).
[209] 'LLB letter to police super intendent,' (25/02/1942), FCO 141/499, *TNA* (Kew), 'Seike letter to Resident Commissioner protesting ban,' (18/04/1943), FCO 141/499, *TNA* (Kew), 'Police report on LLB preaching,' (05/03/1942), DO 35 912/5, Y168/13, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Letter from a police commissioner,' (05/03/1942), FCO 141/499, *TNA* (Kew).
[210] 'Police report on LLB members,' (25/11/1941), DO 35 912/5, Y168/13, *TNA* (Kew).
[211] Ibid, 'Police report on LLB subversive activity,' (09/03/1942), DO 35 912/5, Y168/13, *TNA* (Kew) 108-109
[212] 'Clement Atlee to High Commissioner,' (28/04/1942), FCO 141/512, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Moeletsi,' (16/05/1944), FCO 141/391, *TNA* (Kew).
[213] 'Copy of Banning Order' (24/12/1941), DO 35 912/5, Y168/13, *TNA* (Kew).
[214] Ntabeni, M., N., 'Military Labor Mobilization in Lesotho 1940-43,' *South African Journal of Military Studies*, Vol 36 (2008): 54.
[215] Mphanya, N., *My life in the Basutoland Congress Party*, (Morija: Morija Printing Works, 2010), 4.
[216] 'Extract from the Guardian,' (01/08/1946), DO 35/1177, Y836/3, TNA (Kew).

form."[217] Wartime measures would be finally lifted on 22 October 1946 due to the ineffectiveness of a post-war ban. By this point, it was "a dead letter" with members of LLB actively gathering under the auspices of holding "religious meetings."[218]

Nearly a year after the lifting of the ban and a few years before the anti-*liretlo* effort got into full swing, LLB made their first public statements on the murders. Police reports on meetings held in May and June 1947 recorded LLB speakers referring to the "very oppressive" nature of British rule being a greater problem for the Basotho than the killings.[219] The government's explanation of the killings was already being cast into doubt. Lefela, though, was not yet fully committed to his line of attack; while he noted a wider conspiracy, he also conceded the murders existed.[220] He would later be more hesitant to accept the reality of the killings as his counter-narrative of the murders being a scheme to deliver Basutoland to South Africa grew in popularity. Regardless, police, even at this early stage, referred to *liretlo* as "ammunition" for the association, as it proved that Britain was undermining the Basotho nation.[221] While the panic did not become a national political issue until 1948, even as the increase in the murder rate had been publicly known to be on the increase since 1946, these early exchanges were crucial in establishing LLB's agenda and thinking on the murders.

Throughout the remainder of the 1940s, Lefela was at the forefront of the association's efforts. He spread rumours that Britain's secret goal was to "deprive us of our rights and those of the chiefs" and to take "away bits of the country."[222] While not always mentioning the murders by name, he referenced a conspiracy to destroy the nation and swallow up the chieftaincy spread; a police report in 1947, for instance, declaring that LLB speakers were decrying Britain's attempts to drive "our born chiefs into destruction."[223] The group also included the main Christian missions, the other main vehicle of colonial power, within their wider conspiracy, alleging "the churches with their three denominations work hand in hand with the government to down the Basotho nation."[224] As in the colonial narrative, counter-statements of medicine murders spread by LLB were caught up in wider accounts of "Sesotho culture as a whole."[225] The denying of a Basotho role in the killings reflected, in a sense, a defence of that culture and a way to assert a national pride damaged by the association with killings. Britain, not any Basotho cultural quirk or restless chieftaincy, were the real suspects, according to Lefela.[226]

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[217] 'Letter from Mantšebo' (23/09/1946), FCO 141/500, TNA (Kew).
[218] 'Telegram reporting ban on LLB being lifted,'26/10/1946, DO 35/1177, Y836/3, TNA (Kew) & 'Letter from Kennen,' (07/09/1946), DO 35/1177, Y836/3, TNA *(Kew).*
[219] 'Report on LLB,' (12/05/1947-02/06/1947), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew)
[220] Ibid.
[221] 'Report on LLB,' (23/06/1947), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).
[222] 'Report on a pitso held by District Commissioner,' (21/10/1947), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew).
[223] 'Report on LLB meetings,' (04/10/1947-06/10/1947), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew).
[224] 'Police report on a Lefela speech,' (10/10/1947), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew).
[225] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 131.
[226] 'Report on LLB meeting,' (09/09/1947), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew)

Lefela argued that the British government was whipping up hysteria "as a device for destroying the natural leaders of the Basotho and so paving the way for incorporation into the South African Union."[227] In destroying the chiefs through false murder claims, the British would, by extension, undermine Basotho's autonomy and hand whoever was left alive to the Boers.[228] This fear of a South African takeover due to the murders intensified after the National Party took power in the Union in 1948.[229] The National Party's proposals for Apartheid understandably terrified the Basotho within the kingdom, who were well aware of South Africa's long-standing desires to annex the Basotho enclave directly.[230] South Africa loomed largely and gave some tangible support to LLB's story of a fabricated plot to discredit Lesotho's chieftaincy and remove a major bulwark against incorporation.[231] Although the idea of a grand conspiracy may have appeared fanciful to British eyes, in the context of 1940s Basutoland, it was far from fantasy. These statements were one of the first major examples of *liretlo* being used as a rhetorical tool to make another political point, in this case, to demonstrate the real threat of incorporation.

LLB's critique of Britain did not just remain in the realm of a hidden conspiracy. The group also made more concrete allegations directed at specific colonial policies, particularly the unpopular chieftaincy reforms of 1938 and 1946.[232] LLB presented these reforms as a precursor for the current violent troubles, a way for the British government to undermine and replace the beleaguered Basotho chieftaincy with more pliant colonial agents.[233] The association ignored that it was the chiefs themselves committing the murders.[234] LLB had clear intentions in using the killings to undermine colonial power and restore integrity to the protectorate, although they stopped short of arguing in favour of independence. The extent to which they spoke on the issue during the late 1940s suggests it must have been seen as somewhat of a winning strategy, the attacks on the government seemingly raising their profile. Although there was no evidence for their bold claims, this likely did not matter. At their core, the group were a populist force that wanted to appeal to the masses and against elite interests.

That is not to say there was complete unity within Basotho politics over LLB's position on *liretlo*. Some in society, particularly those in the *bahlalefi*, could not overlook Lefela's abrasive style or allegations that he had embezzled money from the party and found him an embarrassing representation of Basotho politics.[235] Ultimately, these criticisms did not prevent LLB from broadly enhancing its

[227] 'Letter to Colonial Secretary,' (23/05/1930), DO 35 380/1, *TNA* (Kew), 'Petition from LLB,' (29/09/1930), DO 35 380/2, *TNA* (Kew)& Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho,* 92.
[228] 'Seike letter,' (02/03/1947), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew).
[229] 'Report from Resident Commissioner,' (14/07/1947), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew).
[230] Ibid.
[231] 'Police report on LLB activities,' (14/06/1947- 17/06/1947), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).
[232] 'Summary of LLB meeting,' (30/06/1947), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).
[233] Ibid.
[234] 'LLB Letter to Mantšebo,' (08/02/1946), DO 35 912/5, Y168/13, *TNA* (Kew).
[235] 'Resident Commissioner Report on LLB,' (15/06/1949), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).

esteem within society. As LLB was the only group challenging the British in public, those with reservations were often forced to overlook the association's more retrograde and distasteful aspects.[236] In an important point in the context of a protectorate, LLB also asserted that "Britain was failing its role as protector" resonated with nearly one hundred years of history.[237] By linking the medicine murder panic to colonial policy, it connected too many individuals' sense of socio-economic dislocation. Reinforcing this, Edgar states, "many Basotho agreed with his [Lefela's] allegations, and it is no coincidence that during this period *Lekhotla La Bafo* found itself riding a wave of support."[238]

The level of popular support LLB actually had during the late 1940s is hard to ascertain. However, two factors point to this period being a high point in the group's existence. First, the group's membership grew from around one thousand before the war to a claimed two thousand seven hundred after the ban. [239] British officials dismissed this increase, but independent observers, particularly the American Civil Liberty's Council, recognised this shift as significant for a country of Basutoland's size.[240] The second was the composition of that new membership and the demographics the group was attracting. Police reports indicated three new groups attending LLB meetings, notably women, young people and ex-soldiers.[241] These groups had suffered materially most during the war or had their horizons broadened by their experiences abroad. Local officials warned the Resident Commissioner of LLB's recruitment of disaffected groups, noting their wide-ranging potential with a "message that appeals to those with a grudge against Britain."[242]

This new support did not just materialise for Lefela. It required a multifaceted strategy to make use of the situation created by the panic to raise their profile. There were four key components of this strategy. First, the group used public gatherings, such as rallies of supporters or in *pitsos*, to publicly attack the government's anti-*liretlo* efforts. The ageing Lefela would use proxies at these events, such as his brother Maphutseng Libenyana Jobo and Rabese Seike, who spread an identical narrative in the various regions across Lesotho outside of their leader's Beria base.[243] The *pitso* had long been at the heart of LLB's strategy, and it continued to be so. Multiple reports during 1947 reached the colonial officialdom that the group used *pitsos* to make statements of "gross inaccuracy and misrepresentation" to "largely uneducated or disgruntled" audiences receptive to such messages.[244] The targets of this rhetoric included the government's inaction on protecting Basotho from the killings and the corrosive

[236] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour,* 33.
[237] 'Report on LLB meetings,' (14/07/1947-09/09/1947), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew)
[238] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour,* 35.
[239] 'High Commissioner Report on LLB,' (20/06/1947), FCO 141/501, TNA (Kew).
[240] 'Letter by civil liberty's council in USA,' (10/12/1947), FCO 141/500.
[241] 'Summary of LLB meeting,' (15/06/1947), FCO 141/501, TNA (Kew).
[242] 'Letter to Resident Commissioner,' (02/07/1947), FCO 141/501, TNA (Kew).
[243] 'Report on Pitso at Thaba-Bosiu,' (06/01/1949), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[244] 'Report from Resident Commissioner to DC's,' (14/07/1947), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew).

impact of the church on Basotho culture.[245] LLB meetings were often attended by police, both in secret and officially. Subsequent reports often contained snippets of colourful rhetoric at *pitsos* that must have been shocking for many listening; "We accuse England and are not joking; England exterminates nations with its cannons… [and says] 'they were savage nations incapable of civilisation'."[246]

The strategy's second major component was to use the new District Councils, created in 1946, to offer a limited representative element to local Basutoland governance.[247] Although Lefela was personally critical of these bodies for being a poor substitute for a proper democratic legislative, likening them a "big four gallon paraffin tin with tea" that has only "a teaspoonful of sugar," he nevertheless saw they could provide the group with an opportunity.[248] Villages within Basutoland's nine districts could select two representatives on three-year terms to the District Councils. Each District Council would select two members to serve on the National Council.[249] LLB recorded modest successes in the first elections of 1946, receiving ten delegates out of forty in Leribe and six in Teyateyang.[250] Although District Commissioners presided over these councils, and they only officially had an advisory role, they still provided an official assembly for debate where opposition talking points could be raised.[251] Consequently, LLB used their newly elected positions to bang the drum on *liretlo*, accusing the various District Commissioners of "mischievous distortions of historical truth" and not being honest with the nation on the nature of British involvement in the murders.[252] Although the power this small number of seats gave LLB was limited, their presence in an official forum gave them credibility as a group that could deal with the responsibilities of power. It also proved that an opposition group could use colonial institutions to undermine the edifice from the inside.

Petitions and letter-writing campaigns formed the third major component of LLB's *liretlo* strategy. LLB constantly lobbied the government, foreign powers, and international organisations to address Basotho grievances over *liretlo*. Appeals to the United Nations (UN) were of a particular focus, as the group tried to take advantage of the new international order.[253] Becoming a UN protectorate was seen as a potential replacement for British rule, with Josiel Lefela often threatening that "if the British do not comply with the agreement signed by Queen Victoria, LLB will request to be protected by the

[245] 'Correspondence between government and catholic mission,' (15/09/1947), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).
[246] 'Police report on LLB activities,' (14/06/1947-17/06/1947), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).
[247] 'Report on LLB,' (15/11/1950), DO 35/4467, TNA (Kew).
[248] 'National council meeting reports 1947,' (19/11/1947), s3/20/1/39, *LNA* (Maseru).
[249] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, 33.
[250] Ibid.
[251] 'RC meeting 1949,' 04/11/1949, s3/6/9/1, *LNA* (Maseru).
[252] 'Resident Commissioner's letter,' (13/05/1947), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Resident Commissioner's letter,' (20/06/1947), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).
[253] 'Letter to UNO by Seike asking for UN mediation,' (02/06/1946), DO 35/1177, *TNA* (Kew), 'Letter from Seike to UN,' (07/10/1947), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew) & 'LLB letter to UN,' (20/11/1949), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew).

UN."[254] The group called for UN mediation on medicine murder, as seen in chapter two, there was a distrust in the British to carry out any investigation impartially, and they pushed for greater oversight of the police force.[255] However, while LLB intended these letters to raise grievances on an international stage, they had to be sanctioned first by officials before being sent abroad. This dynamic made making appeals to international allies, especially the UN, an especially inefficient form of protest, as colonial officials mostly often ignored or ridiculed the LLB appeals.[256] These letters had little practical effect in getting international supporters for the association's claims on *liretlo*. However, they were consistent with their major medicine murder strategy, attempting to spread the conspiracy and use it to garner support.

The final and perhaps most consequential part of the association's strategy was their active attempts to agitate within murder cases to highlight colonial incompetence and instances of "bribery and coercion" within the police.[257] Lefela was particularly concerned with officers forcing convictions out of suspects for the crimes, believing this to be the only reason chiefs ever confessed; "in the case of ritual murders... the police compelled people to give untruthful evidence that the chiefs have killed so that they may also be killed."[258] When the group heard of a murder case, they would often attempt to 'assist' the police in their investigations by observing what was occurring to ensure that the police did not take any testimony through coercion.[259] When they were inevitably blocked from doing this, they considered it proof of the government's guilt. Widespread criticism of the unpopular police force and the hatred of illegal detention meant this issue strongly resonated within wider society.[260] LLB, therefore, used criticism of the police's handling of *liretlo* to disrupt colonial authority by calling into question the credibility of its main coercive institution. They used dissatisfaction with the status of policing to call repeatedly for damaging independent enquiries on officer conduct free from police interference. These calls were ignored but indicate LLB saw the potential to make political capital from police behaviour.[261]

If an investigation had progressed far enough to identify witnesses and credible suspects, Lefela or another senior LLB member would offer to represent them in their legal matters with the police and lobby for their innocence, calling for an independent commission to take over.[262] Lefela's personal

[254] 'Subversive statements made by Josiel Lefela,' (16/01/1950), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew). 561-566
[255]'Maphutseng letter to UNO,' FCO 141/502, 20/08/1950, *TNA* (Kew), Maphutseng letter to British Foreign Minister,' (26/02/1950), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew) , 'Maphutseng letter to UNO,' (18/06/1950), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Maphutseng letter to UNO,' (26/02/1950), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew).
[256] 'Telephone call with Lefela,' (15/11/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[257] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 80.
[258] 'Report on LLB meeting,' (03/05/1949), 165 Vol II, *LNA* (Maseru).
[259] 'Letter from Josiel to Dominions Office,' (20/11/1949), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew).
[260] 'Letter from Lefela on behalf of chiefs,' (02/02/1952), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[261] 'Extract from BNC session,' (16/10/1953), FCO 141/737, *TNA* (Kew).
[262] 'Subversive statements made by Lefela,' (06/08/1950-07/08/1950), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew), 'LLB meeting report,' (22/05/1949), 165 Vol II, *LNA* (Maseru) & 'Lefela letter representing prisoners condemned to death,' (23/05/1949), 165 Vol II, *LNA* (Maseru).

experience of being falsely accused in August 1951 may have reinforced his determination to ensure police investigations were conducted fairly, and he personally involved himself in a significant number of cases.[263] LLB's assistance to suspects did not end if the suspect was found guilty; convicted chiefs continued to receive the group's support through fiery petitions attempting to disprove the state's claims.[264] They did not have much respect for the legal system and publicly challenged guilty verdicts with threats to protest.[265] This obstruction was more than just an attempt to pervert the course of justice but was a part of the organisation's wider moral crusade to discredit Britain and, in their eyes, save the Basotho nation.[266] Despite the government believing the police and legal system could provide transparency and reveal the true culprits, the lack of trust they showed in their people emboldened LLB to campaign for convicted chiefs. [267]

An indication of the group's rising fortunes was the Resident Commissioner agreeing to meet with Lefela on 2 March 1949 to listen to his grievances on the government's handling of *liretlo*.[268] During these increasingly ill-tempered discussions, Lefela petitioned for a new commission and the end of executions for convicted chiefs, who he believed were innocent and the victims of a colonial conspiracy. However, the commissioner declared these demands to be impossible, and this caused Lefela to storm out, reportedly muttering, "'I know how I shall do it'."[269] LLB's relationship with the government was not helped by the articles they published in the independent South African black press, primarily the communist-aligned *Inkululeko*, which directly charged the government were committing the murders.[270] Lefela used the press abroad to avoid censorship, covertly getting his message across the border that "the government wanted to annex Basutoland to the union."[271] These publications almost led to the arrest of Lefela in December 1949 for sedition. However, a secret report concluded this would not be in the national interest as it would give him a large public platform where "he could not legally be stopped from calling witnesses in his defence."[272]

[263] 'Letter from Josef Letsatsi,' (03/08/1951), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew), 'Political significance of murder in Leribe,' (17/10/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Murder in Leribe of Pregnant Woman,' (30/11/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[264] 'Lefela agitating in Murder Case,' (30/11/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew) & 'LLB meeting in Maseru,' (01/10/1949), 165 Vol II, *LNA* (Maseru).
[265] 'Letter from Seike to High Commissioner,' (02/02/1948), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew) 649i & 'Seike Letter,' (02/09/1948), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).
[266] 'Telegram from Lefela,' (12/10/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew), 'Letter from Josiel Lefela,' (08/11/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Letter from Lefela,' (09/11/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[267] 'Maphutseng letter to Hailey,' (14/01/1950), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew), 'Government letter to LLB,' (30/01/1951), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew) 714 & 'Attorney general Letter,' (12/01/1952), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[268] 'Notes on meeting with Lefela,' (02/03/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[269] Ibid.
[270] '*Inkululeko*,' (03/12/1949), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).
[271] 'Report on subversive statements made by Josiel Lefela,' (24/03/1950), FCO 141/502, TNA (Kew). 584-5
[272] 'Police collection of Josiel Lefela's subversive statements,' (15/12/1949), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).

It was not just the colonial elite who were increasingly paying attention to LLB's growing profile; the association found the upper chieftaincy a receptive audience to the idea that the murders resulted from a conspiracy. Traditionally the chieftaincy had been opponents of the group, fearful of their supposedly radical agenda and desire for an elected National Council.[273] As LLB's stock rose, the group's messaging became more widely known, and many chiefs turned to the group as they appeared to be the only organisation protecting their interests.[274] 'Mantšebo met Lefela in 1948 with the Sons of Moshoeshoe, a collection of the most senior chiefs in the country, and produced an understanding between the two parties.[275] Therefore, the commoner opposition and senior chiefs were briefly united in their attempt to discredit the colonial explanation for the murders. A 1949 colonial memorandum asserted that "the chiefs have clutched at the straws offered by Lekhotla La Bafo's tempting support."[276] The BAC would not extend this association after 1952, as they were critical of LLB's seeming acquiescence to the chiefs, but it did mark the extent to which the *liretlo* counter-narrative had spread across the various strata of Basotho society.[277]

The increased prominence LLB was enjoying in Basotho politics as a result of the panic concerned the colonial establishment. Senior officials warned that "we should pay serious attention to its activities and take active steps to counter its propaganda."[278] However, many privately belittled the association's views as "childish and fantastic."[279] District commissioners were ordered to publicly express in their districts that "the alleged injustices to have been perpetrated by the British government are mythical" and LLB should be presented as a "disgruntled body of ill-informed and apparently malicious people."[280] Despite their concern, the government was unwilling to commit to actively repressing the organisation for fear of legitimising them as a genuine opposition movement. The government did not consider why LLB's critiques of their conduct were receiving so much attention and were focused more on the "careful handling of Lefela as to not make a martyr out of him."[281] Again and again, officials argued that while "Josiel Lefela is a fanatic," he was "too uneducated to be dangerous," and the "best plan is to ignore him."[282] The colonial government's overall lack of concern regarding LLB, despite acknowledging the popularity of their messaging on *liretlo*, was arguably not

[273] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, 26-27.
[274] 'Letter from police,' (06/08/1947), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Letter to Resident Commissioner,' (02/07/1947) FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew). 253-4
[275]'Minutes of a meeting between LLB and Mantšebo,' (19/04/1948), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Speech from paramount to LLB members,' (19/04/1948), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew).
[276] 'Memorandum on Medicine Murder, Ritual Murders and Witchcraft: Basutoland DO 119/1377,' (31/03/1949), ICS88/2/3, *ICS* (London). 5g.
[277] 'Letter from police addressing some LLB tenets,' (06/08/1947), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).
[278] 'A. D. Thompson on the threat of LLB,' (14/05/1947), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew).
[279] 'Report on LLB meeting,' (22/07/1947), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).
[280] 'Ways to counter LLB misinformation secret letter,' (14/07/1947), FCO 141/501, *TNA* (Kew).
[281] 'Government correspondence,' (14/09/1949), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew).
[282] 'Colonial correspondence on Lefela,' (21/01/1950), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Police report on Communism,' (19/04/1950), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew).

as imprudent as one might expect.[283] Beyond *liretlo,* LLB, by the 1950s, had proven itself to be an organisation that offered tangibly little else.

Despite Lefela's pretensions of being a voice for the nation, his association's support peaked in the late 1940s and declined from that point onward.[284] Part of this decline was due to organisational issues. LLB had never been well organised. It did not have regional branches, a clear internal hierarchy, or a long-term plan to seize power, the foundations for any successful political movement.[285] While some association events would be successes, particularly those regarding *liretlo,* with hundreds of attendees, others would be poorly advertised and only attended by a few dozen elderly committed members.[286] The inability to create a structured party organisation across the nation limited their ability to actively challenge the government as it lessened the pressure they could leverage; despite the favourable conditions of the panic.[287] Furthermore, LLB was far too dominated by the personality of Josiel Lefela, a figure who was increasingly perceived to be authoritarian and corrupt.[288] These internal challenges were factors in the group's decline.

After the end of the Second World War, a new generation of educated anti-colonial activists emerged who were far more in tune with the international climate and, crucially, were nationalists explicitly committed to independence. These men had seen a revitalisation of LLB as an option, many of whom had joined LLB in their youth. However, it was considered too old-fashioned, too compromised, and too beholden to the ageing Lefela to be a real possibility.[289] *Liretlo* may have given it one last gasp of relevance, somewhat ironically it could have hampered the nationalist parties if Lefela had been more competent, but the other faults of the association proved to be its undoing. Lefela was an old man whose opinions on Basutoland's future were considered eccentric and out of touch.[290] Despite the knowledge of the burgeoning nationalist movements expanding across the continent, he still did not advocate for the total overthrow of colonialism but merely its retraction from Basotho domestic life.[291] Although the group contained many nationalist elements within their doctrine, they crucially were not committed to independence, meaning their critique was outdated in the post-war world dominated by discussions of the nation-state.

It was the insurmountable differences in LLB rhetoric and the goals of the new nationalists that spelt the end of Lefela's association. LLB stubbornly stuck to their belief that negotiating with Britain

[283] 'Police report,' (28/08/1950) FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew).
[284] 'Police report,' (10/09/1951), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew).
[285] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, 40-41.
[286] 'Transcripts of LLB Meetings,' (06/08/1950-07/08/1950) FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew), 'Report on LLB,' (07/01/1948), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew) & 'LLB meeting report,' (01/02/1948), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew).
[287] 'Report on a pitso called by LLB,' (19/04/1948), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew).
[288] Mphanya, *A Brief History of the Basutoland Congress Party*, 10.
[289] Ibid, 8-9.
[290] 'Report on BAC meeting,' (14/02/1953), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew).
[291] Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages*, 151.

was a validation of Britain's illegal protectorate that did not honour the original agreement with Moshoeshoe.[292] This conception meant that while they were fierce critics of the government and how it handled the nation's affairs, this ultimately accounted for little when they fundamentally did not advocate independence. Whatever lingering chance that LLB may have to play a major part in the future of Basutoland ended when the BAC, a more committed nationalist organisation that tied LLB's *liretlo* rhetoric to a programme of socio-economic transformation, was founded in 1952.[293] Though it continued until 1970 in an increasingly attenuated form, it played no major part in politics from this point on.[294]

Despite this, LLB's impact as the only opposition force challenging the colonial narrative during the immediate post-war years should not be overlooked. Despite a lack of concrete political victories, the group's continued emphasis that in response to the panic the Basotho should "rely on their resources and not on outside interests for cultural, educational and economic sustenance" contributed to a political legacy that later nationalists could draw from.[295] Reuben Mekenye affirms that, at their core, LLB were against "exploitive colonial policies, especially regarding the imposition of the many burdensome taxes, the poor education for the Basotho, [and] lack of economic progress," which they saw as "responsible for people's suffering."[296] Therefore, their use of *liretlo* was within this framework, and the politicisation of the issue would prove one of their most significant long-lasting legacies. Their efforts to establish a counter-narrative helped foster rejection of the government's *liretlo* propaganda; this was a major outcome with long-reaching ramifications. [297]

Conclusion

As 1952 reached its conclusion, a pattern of panic and reaction had been found within Basutoland that seemed to have no end in sight. The rising cases of murders during the 1940s aroused the attention of an orientalist international media whose coverage put pressure on the Basutoland government to do something, anything, about these killings.[298] The murders were political, the revolt of a disinherited rural aristocracy, the panic that followed the killings therefore was also political, a misinterpreting of events by observers that reframed it as a clash of civilising morals vs pagan barbarism. This along with pressure from the various missions shaped the government's attitude to focus on cultural differences and alienated great number of Basotho who hated the killings but resented the ways their nation was

[292] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, 39.
[293] 'Confidential report on BAC's first meeting,' (05/01/1953), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew).
[294] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, 40.
[295] Ibid.
[296] Mekenye, 'Re-Examination of the Lekhotla La Bafo's Challenge to Imperialism in Lesotho,' 91.
[297] 'Intelligence report,' (February 1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[298] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 60.

being presented. While white society was the main driving force in making the killings into a broad national panic Basotho representations and concerns also shaped social anxiety and provided a counterweight to the colonial view.[299]

The response by administrators, the press and the missions therefore can be blamed for heightening concern over the killings and made them a national crisis. These representations, combined with the material reality of the murder rates seemingly increasing, heightened both white and Basotho concerns and led to the start of a period of moral panic. Individual events, such as the execution of Berang and Gabashane in 1949, intensified the panic for short periods, but this level of mania proved unsustainable. A broader concern within the colonial government that the killings could directly disrupt colonial authority ultimately fashioned these representations. This fear of losing control became interconnected with assumed perceptions of Basotho backwardness and immorality, both factors encouraging the perception that the murders were a tangible threat. By framing the "evil of medicine murders" as a national crisis, it expanded the threat of the killings from fear of one's own safety to wider anxiety focused on the apprehension of societal collapse.[300] It is in this colonial construction that moral panic emerged and spread. Without it, concern over the killings would not have been seen as all-encompassing as they were.

The administration overlooked hard truths about the nature of British colonialism in Basutoland in favour of hysterical narratives spread by commentators that fit established colonial perceptions of subject peoples being irrational. Assumptions based on colonial panic combined with a general lack of organisational acumen and a heavy handedness to create the foundations of a strategy that was, simultaneously, both ineffective in curbing murders and disruptive to Basotho life. The shift in police tactics in particular, toward a more interventionist approach, would prove to be a long-lasting legacy in these early years that shaped public perception of the administration more broadly.[301] The commissioning of investigations on the crisis, principally the Jones Report, had the potential to create a far more effective strategy toward recognising the need to address the deeper roots of the crisis. Jones's recommendations, except for the ones that fit the preconceived notions of the government, were ignored, ensuring the anti-liretlo would remain ineffective and even damaging for British rule. Ultimately, both the subsequent panic and subsequent response revealed major cracks in the foundations of colonial power that would prove advantageous for any opponents of colonialism.

Principally, LLB made use of the "political opportunity" afforded to them by the panic to gain political support.[302] Through forums such as the new District Councils, the existing *pitsos*, and party-

[299] 'Letter from Chief Goliath, 07/07/1949, FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).
[300] National council meeting report 1955, (15/09/1955), s3/20/1/48, *LNA* (Maseru).
[301] 'Proposal for more police in certain districts,' (14/04/1949), FCO 141/538, *TNA* (Kew).
[302] Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism*, 135.

led meetings, the group used the murders in their rhetoric to make wider points on the unjust nature of British colonialism and the failures of the state's anti-*liretlo* efforts. While Lefela's wider political programme was not popular, particularly his belief in the viability of a reformed protectorate, their use of the medicine murder panic demonstrated that it was an emotive issue that the group could easily link to wider colonial injustices. Although they would ultimately not be able to capitalise politically on this endeavour LLB's rhetoric attacks, interference in police cases, and other methods of political mobilisation they used provided a model for later nationalists to build from. They made use of the cracks in the imperial edifice to establish much of the popular opposition talking points surrounding Britain's handling of the panic, making their activity a key outcome from these early years of the panic.

Chapter 3: The Height of the Panic and the Birth of the Basotho Nationalist Movement, 1952-1956

On 15 August 1952, the Resident Commissioner of Basutoland, Edwin Porter Arrowsmith, wrote a letter from Maseru to the Deputy High Commissioner of South Africa, Roland Evelyn Turnbull, in Cape Town. In this letter, he stated that: "the execution of Berang and Gabashane has had a good effect in checking these murders; but since then their incidence has increased."[1] He expressed the "concerning" reasons for this rise included "the absence of so many police," which had emboldened the Basotho who "doubtless" felt they would be able to commit a crime with no recourse.[2] The letter is an illustrative example of discussions occurring in private within the British colonial administration. Officials such as Arrowsmith often pathologised the Basotho, seeing them as ignorant, secretive, and irrational, with their violent impulses only held back by the robust application of colonial authority.[3] While the attitude illustrated in the letter was mainly calm, the fact that Arrowsmith expressed a firm belief that an outward display of force was needed to contain the pandemic indicates a rising level of colonial anxiety.

Around three and a half years later, on 27 April 1956, the Basutoland Chief of Police Paul Kitson offered a summation of recent events and the views of his officers on the ground.[4] He concluded, in his "considered opinion supported by the views of the officers," that efforts to stymie the rate of killings was a direct result of there not being a feasible "deterrent."[5] The lack of change, he explained, was due to the Basotho's "deep rooted, superstitious belief in the efficacy of the human medicine, the traditional loyalty and obedience to the chieftainship, the fear of reprisals and the terror inspired by witchdoctors."[6] Not even fear of death would stop those who wanted to kill; as Kitson noted, "capital punishment has not proved a strong enough deterrent to overcome these powerful forces."[7] Again, the irrationality of the subject people was stressed and used to explain why the administration's efforts were so categorically failing. They were acting from a position of weakness, where the application of force was no longer a guarantee of control.

These letters are illustrative of the wider flaws within the British administration's response to a colony during the mid-1950s that appeared, to the white administrators, to be eating itself. Any bravado contained within both sets of correspondence masked a fear of failure and the loss of authority. The distasteful, racist, allusions to Basotho barbarity, which was contradictory considering the extent

[1] 'Letter from Resident Commissioner (RC),' (15/08/1952), FCO 141/484, *The National Archives* (*TNA*) (Kew).
[2] Ibid.
[3] 'Letter from Gov Sec to Commissioner of Police,' (21/05/1951), 2494/2, *Lesotho National Archives* (*LNA*) (Maseru).
[4] 'Chief of police letter on proposed statutory offences,' (27/04/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.

to which the colonial administration relied on the chieftaincy, reflected this wider apprehension within the white colonial psyche. Both white and Basotho administrators and observers recognised that these murders represented a crucible of conflict between those flouting colonial law and those trying to enforce it. This acknowledgement made the government's attempt to stop the killings a public test of their authority, a test they would fail. That failure was not for want of trying.

Despite the construction of this multifaceted approach in the previous seven years, the government's efforts at the height of the panic to stop the killings, during 1952-1956, failed. The attempt may have been comprehensive, but an imperial mind-set more focused more on moralistic appeals than engaging with their subject's concerns limited the effort's effects. While officials had a "punctilious insistence on… [employing] forms of legalism" to legitimise their anti-*liretlo* activities, there was marked tension between the conservative colonial administration on the ground and a legal system with its basis in due process.[8] Existing weaknesses within the state's administrative capacity, its ability to exert authority and the squandering of the conclusions from intelligence reports contributed to this failure. These factors ensured the *liretlo* killings became a seismic event for the British administration, not only because it was reflective of wider cracks in the colonial system but also because of this failure to control it. The abortive attempt to manage the crisis would have consequences beyond the murders. It weakened the ability of the colonial government to exert its authority and created a space where nationalists could later operate and offer an alternative.

All the existing prejudices built up from decades of rule within the colonial mind-set made their approach to the panic during the period fatally flawed. The fundamental error in governmental thinking, of prioritising a moral campaign over any significant reforms, doomed the anti-*liretlo* efforts by embracing the worst aspects of the panic and ended any hope for the state to appear in control of the situation. The very nature of British power in Basutoland made actually ending the killings virtually impossible without the wholesale changes needed to transform the territory and alleviate the panic. A better management of the panic might have reduced the level of the panic and limited the opportunities for the emerging nationalists to achieve their political goals. However, the British government proved incapable of reforming itself throughout the panic to any significant degree. Any shifts in how Britain administrated the territory during the anti-*liretlo* effort were minor, ineffectual, and ultimately fruitless. This failure was exposed to the nation by the inability of the separate components of the anti-*liretlo* effort to achieve their stated goals. Ultimately, it was during these years that the failure to assert authority would signal a significant weakening of Britain's hold on power that would prove irreversible. Britain could not control what was happening within its borders and lost a key justification for continuing its colonial rule of law and order.

[8] Lobban, M., *Imperial Incarceration: Detention without Trial in the Making of British Colonial Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 427.

These factors encouraged youthful and more explicitly nationalist activists to form a new party, the Basotho African Congress (BAC). Formed in 1952, this new group integrated popular aspects of LLB's ideology, particularly the distrust of the British explanation of medicine murder, into their wider critique of the government and similarly used it to secure support from the public.[9] Making a more direct link between the murders and British socio-economic exploitation, the BAC argued that Britain's handling of the murder panic was indicative of wider failings of colonial rule.[10] The BAC's wedding of LLB's anti-government narratives to this more explicitly nationalist programme, focused more clearly on the seizure of state power, would prove decisive in gaining their early support. It was here the key political impact of the medicine murder panic would fully take shape and influence national politics in a way few historians have yet recognised. Unlike in other panics, the uncontrolled "unfolding of colonial anxieties" severely damaged colonial standing and emboldened an emerging nationalist movement.[11]

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first examines the high point of the panic and the spill-over from debates occurring society into Basotho literature. The second discusses how the administration continued to respond to the killings. Although thinking shifted over time thanks to new information of changes to approach, the original assessment of the administration's goals remained, and the effort was ineffective. The third examines one case study, the murder of Mokotamme Mokale, to inspect the ways in which a murder was investigated and how the anti-*lirelto* campaign causing disquiet in region. The final section looks at the first years of the Basutoland African Congress (BAC) and surveys the ways in which it navigated these years of the panic, principally these years saw the formulation of the counter-narrative of a colonial conspiracy and more direct intervention into individual medicine murder cases.

Administrative Fatigue and Societal Disquiet: The Height of the *Liretlo* Panic

While the immediate post-war years had the seen a moral panic take shape within Basotho society, driven by representations in the press, administrative anxiety, and missionary concerns, the early 1950s saw that same panic solidify and deepen its hold. The period saw a continued level of scrutiny from the international press, the signs of fatigue within the government and, uniquely, the publication of numerous works by Basotho authors reflecting the debates of the time. These published works were reflective of an intensifying dissatisfaction that had formed during the period focused on the ways in which the government was tackling the panic. A rapid rise of cases and the violence inflicted continually shocked observers, leading to a despondent view across colonial society, surmised by Samuel Matete

[9] 'High commissioner on the BAC's influence on *liretlo* hysteria,' 05/03/1958, DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[10] 'Handbill distributed by BAC,' (01/02/1955), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew).
[11] Pratten, D., *Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

during a national council debate in 1952; "it is our right that we should enjoy comfort and happiness in this country, nevertheless we are not happy as a result of this evil of medicine murders in this country."[12]

This was due, in part, to a heightened post-Berang and Gabashane climate that encouraged a greater scrutiny of the actions of the colonial government and the chiefs. Unlike at the start of the panic citizens increasingly expressed serious concern at how these crimes were being investigated, a petition from Mapoteng from that time for example complained that the local chief had been incriminated unfairly.[13] Conversely, some individuals requested more government intervention to suppress the chieftaincy. An ex-soldier wrote to the Government Secretary, that "the chiefs of today practice *liretlo* murders instead of acting like the chiefs of old... they should be held responsible for these bodies."[14] Another, the sister of a *liretlo* victim, similarly called for chiefs to have their powers reduced, particularly calling for them to face a fine if investigators found a murder in their territory.[15] These divergent views reflect debates that were occurring within society throughout the panic over the chieftaincy, in private correspondence and newspaper articles. Commentators argued whether the institution should be protected as a bulwark of Basotho autonomy or reformed to give the nation a chance of prosperity in a rapidly changing world.[16]

It was in this context that W. A. Clark, an official in the High Commissioner's office, wrote in January 1953, "frankly... we see no reason for optimism... my remarks may sound defeatist, but we are reporting on the present situation."[17] His observations were also reflected within police intelligence reports which read as far less confident regarding the capacity of the state to tackle the panic; "such warnings to not commit murder that have been given... held in many districts have had worryingly little effect."[18] The views reflected in the above statements are demonstrative of the media's success, particularly the international press, in sensationalising the crimes and making them seem a matter of national priority. While the murder rate was certainly high during the 1950s, administrator's response was largely driven by what they read and the pressure they felt to act because of it. [19] Clark's comments that "what I am reading every day in the press is causing me great concern" reinforce this and show that many in white society had embraced the narratives of the panic.[20] Segments of Basotho society however were unwilling to simply repeat the accounts they were hearing. Revealingly, some of the reactions to

[12] 'Vote on medicine murder prevention,' (04/10/1952), s3/20/1/48, *LNA* (Maseru).
[13] 'Complaint of the people of Mapoteng,' (10/03/1957), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Government response to the people of Mapoteng and call for a pitso,' (04/04/1957), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[14] 'Letter from ex-solider complaining about chiefs,' (30/07/1957), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[15] 'Letter from sibling of victim,' (13/06/1957), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[16] 'Johannesburg Star,' (06/10/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[17] 'HC letter,' (05/01/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[18] 'Intelligence report Meeting of Sons of Moshoeshoe,' (26/04/1952), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[19] 'Report of planned murder in Qacha's Neck,' (12/06/1956) FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[20] 'HC letter,' (05/01/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).

the growing influence of these sensationalist narratives are reflected in some of the literature produced by Mosotho authors of the time.

The positions taken by commentators in media outlets and the debates being held privately over Basotho culture, religion and the chieftaincy bled into Basotho art more broadly. Novelists, poets, and playwrights were understandably drawn to the subject, with the lurid accounts in the press providing a tantalising setting for a narrative. Multiple authors produced numerous works in Sesotho that contained an element of medicine murder. While not influencing the panic directly in the sense that it shaped government thinking, this body of work should be a read as, often nuanced, rejections by ordinary Basotho of the panic. Such works offered a "powerful denunciation of Lesotho's [then] current status" and a more nuanced take beyond the clash of civilisations pushed by white commentators.[21] While not directly pressuring colonial officials to get a grip on the killings these novels, mostly published in both Sesotho and English, certainly affected a popular view of the panic that reflects a distinctly Sesotho perspective. These texts did not condone or endorse murder, however, the murderers were considered flawed characters and pitied when punished for their actions. Adding a fictional element of redemption, fitting the Christian values of the authors, the chiefs in these stories confess what they have done and command respect for this. Authors viewed chiefs with sympathy as victims of the machinations of their advisors and doctors.

These included Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* in 1925, Mopeli-Paulus's provocatively titled short story *Liretlo* in 1950, Mopeli Paulus and Miriam Basnar's's *Turn to the Dark* in 1956 and Bennett Khaketla's *Mosali a Nkhola* in 1960.[22] These novels contained different narratives and styles but shared some similar elements in their presentations of *liretlo*, most novels presented the "medicine murderer as [a] tragic hero."[23] The most famous of these novels was *Blanket Boy's Moon*, published in 1953 by Mopeli Paulus with his co-author Peter Lanham, perhaps best known because Paulus wrote it in English. Chris Dunton describes the novel as "unusually trenchant in its criticism of conditions in South Africa and British government policy in Lesotho."[24] The novel expands on the themes of Paulus's earlier short story, *Liretlo*. It is a large, even sprawling narrative where the emphasis shifts from a socio-political critique of migrant life in Johannesburg to the adventures of Chief Monare as he attempts to escape arrest for murder.[25] Paulus displays some sympathies for the chieftaincy but uses Monare's maturation throughout the novel to argue that Basutoland's future lies away from that institution and that Basotho should embrace solidarity with black South Africans across the border.[26] It can be considered the most

[21] Dunton, C., 'Mopeli-Paulus and "Blanket Boy's Moon",' *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 21 (1990): 166.
[22] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 176-180.
[23] Ibid, 177.
[24] Dunton, 'Mopeli-Paulus and "Blanket Boy's Moon",' 116.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid, 105-107.

prominent and influential example of the wider "corpus of the counter-narrative on medicine murder" that existed in Basotho society.[27] Basotho literature connected to the broader debates of the time and expressed a distinct Sesotho sensibility of pain at the nation's misfortune and understanding for those who wished to escape the degradation. These works are reflective of an indigenous interpretation of a panic drawn largely, although not totally, from the views of white observers, most salaciously those in the international press.

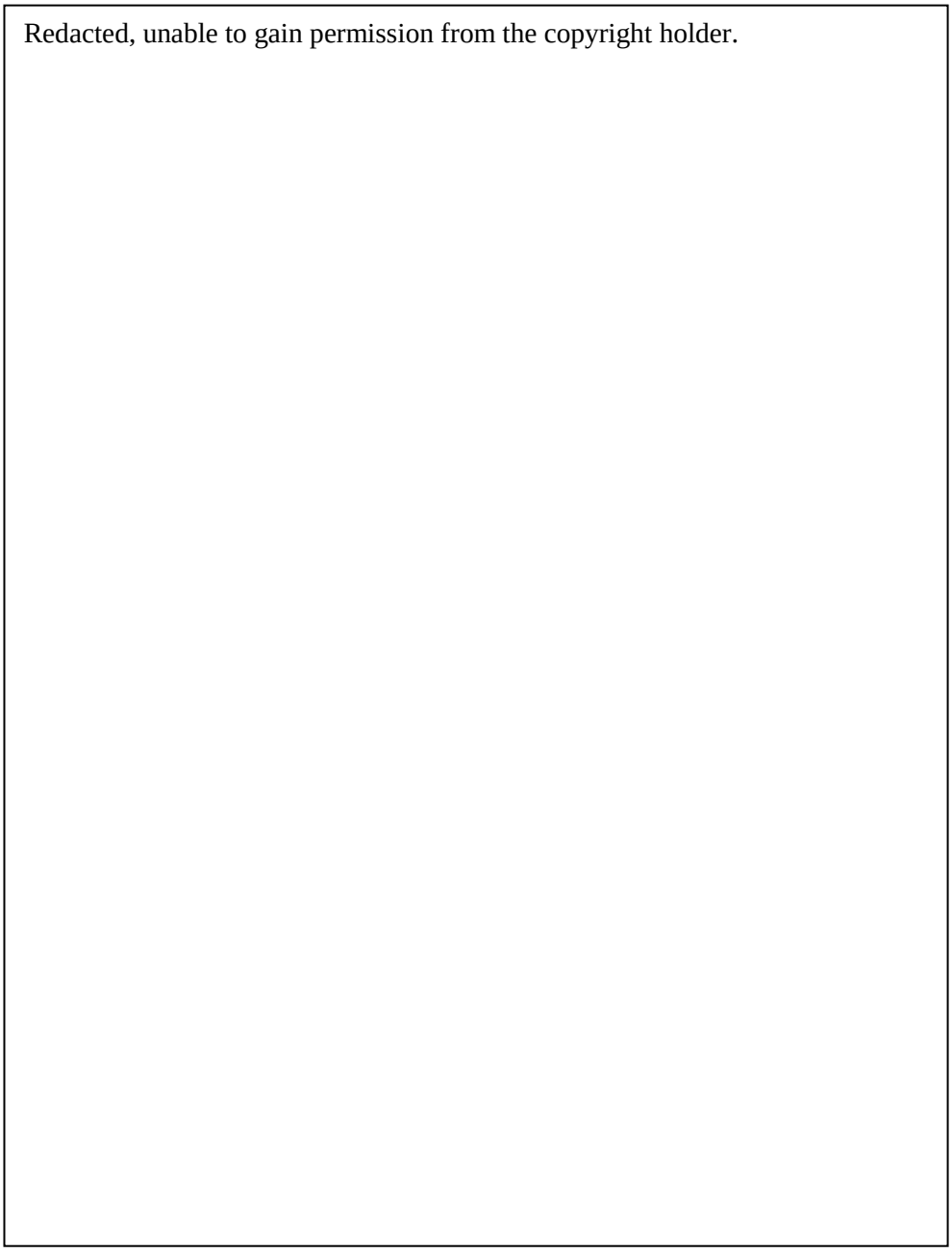

Fig 1: Recreation of a liretlo killing in the German magazine *Neue Illustrierte*, 1953.[28]

[27] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 179.
[28] 'Neue Illustrierte,' (1953), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew).

Foreign journalists continued to find new ways to sensationalise *liretlo* with a lurid, glossy and explicit article in the German magazine *Neue Illustrierte* perhaps the most egregious representation [fig 1].[29] The article contained high quality photographic reproductions of the crime, where Basotho reenactors acting as a killer pretended to cut flesh from his victim with the caption, "this is how *Direlto* murders are done."[30] These insensitive and dehumanising representations were not real but certainly reflect an uncomfortable exoticism and reproduction of a very real act. They acted to further sensationalise what was occurring in the Basotho Kingdom and provide white observers a tantalising sense of a, safely reproduced, taboo act. Certainly, aspects of the colonial mind-set increased the desire to view such images. Colonialists held a captivation "with the exotic" and by confronting the crime through such images it allowed them to demystify the "dark side in the fear of the unknown" that accompanied their fascinations.[31]

Images like this most likely did not make their way into Basotho society but were definitely seen within the administration. The British press similarly kept up their chauvinistic coverage of the event, *The Telegraph* on 9 July 1953 reported: "to the European, one of the most baffling manifestations of the African mentality is the ritual murder... this type of crime shows no sign of diminishing."[32] As 1955 drew to a close, one of the most terrible episodes occurred when an infant's head, believed to be less than eight months, was found in Teyateyaneg.[33] The police failed to find the deceased's body and could not identify the victim; whether this was a *liretlo* killing will never be known.[34] The death of someone so young reinforces the human tragedy at the heart of the crisis. Outside of all the sensationalised moments of moral panic or administrative indecisiveness this was a real phenomenon that was deeply affecting the lives groups of ordinary people, who had nothing to do with the murders, and therefore shaping their perceptions. Victims were subject to forces beyond their control but remained individuals whose lives were cut appallingly short.

This tragic reality differed from the continued sensationalist portrayals within the South African press.[35] Reports continued much of the same sensationalism from the previous decade whilst also more directly placing pressure on the British government to intervene more directly to stop the killings. Reports in the *Johannesburg Star* for instance criticised the government's perceived soft touch and claimed they were leaving "barbarism unchecked."[36] *The Star*, a daily newspaper based in the Transvaal province, similarly gloated that "another rash of 'medicine murders' shows the Maseru administrative

[29] 'Neue Illustrierte,' (1953), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew).
[30] Ibid.
[31] Reinkowski, M., & Thum, G., 'Introduction,' in Reinkowski, M. & Thum, G., (eds.), *Helpless Imperialists Imperial Failure, Fear and Radicalization*, (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 8-9.
[32] 'Daily Telegraph,' (09/07/953), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew).
[33] 'Police report on finding a head of an infant in Teyateyaneg,' (23/12/1955), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[34] 'DC report on prisoners who were sentenced to death,' (09/06/1951), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew).
[35] Weisfelder, R., F., *Political Contention in Lesotho, 1952-1965*, (Roma: Institute of Southern African Studies, 2002), 71-3.
[36] 'Johannesburg Star,' (13/07/1956), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).

authority is unable to control its own subjects."[37] Commentators in *The Star* also called for the arrest of 'Mantšebo, a new investigation into the cause of the murders and a review of Basotho cultural institutions like initiation schools.[38] While by 1956 the panic had entrenched itself within Basotho society and was a prevalent feature within the international press coverage, the year also saw some tangible signs that the end of any wider panic may just be in sight.

In response to this pressure to act, the colonial state decided to organise a medicine murder conference in August 1956. Although the impact of this conference would be marginal, its existence does indicate that the administration was beginning to shift its thinking somewhat in regard to the panic. Attended by a range of prominent Basotho, including the nationalist leaders Ntsu Mokhehle and Bennett Khaketla, the conference was surprisingly undertaken with an "excellent spirit," to seeming satisfaction of the administration, but certain division revealed themselves.[39] Crucially, both sides held a differing point of view of what was actually occurring, the Basotho representative rejecting the link between medicine horns and *liretlo* seemingly going back on previously established fact.[40] Most of the conference was spent trying to reconcile these perspectives and was bogged down by "hair-splitting and sophistry."[41] It would be hard to classify this anti-*liretlo* conference a success but it revealed the extent to which the Basotho and British viewpoints had diverged.[42] The colonial narrative was no longer taken seriously by a Basotho population sick of having to excuse an embarrassing and upsetting phenomena that the vast majority of the country had no part in. The "opposition of the people" to the government's actions had grown and replaced the anger over the murders themselves.[43]

The end of 1956 saw some change in the administration's viewpoint that signalled the beginnings of a shift in anti-*liretlo* policy. When newly appointed High Commissioner Geoffrey Chaplin was interviewed in *The Basutoland Times* he claimed "these murders are not restricted to Basutoland. The position here has been dramatized. I am sure these things happen wherever there are primitive natives in southern Africa."[44] G. M. Hector the Government Secretary similarly did not see the need for the creation of any new investigative efforts, informing Basotho notables that the 1956 committee was sufficient.[45] The experiences on the ground in the different though was different. Rates of killings, a sense of panic and citizen's concerns continued to remain at a high level.[46] Conversely, some individuals requested more government intervention to suppress he chieftaincy, an ex-soldier

[37] 'The Star,' (11/09/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[38] 'The Star,' (30/07/1956), FCO 141/617 *TNA* (Kew).
[39] 'Medicine murder conference,' (01/09/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[40] 'Report on anti-liretlo meetings,' (27/08/1956-31/08/1956), FCO 141/740, *TNA* (Kew).
[41] Murray and Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 168.
[42] 'Daily minutes of 1956 round table recommendations,' (07/05/1956), s3/20/1/48, *LNA* (Maseru).
[43] 'Extract from Manchester Guardian,' (20/09/1956), FCO 141/490, *LNA* (Maseru).
[44] Murray and Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 169.
[45] 'Letter from government secretary to BAC,' (25/05/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[46] 'Report on murder in Teyateyaneng,' (31/08/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Letter on disappearance and suspected murder in Quthing,' (21/01/1957), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).

wrote to the Government Secretary "the chiefs of today practice *liretlo* murders instead of acting like the chiefs of old... they should be held responsible for these bodies."[47] Another, the sister of a *liretlo* victim, similarly called for chiefs to have their powers reduced; in particular calling for them to face a fine if a murder was found in their territory.[48]

These divergent views confirms that while the government was beginning to wind down the panic during 1956, within society it was still in full force. Wider debates within Basotho society and culture had largely crystallised and there were increasing criticisms of the official government narrative then there had been during 1945-1952. This was likely in part the result of Lekhotla La Bafo (LLB) and the Basutoland African Congress (BAC) spreading their effective counter-narrative, but it also was demonstrative of a broader growing disquiet within society over the handling of the panic.[49] As a 1956 petition from Mapoteng complained, the British government's ability to control the crisis was not proving convincing for many; "our request is this matter in stopping these horrid murders should be scrutinised... This is our cry, and we request you to be good enough to inform Her Majesty's Government."[50] To restore confidence and return a sense of control Britain would need to improve on its anti-*liretlo* effort, a task that would prove to be exceedingly difficult.

Propaganda, Panels and Colonial Justice: The Anti-*Liretlo* Effort Develops

Alongside this continuing panic was an anti-*liretlo* effort that developed a great deal throughout the 1950s, becoming far more complex and multifaceted as administrators learnt some lessons from the late 1940s. The propaganda got more sophisticated, the police and judiciary attempted to become more effective, and the vigilance committees were reformed into the new *liretlo* panels. Yet, these efforts were handicapped by a continued insistence on flawed thinking, focused on the moral aspects of the crisis, not recognising the threat to colonial power that this moment actually represented. An already weak government made for ineffective and toothless management of the murder panic, a factor recognised by many administrators whose cynicism over the anti-*liretlo* campaign's success "lent itself to a continual state of anxiety over the potential loss of control."[51] While the campaign certainly evolved therefore it was not able to escape its fundamental flaws, a factor which contributed to continual disappointments throughout 1952-1956.

After a 1953 Round Table Conference, the administration placed the anti-*liretlo* efforts under the direction of an appointed *liretlo* committee.[52] The committee was chaired by a senior District

[47] 'Letter from ex-solider complaining about chiefs,' (30/07/1956), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[48] 'Letter from sibling of victim,' (13/06/1956), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[49] 'Letter from Mokhehle,' (30/11/1956), FCO 141/739, *TNA* (Kew).
[50] 'Complaint of the people of Mapoteng,' 10/03/1956, FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Response and call for a pitso,' (04/04/1957), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[51] Fischer-Tiné & Whyte, 'Introduction: Empires and Emotions,' 18.
[52] Murray, & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 162-5.

Commissioner and consisted of two missionaries, two trusted chiefs, and a Mosotho civil servant.[53] It became the head of a formally sanctioned anti-*liretlo* campaign and began to direct the national efforts, such as organising meetings, propaganda, producing material and liaising with churches. However, it soon came under 'dismissive and contemptuous' attacks from the High Commissioner's office, which believed it to be ineffective in curbing the killings and merely stirring up trouble.[54] By 1954, the committee's opponents were casting doubts over the enterprise, and its recommendations were "ridiculed."[55] So, it became increasingly side-lined. The *liretlo* committee continued to submit reports to the National Council until at least 1958, but it was not a major force in formulating the overall strategy.[56] The failure of this committee would be important during the murder panic. While it did not mean the anti-*liretlo* efforts ceased, it ensured the government delegated the organising business to the local district officials and other civil servants. This factor contributed to their decentralised and often piecemeal nature. The Basutoland civil service was not a large or particularly prestigious one.[57] Officials therefore faced specific challenges in implementing these strategies due to a lack of resources or influence in their districts, which ensured that the gap between colonial assumptions of power and their actual reach remained distant.[58]

An indication that the overall thinking behind the government strategy had not developed a great deal from 1945 came in 1953 when a report was published by Major Donald and Chief Leshobro Majara titled "on medicine murders and how to prevent them."[59] The report advocated banning initiation schools and witchdoctors, opposing plans to democratise local government, preserving the chieftainship as a "sort of constitutional aristocracy," and increasing police powers.[60] It is hard not to read this report as a conservative reaction within the administration to the Jones Report as it was far more concerned with moral or cultural issues over the political challenges Jones identified. It argued these murders were the "struggle of a dying paganism" and that Britain must meet the challenge with a "religious zeal."[61] The response to the report among officials was positive as it affirmed many pre-existing prejudices, particularly with lower-ranked members of the administration who held more conservative leanings, and its authors would later be selected to serve on *liretlo* panels.[62]

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] 'Report by *Liretlo* Committee,' (29/07/1958), s3/20/1/52, LNA (Maseru).
[57] Halpern, J., *South Africa's Hostages*, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), 226.
[58] Fischer-Tiné & Whyte, 'Introduction: Empires and Emotions', 6.
[59] 'Report by Major Donald and Chief Leshobro Majara,' (1953), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew).
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.
[62] 'RC letter on Donald and Majara report,' (20/07/1953), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew), 'DC letter to Gov Sec praising Donald and Majara report,' (28/07/1953), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Correspondence on Donald and Majara report,' (02/09/1953), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew).

Fig 2: Final design for an anti-*liretlo* badge, actual size one inch in diameter, 18/12/1953.[63]

While there was a desire for a more imaginative and effective campaign, colonial thinking was broadly still stuck in the decade previously. The High Commissioner wrote to the District Commissioners to be more creative in shifting the "popular opinion of the gravity of the offence."[64] The Resident Commissioner mirrored his call for greater regional efforts in 1953 and acknowledged that "propaganda by itself will not stop these murders," and asked for suggestions to be submitted on how to improve it by the following year.[65] The police were similarly losing faith in the efforts. The Paramount's circulars, in particular, came under intense criticism, with the commissioner of police believing they were ineffective and had unfortunate wording.[66] The administration's public relations efforts appeared to be faltering. While the state had "intended to commence a publicity campaign on medicine murder," the dry, formal circulars had not permeated the public consciousness.[67]

The colonial administration turned to the then newly formed *liretlo* committee for aid in developing a more effective propaganda campaign. This act was the committee's last major contribution before being side-lined in 1954.[68] A series of proposals emerged from these meetings, and the state immediately enacted them. These efforts included, in February 1954, creating an "anti-*liretlo* month," proposing education in schools, the production of badges as a unifying symbol, and creating more

[63] 'Suggestion for anti-*liretlo* badge,' (18/12/1953), FCO 141/737, *TNA* (Kew).
[64] 'Confidential circular on how to deal with medicine murder,' (18/12/1953), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew).
[65] 'RC note doubting effectiveness of propaganda,' (03/01/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[66] 'Commissioner of police on 'Mantšebo circulars,' (25/09/1953), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew).
[67] Ibid.
[68] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 162-5.

publicly available resources such as booklets and leaflets.[69] The committee considered numerous designs for the badges, including a design featuring a lone figure chosen to be neither "protestant, nor pagan. Just anybody's child" [fig 2].[70] By engaging with the missions, particularly the Paris Evangelical Mission Society (PEMS), during this month, committee members hoped the effort could become a "spiritual campaign for humiliation and repentance."[71] Through these practical and crucially national efforts, the planners hoped a unified front could be created to convince would-be perpetrators to "cease this evil."[72]

Various slogans for the campaign were considered, such as "keep it clean," and these adorned the various pamphlets produced.[73] In 1953, "10,000 copies of a leaflet with 'Mantšebo were printed" along with "1,500 badges."[74] From the mid-1950s onward, administrators spread these resources to villages across the nation in *pitsos*, customary gatherings where commoners could air their opinions on chiefly or government decisions, and anti-*liretlo* tours across regions by senior figures in the administration. These included the Butha Buthe District Commissioner, whose series of anti-*liretlo pitsos* in 1953 was deemed a '"success" by other officials, and the Education Inspector who undertook a trek across Qacha's Nek during the anti-*liretlo* month the following year.[75] However, the decentralised nature of these tours, relying on the schedule and goodwill of officials with little central planning to cover all districts equally, meant they lacked consistency.

This lack of uniformity or central planning would be seen in the rebranded vigilance committees, known from 1953 as *liretlo* panels. Despite the vigilance committees being largely ineffective during 1945 to 1952, the government believed there was value to the concept of and did not want to abandon it.[76] These panels had much the same functions as the vigilance committees. However, they involved the administration much more in selecting appointees, whom police would also vet before being selected to sit on the panel.[77] The number of individuals vetted was a significant undertaking, with the appointment of *liretlo* panel members taking up a significant amount of official time throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s.[78] One such individual was Mohato Lefojane, whom the administration

[69] '*Liretlo* committee meeting,' (18/12/1953), FCO 141/737, *TNA* (Kew) & *Basutoland Witness*, (January-March 1954, LNA (Maseru).
[70] '*Liretlo* committee meeting,' (18/12/1953), FCO 141/737, *TNA* (Kew).
[71] *Basutoland Witness*, (January-March 1954, LNA (Maseru).
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 162.
[75] 'Telegram to DCs on RC's and Paramount's anti-*liretlo* tour,' (11/11/1953), FCO 141/737, *TNA* (Kew), 'Report on anti-*liretlo* pitsos held by Butha Buthe DC,' (01/03/1954) FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Telegram that discusses anti-*liretlo* campaign,' (19/03/1954), FCO 141/489, *TNA* (Kew).
[76] Ibid.
[77] 'Circular to DCs from RC,' (11/01/1958), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew).
[78] 'Appointment of two members to panel in Butha-Buthe,' (05/03/1958), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew).

selected for a place on the Quthing panel in 1958. His "three convictions for malicious injury" and another for "homicide" were insufficient to prevent his appointment.[79]

Another, Sello Shakame in Mafeteng, was recorded publicly doubting the existence of *liretlo* but was still accepted, as was his colleague Mpapa Berang despite Berang's brother having been hanged for the crime.[80] Seetsa Tumo was perhaps the most surprising appointment to a panel in Teyateyaneng despite being "accused of M.M. [medicine murder] in 1953, but… acquitted as an accomplice repudiated their evidence in court."[81] Many who had connections to medicine murder were rejected, including Chief Sekhonyana Maseribane of Quithing for a conviction or Maqaoane Kente of Mokhotlong for being "criminally minded," but the criteria of who was and was not acceptable was applied inconsistently.[82] However, the number of nominees connected to the murders selected by the administration to serve in an official anti-*liretlo* role discredited the entire enterprise. This questionable selection process was not only a phenomenon seen in the creation of a *liretlo* panel.

In his memoir, former Basutoland Congress Party member Ntsukunyane Mphanya discussed a childhood friend, named Lebotho, whom the state repeatedly arrested on suspicion of *liretlo*; but never charged. The family's connection to medicine murder ran deep, with Lebotho's father executed for murder at the start of the panic. The state later appointed Lebotho a magistrate in "the late 1950s," a surprising turn considering the level of suspicion that had previously surrounded him.[83] Lebotho's treatment contrasts with the treatment of those who held a connection to a Basotho political organisation outside of colonial influence. The state rejected many associates of these groups despite those individuals often holding prominent positions within society, having good reputations, and holding high levels of education.[84] During the height of the killings, the selection of Benedict Matela gave the administration the biggest headache over this very matter.

Matela was a teacher at St. Thomas Roman Catholic School in Butha Buthe; he was regarded as one the brightest stars within the education system, with a high level of moral fortitude and personal integrity. Despite this, when his name was put forward for his district panel, it was rejected because "he is a member of the Basutoland African Congress."[85] This rejection caused a minor controversy within the district and led to the District Commissioner of Butha Buthe agreeing to have a second look at the appointment. Matela would be ultimately accepted onto a panel after this intervention as he had "shown

[79] 'Nationwide nominations to panels,' (1958), FCO 141/740, *TNA* (Kew).
[80] 'Appointees to panels,' (18/04/1958), FCO 141/740, *TNA* (Kew).
[81] 'DC nominees to *liretlo* panel,' (October 1959), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).
[82] 'Nationwide nominations to panels,' (1958), FCO 141/740, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Secret telegram on acceptability of appointments to council,' (09/04/1959), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).
[83] Mphanya, N., *My life in the Basutoland Congress Party*, (Morija: Morija Printing Works, 2010).
[84] 'Police overview on potential appointees,' (19/10/1957), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew), 'Police overview on potential appointees,' (26/10/1957), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Nationwide nominations to panels,' (1958), FCO 141/740, *TNA* (Kew).
[85] 'Police overview on potential appointees,' (19/10/1957), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).

the utmost willingness to co-operate with the administration."[86] After interviewing Matela personally, the District Commissioner concluded that Matela was "quite sincere" in his dislike of the killings and in no way seemed to hold a "preconceived view of *liretlo,*" so he allowed him to join.[87] Matela's case reveals how these appointments had become a means of demonstrating one's colonial respectability for many prominent Basotho. Not everyone had the connections that Matela had, however. Indeed, many potentially useful allies in the fight against medicine murder were rejected due to being a member of the legal Basutoland African Congress (BAC).[88]

There were exceptions to this blanket ban on political supporters that occurred when the political parties of Basutoland were more established.[89] However, for the majority of the time that the *liretlo* panels were operating, an association with murders was often not enough to be rejected outright, yet holding 'radical' political positions, usually some form of anti-colonial criticism of Britain, usually was. This trend demonstrates where colonial officialdom's attention truly lay, more concerned with radicals using the boards as an independent body that could undermine imperial power, than creating a functioning institution that could offer the best support to wider anti-*liretlo* efforts. The panels were expected to aid the police in investigations, frequently expected to be present throughout an entire investigation, and were "not to be critics" of these efforts.[90] The many criticisms of the police levied in the press, within the Basutoland National Council and in nationalist rhetoric, during the murders indicate a desire for a body with a more regulatory function.[91] However, the panels were not this. Panel members were required to hear any complaint about the police in the presence of a police officer for that complaint to be officially recorded therefore removing any independent monitoring function.[92] They were neither a check on police excesses nor a body with enough distance from the crime to independently monitor it, thanks to the high number of members connected to *liretlo*. Being on a panel denoted status and respectability rather than necessarily being about the actual work it entailed

The *liretlo* panels were from their establishment controversial organisations. Resistance to them primarily emerged from the chieftaincy. Chiefs complained to the administration that this would undermine their local authority and accused the colonial state of mistrust towards them. A prominent Mafeteng Chief, Joel Moholobela, refused to form panels in his district, as did Chief Phakiso in Mohale's Hoek, both requiring invention from their District Commissioners to inform them that this was not an option.[93] Commissioners who received reports that chiefs were rebelling against the orders were often required to lead *pitsos* in offending districts to put pressure on chiefs, which took up

[86] 'Appointments to panel,' (05/03/1958), FCO 141/740, *TNA* (Kew).
[87] 'Letter on appointment of Matela to panel,' (08/04/1958), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew).
[88] Ibid.
[89] 'Appointments to Butha-Buthe panel,' (22/03/1960), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew).
[90]'Instructions for panels,' (18/10/1958), FCO 141/740, *TNA* (Kew).
[91] 'Report by *liretlo* committee,' (29/07/1958), s3/20/1/52, *LNA* (Maseru).
[92] 'Measures to combat *liretlo* circular,' (03/05/1960), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).
[93] 'Letter on objections of chiefs to vigilance committees,' (20/12/1948), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).

considerable administrative time.[94] Hesitancy was not solely contained within the districts. 'Mantšebo, the most senior member of the native administration, expressed her reservations privately about whether the panels would lead to democratisation and a lessening of chiefly power.[95] Ultimately the hesitancy of a minority of chiefs did little to delay or prevent the implementation of the policy but reinforced that, from the offset, these were far from uncontroversial bodies. The panels were an attempt to mobilise a respectable grouping of Basotho manpower to help manage the crisis but by 1956 it was clear it faced significant challenges to succeeding.

The same anxiety over being outnumbered due to low manpower that drove the creation of the panels though encouraged some oppressive police practices to develop. From the late 1940s onwards, complaints surrounding police activity had begun to filter up to the administration from several sources. Some of the first criticism emerged from the almost defunct Basutoland Progressive Association (BPA), which complained to B. A. Marwick, the Acting Government Secretary, about the treatment of accused "guilty persons" and believed those police tactics had "done nothing to prevent the crime."[96] A commoner named K. Moroka in 1952 protested the pressure put on commoners to give fake evidence against their chiefs, complaining that witnesses were treated like "mere children" and the government had not "taken any steps to investigate this evil practices of the police."[97] The Penal Reform League of South Africa, which undertook a series of meetings and interviews with administration staff in 1955, also offered an independent report on the poor treatment of witnesses and prisoners.[98]

The poor conditions within the nation's prisons helped reinforce the perception of the Basutoland Mounted Police as an arbitrary and repressive force. Prisoners hated the prisons as being especially uncomfortable, cold, and cramped, with little to do but sit around.[99] Reports recorded guards as being prone to mistreating prisoners. There are records of arm and leg restraints used on prisoners within the Basutoland gaols to compensate for the lack of officers.[100] Prisoners, on occasion, reacted violently to their mistreatment. In one notable instance in Maseru central prison during November 1955, prisoners were briefly able to take over the jail, but there was little impetus to reform the prison system.[101] This poor treatment was likely driven more by a material concern than a coherent policy, as the prisons, like the police more broadly, were underfunded.[102] The knowledge of the poor conditions

[94] Ibid.
[95] 'Letter from 'Mantšebo on vigilance committees,' (01/02/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[96] 'Letter from the BPA to RC,' (10/03/1949), FCO 141/582, *TNA* (Kew).
[97] 'Letter from citizen to RC,' (01/01/1952), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[98] 'Letter from Penal Reform League of South Africa to RC,' (04/08/1955), FCO 141/489, *TNA* (Kew).
[99] 'Disturbance at Maseru Central Prison,' (24/08/1953), 764, *LNA* (Maseru).
[100] 'Restraints used on Basutoland's prisoners,' (30/03/1955), 2777 III, *LNA* (Maseru).
[101] 'Report on Riot at Central Prison, Maseru on 19 November 1955,' 2777 III, (21/11/1955), *LNA* (Maseru).
[102] 'Letter from Penal Reform League of South Africa to RC,' (04/08/1955), FCO 141/489, *TNA* (Kew).

in prisons was spread anecdotally and in the press, feeding into the denunciations of the force's behaviour more broadly throughout the 1950s.[103]

These criticisms were also heard within the Basutoland National Council (BNC). During a special conference held in August 1956 attended by a range of prominent Basotho, divisions over the police soon revealed themselves.[104] Basotho representatives suggested 'territory-wide distrust' existed in officers' behaviour and argued that the murders were exaggerated to justify this repression.[105] It appeared the "opposition of the people" towards the police's actions had grown and, in some regards, overtaken the anger over the existence of the murders themselves.[106] A majority of council members in 1956 came to a consensus after a heated debate that Basutoland's "general sickness" [*liretlo*] was in fact being made worse by the police handling of witnesses.[107] The BNC committee concluded that the changes to policing had made the institution less effective and open to censure; "although our intention was good, in actual practice our decision has many problems which will result in our continued criticism of police."[108] Criticism of the police was not universal. For example, their efforts had many supporters in the nation, including council member J. M. Rankakala who praised the moral steadfastness of policemen during investigations. However, the nation as a whole opposed the force.[109]

This extended to the judiciary who during these years increasingly were viewed as ineffective or dishonest, despite concerted attempts by the state to increase the conviction rate. Those who planned and committed the murders received the harshest sentences. In contrast, those deemed on the periphery of the crime, such as those only moving a body or those who were merely witnesses, received less severe sentences.[110] This made trying cases especially difficult for the state, as often evidence did not meet this standard. The burden of proof weighed heavy on the British efforts to convict *liretlo* suspects, and judges threw out many cases due to a lack of hard evidence.[111] The police simply didn't present prosecutors with enough evidence to convict, meaning the conviction rates within the courts remained inconsistent at best. Consequently, the state instituted and instructed some changes to how *liretlo* cases were tried to increase the conviction rate alongside severe punishments for those found guilty. However, the reforms did little to meaningfully impact the conviction rate as the same evidence issues remained.[112] An inability to produce operative evidence in cases that fit established judicial procedure hampered

[103] 'Basutoland Witness,' (July-September 1952), *LNA* (Maseru).
[104] 'Medicine murder conference,' (01/09/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[105] 'Deputy HC letter on public opinion,' (20/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[106] 'Extract from Manchester Guardian,' (20/09/1956) FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[107] 'National council report on *liretlo* murders,' (20/03/1956), s3/20/1/51, *LNA* (Maseru).
[108] 'Report by *liretlo* committee,' (29/07/1958), s3/20/1/52, *LNA* (Maseru).
[109] 'Letter praising the police,' 15/09/1953, FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Government reply to 15/09/1953 letter,' (25/05/1953), FCO 141/579, *TNA* (Kew).
[110] 'HC commuting murder sentences of prisoners,' (13/03/1945), FCO 141/482, *TNA* (Kew).
[111] 'BMP Annual Report,' (1951), 2494/5, *LNA* (Maseru).
[112] 'BMP Annual Report,' (1952), 2494/6, *LNA* (Maseru).

prosecutor's efforts and the British strategy, while unpopular due to numerous high-profile executions and miscarriages of justice, was ultimately an ineffective one.

Debates over culpability would often be impacted by information received after the trial, leading to reduced sentences for those convicted.[113] The courts discharged many before trial, especially those who only witnessed the crime, which caused a great deal of consternation from some parts of the administration. In one instance, ten of the twenty-one indicted, during the 1953 trial of Regina vs Pheelo Smith and others were released due to lack of evidence, with the prosecuting counsel complaining to the Attorney General of rumours that those released chiefs had participated in multiple killings.[114] The ten men responded to their not-guilty verdict with "war-dancing and singing," something described by the prosecutor as "rather alarming."[115] There was a growing sense within some segments of the administration that many perpetrators were getting away with it and openly disrespecting the authority of colonial law. This perception was also spreading to the South African press, with the acquittal of perpetrators criticised by *The Johannesburg Star* on 19 December 1951 as ensuring "ritual murder, of a particularly significant, cunning and revolting kind remains to be unpunished."[116]

The January 1953 trial of Chief Matlere encapsulated many of the challenges jurors found when trying medicine murder cases.[117] The trial attracted a large amount of outside attention as Matlere was an outspoken opponent of medicine murder, a prominent chief in the Mokhotlong district and a key advisor to 'Mantšebo. Public opinion was divided on whether he was innocent or not.[118] Despite compelling evidence to the contrary, the crown failed to convict and blamed its failure on the "adverse atmosphere" created by the insufficient evidence from inconsistent accomplice testimony that the case relied on; in particular, the colour of a canvas bag used to transport the body.[119] The Attorney General called the outcome of the case "worrying" as it placed a "heavy handicap... upon police investigations," and Matlere's District Commissioner also warned that the chief "is likely to be consulted when future medicine murders are planned."[120] Matlere would be acquitted for another murder in 1959 despite being labelled the "chief instigator" and was linked to numerous other murders rumoured under the instruction of 'Mantšebo, whose territory in Mokhotlong he administered.[121] While it is impossible to say

[113] Ibid.
[114] 'Court case: Regina vs Pheelo Smith and others,' (06/02/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[115] Ibid.
[116] 'Copy of Star article,' (19/12/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).
[117] 'Outcome of Matlere case,' (18/02/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[118] 'Public reaction to Matlere case,' (02/03/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[119] 'DC letter asking what to do about Matlere letter,' (06/03/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Public reaction to Matlere case,' (23/03/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[120] 'Attorney general on Matlere case verdict,' (23/03/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew), 'DC letter asking what to do about Matlere letter,' (06/03/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Public reaction to Matlere case,' (23/03/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[121] Murray & Sanders *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 153.

conclusively, his lack of conviction in 1953 may have had deadly consequences for commoners in his district.

Another miscarriage of justice, this time for the victim's families, occurred in 1954 after the especially violent murder of Masebokoana Pule in the Butha-Buthe district.[122] The killing occurred the day before minor chief Lepekola Joel was due to attend his senior chief's son's placement ceremony. Joel and his associates allegedly monitored the victim travelling to her home and lured her to a remote donga where Joel murdered her. The police soon identified Lepekola Joel as the chief suspect because witnesses had heard he wanted blood for the placement ceremony. The victim was also the mistress of one of his associates.[123] However, despite some damning evidence that put Joel in the area, with motive and the presence of witnesses, he was released on appeal in May 1954 because of an inconclusive coroner's report.[124] Lepekola Joel was later found guilty of the murder after new evidence came to light in 1954, with a new forensic investigation confirming that Masebokoana had been murdered.[125] In light of this new evidence, the initial failure to convict Lepekola Joel in 1954 caused a minor scandal in the press, seen as a major miscarriage of justice.[126] The High Commissioner offered the view on the whole affair: "that this man was let free in the initial investigation dangerously weakens the prestige and authority of the administration as a whole."[127] The impact of this was such that there existed a concern in the police that it could spiral into "local turmoil," between supporters and opponents of Lepekola Joel.[128]

These issues were debated in a 1954 session of the BNC.[129] The main issue that the councillors expressed was the instances where guilty men go free; "it does happen that... one of the accomplices gives evidence to effect that he was actually present at the time of the killing... and is allowed to go free."[130] As one councillor Mahabe Makhaola noted, it seemed a strange system where "the government should let these people free" when they admitted their guilt and may be involved in a murder in the future.[131] However, this debate over the contentious issue of accomplice evidence accomplished little. After a full day's debate, most members decided to encourage passing a law that would punish those who "provided false evidence" but leave the broad protections for those who gave accomplice evidence

[122] 'The Basutoland, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland Court of Appeal: Regina v Lepekola Joel and others,' (16/07/1958-01/07/1958), DO 119/1189, *TNA* (Kew).
[123] 'Regina vs Lepekola Joel,' (15/08/1958), FCO 141/671, *TNA* (Kew).
[124] 'List of Condemned Prisoners,' 26/08/1958, FCO 141/671, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Death of Mosololi Mphutlane due to cardiac arrest,' 29/08/1958, FCO 141/671, *TNA* (Kew).
[125] 'Police order to exhume bodies with pathologist,' (25/06/1959), FCO 141/487, *TNA* (Kew).
[126] 'Deputy HC request to RC,' 27/08/1958, FCO 141/671, *TNA* (Kew), 'Basutoland News,' (29/07/1959), *MMA* (Morija) & 'Basutoland News,' (27/01/1959), *MMA* (Morija).
[127] 'Letter from HC on Lepekola Joel case,' (06/02/1959), FCO 141/487, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Letter from Scrivenor saying case will cause a mess but worse if they leave it,' (17/09/1959), FCO 141/487, *TNA* (Kew).
[128] 'Letter from Major Steward with concerns over decision to pursue case,' (25/09/1959), FCO 141/487, *TNA* (Kew).
[129] 'Session of the Basutoland National Council,' (1954), LW 1, *Morija Museum and Archive (MMA)* (Morija).
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

in place.[132] The reason for this seeming capitulation was that, as the resident commissioner reminded the attendees, they needed this evidence to prosecute the main suspects. Without it, the state had little else to get convictions.[133] The concern from some councillors that this was unethical, ineffective, and ultimately self-defeating was overridden by the majority of the other members present.

This concern, though, that the system needed even more reform, was reflected by the statistical evidence. Only 63% of the cases investigated by police went to trial, meaning a third of all perpetrators escaped thorough legal scrutiny; reflecting both the difficulties the police had in acquiring evidence and that many officers did not care enough to do their jobs thoroughly.[134] Of those cases that made it to trial, the heavy reliance on unreliable accomplice testimony made them "more complicated" than any other serious crime.[135] Officials debated using accomplice testimony as a witness to the crime to convict the actual perpetrator; many prosecutors believed it held the key to winning trials and countering misinformation.[136] Senior members of the administration, though, were reluctant to use accomplice witnesses in trials. Some, including the High Commissioner, viewed them as unreliable and believed witnesses held personal agendas that swayed their testimony.[137] Furthermore, many court prosecutors believed it "dangerous" to convict on accomplice testimony alone, as it set a poor legal precedent.[138]

These cases certainly shaped the administration's view towards the issue. The Resident Commissioner Edwin Porter Arrowsmith privately acknowledged that the number of perpetrators being released due to the police's incomplete evidence was causing a real problem for the administration; the inability to hold culprits to account seemingly encouraged recidivism.[139] Officials hoped new legislation targeting *liretlo* would ensure the law would be a proper deterrent for would-be perpetrators and their accomplices. The Deputy High Commissioner was at the forefront of this push. On 14 March 1956, he sent a drafted revision of the law that increased the punishments for witnesses who did not provide testimony to High Commissioner Percivale Liesching for approval.[140] Evidently, this skeletal administration could not provide decent protection for people and was instead resorting to threats. This change, in theory, would reduce the rate of suspected murderers walking free. If there was not enough evidence to prove an individual had committed a murder, the state could prosecute them for this lesser charge. The High Commissioner had his doubts over this change; his handwritten note on the draft law

[132] Ibid.
[133] Ibid.
[134] Murray & Sanders *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 251.
[135] 'Court case: Regina vs Lerotholi and others,' (18/02/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[136] 'Letter to RC on the potential use of accomplices as witnesses,' (23/06/1952), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[137] 'HC letter on reluctance to use accomplice witnesses in trials,' (14/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[138] 'Court case: Regina vs Lerotholi and others,' (18/02/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[139] 'Note on Mokhehele,' (10/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[140] 'Deupty HC's letter on draft wording of a statutory offence focusing on *liretlo*,' (14/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).

was worried both it would still be "too difficult to prove" someone's guilt and that this new law was "failing to take all reasonable steps to assist the police in the investigation of a murder."[141]

The number of cases brought to trial, and the subsequent overall conviction rate in cases appear to support the hesitation from elements of the administration towards the effectiveness of the judicial process [fig 3]. These cases included multiple perpetrators in each. At least nine hundred and twenty-two Basotho were judged at the high court for involvement in a murder during the period. However, looking at the percentage of cases and not the individuals involved indicates the statistical convictions rate as a whole.[142] During 1895-1944, before medicine murder was deemed a national issue by the administration, rates remained below 50%. Rates then rose during the late 1940s to 52%, continued to rise throughout the early 1950s to 67% but fell to 48% toward the end of the decade. Cases brought to court and conviction rates dramatically fell during the 1960s, reflecting a general move away from the murder hysteria by the administration. While the government was able to bring far more cases to trial during the height of the killings, specifically the period of 1945 to 1959, the rates of conviction varied, and improvements in the early 1950s were lost by the end of the decade. It demonstrates that the changes to the law in 1956 had a small practical effect. When the state introduced the change, the percentage of cases that led to conviction actually fell.

Overall, the breakdown of the conviction rates reveals that the administration could not address its central concern with the judicial process. There was certainly an improvement in the pre-war years. However, seeing that the issue was not viewed as a national crisis until after 1945, the fact was that most cases did not end in a conviction for the majority of the panic. This conviction rate was hardly good news for the British administration. Considering how hard it was to bring a case to trial, with the burden of proof being borne firmly by the state, the fact that only around half of the total resulted in a conviction demonstrates that the government's changes to the law were ineffectual. Save for five years in 1950-1954; the judiciary could not follow up on, these supposedly professionally undertaken, police investigations with a guilty verdict consistently. Although this may have saved many innocent men, as discussed, evidence gathering and witness testimony were often questionable, it went against the colonial state's desire for more murderers to be "sentenced to the gaol."[143] They were looking for guilty verdicts but did not get them.

[141] 'High Commissioner's note,' (20/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[142] Murray & Sanders *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 256.
[143] 'Copy of Star article,' (19/12/1951), FCO 141/581, *TNA* (Kew).

	Total Number of *liretlo* cases investigated by the Police	***Liretlo* Cases That Went to the High Court**	**Cases that Went to the High Court Ending in Acquittal**	**Cases with at least one Conviction**	**Percentage of Total Cases Which Resulted in at least one Conviction**	**Percentage of Cases That Went to Court Which Lead to at least one Conviction**
1895-1939	29	17	11	6	21%	35%
1940-1944	25	17	9	8	32%	47%
1945-1949	61	27	13	14	23%	52%
1950-1954	45	36	12	24	53%	67%
1955-1959	27	21	11	10	37%	48%
1960-1964	12	9	6	3	25%	33%
Total	199	127	62	65	32%	47%

Fig 3 Rates of conviction outlined by Murray and Sanders, 1895-1964.[144]

The colonial state's policy was caught between being so ineffective as to become almost lenient, allowing many cases to collapse under circumstantial evidence, but harsh enough with the various high-profile executions to undermine public faith in the efforts. While the government remained reluctant throughout the crisis to engage in "exceptional measures beyond the machinery of the existing law," they still retained the dispensation to administer capital punishment.[145] Nearly all condemned men and women "went to their deaths defiant and unrepentant," still protesting their innocence and denying their part in the killings.[146] Executions were a grim conclusion for many individual cases of medicine murder, but their overall impact as a deterrent for would-be murderers is unclear.[147] Despite an acknowledgement from senior officials that too many guilty individuals were being released, accompanied by a fierce debate over the use of accomplice testimony, not much changed within the courts. Far from being an arena of truth, where complicated cases could be dissected, and culprits and their accomplices unveiled, the courtrooms often obfuscated the issues at play due the difficulties in

[144] Ibid, 251.
[145] 'Memorandum on Medicine Murders,' (1954), FCO 141/489, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Death warrants,' (16/06/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[146] 'Basutoland Witness,' (July-September 1952), 79, *LNA* (Maseru).
[147] 'Annual Returns to HC Death Sentences and Executions,' (1945-1954), 404/I, *LNA* (Maseru) & 'Letter to RC,' (15/08/1952), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).

proving trying a suspect.[148] Many within the legal system shared the conservatism that characterised the wider administration and believed things "should be left alone for fear of causing much greater harm."[149]

The confusion over the state of the law on accomplice evidence, combined with the earlier failure of Berang and Gabashane's appeal at the Privy Council in 1949, hardened the lines of confrontation between the chieftaincy, commoners, and the government.[150] Continued allegations of the mistreatment of prisoners, the unlawful detention of witnesses and pressure put on suspects to give confessions further undermined confidence in the legal system. Opponents of the government, particularly the opposition groups Lekhotla La Bafo (LLB) and the BAC, protested at trials to raise what was, in their mind, miscarriages of justice.[151] These protests helped facilitate rumours that the courts were out to get Basotho chiefs.[152] For all the administrative hopes that the courts could provide clarity in murder cases, it was increasingly apparent that the seemingly inconsistent and confusing application of justice was damaging the wider effort to stamp out medicine murder.

The legal system suffered from the administration and the police rarely providing courts with enough evidence to convict despite consistently applying due process. This situation made it ineffective against the challenges that arose during the *liretlo* panic. As a part of the wider anti-*liretlo* effort, it fell far short of the endpoint of colonial justice many aspired it to be. There was an improvement in the conviction rate, but this was not consistent, sustained, or convincing. The application of the court's justice, although admittedly more even-handed than the often more violent methods of the police, was not punitive enough to be a deterrent. While officials desired the law to impose a sense of order upon its subjects and be a proper deterrent against committing the crime, what Michael Lobban defines as a policy of "Lawfare," the legal system proved committed to a "rule of law" which made the efforts to improve the conviction rate a failure.[153] There was no getting past the lack of available evidence to convict without resorting to trials which fell "far short of what English criminal procedure called for," something jurists were unwilling to do.[154] Evidently, the government's reform of the judicial code failed to consistently increase the rate of conviction or convince the public of the infallibility of colonial law, meaning it formed another disappointment within the broader effort during these years.

The general mismanagement of the panic led many to echo the 1953 sentiments of the Attorney General, "so far the results of the anti-*liretlo* campaign do not appear to have been conspicuously

[148] 'Notes from opinions held at 1956 *liretlo* conference,' (05/01/1957), FCO 141/740, *TNA* (Kew).
[149] Ibid.
[150] Murray & Sanders *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 3.
[151] 'Police report on a Lefela speech,' (10/10/1947), FCO 141/500, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Intelligence report,' (October 1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew) 73a-73d
[152] 'Report on roundtable conference on *liretlo*,' (22/10/1954), FCO 141/738, *TNA* (Kew).
[153] Lobban, *Imperial Incarceration*, 17.
[154] Ibid, 37.

successful," in private correspondence.[155] The impact of these judicial problems deepens our understanding by demonstrating the extent to which the failure to successfully manage an aspect of the panic could have on the administration's standing. The inability to lower the number of murders or consistently increase the conviction rate made the administration appear not only weak but out of control. For a significant portion of the panic, those officials tasked with administering the anti-*liretlo* effort acted as if they were going through the bureaucratic motions; in private, they conceded things were slipping away from them.[156]

One case in July 1953 in particular demonstrates this trend and provides some more insight into the motivations behind the desire to commit a medicine murder as well as the often-controversial application of colonial justice. Murders like these contributed to the atmosphere of panic that set in within the administration, not least because the very chiefs that the colonial regime relied on were committing the killings. When these chiefs took part in *liretlo* it therefore shook the foundations of British rule. The restless chieftaincy was at the heart of creating the preconditions for the panic to occur; their initial rejection of colonial norms and embrace of medicine murder was an evolving part of the occurrence as a whole during the period. Individual cases of murder impacted on people on a local level but also fed into a broader debate within society over the validity of Britain's narrative on the deaths.

Case Study: The Murder of Mokotamne Mokale, July 1953

On 4 May 1953, Mokotamne Mokale left his house for the last time. The reason why he initially went out varies in reports. Some recorded the intention "to look for some young owls in a nest on a certain kran [cliff]," and in others, he was gathering honey, regardless of why this would be the last time Mokale was seen alive.[157] That night he was murdered by seven men led by Chief Khopiso Lerotholi. He was lulled into a false sense of security by the presence of his brother-in-law, Thabo Ralitau, and allowed himself to be taken to a cliff edge from which Thabo pushed him down. In his injured state, the flesh was taken from his face, forehead, and legs, leaving him alone to die. Mokale's murder was deemed at the time to have little to no political factors driving it, with the police making the rather extraordinary claim that there was "no apparent motive for the crime."[158] His murder and its aftermath reveal much about how a loss of prestige and the shock of chieftaincy reform encouraged chiefs and accomplices to

[155] 'Letter to HC from RC,' (29/12/1955), FCO 141/489, *TNA* (Kew).
[156] 'Overview of recent attempts to combat *liretlo*,' (21/01/1958), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[157] 'Murder in Lesobeng,' (10/07/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew) & Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 389.
[158] 'Political Significance: Chief Lerotholi,' (30/09/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).

murder their neighbours and friends. It also reinforces the ways in which the colonial state was failing to properly manage the panic and how this was creating some disquiet in the region.

It would take until the 10 May for someone to realise he was missing and another two days for the body to be found. By this time, it "was in an advanced state of decomposition," so it was difficult even to identify the cadaver.[159] The murderers would not be able to remain anonymous, and on 16 June 1954, two of the seven accomplices would be executed, with the whole affair lasting just over a year. The murder of Mokale does not immediately stand out as a case of particular interest or great importance. He was a commoner who had lived his entire life in Lesobeng village within Maseru province, a victim that was seemingly chosen for convenience rather than any broader political considerations. It was one of many killings, similar to the murder of Mbuvusa six years later explored previously; surrounded by an opaque cloud of distrust and fear.[160] Unlike the murder of Mbuvusa, though, there is clear evidence of who took Mokale's life.[161]

At its head was Chief Khopiso Lerotholi, whom the state convicted of leading and directing the murder.[162] Chief Lerotholi was born in 1917, received a missionary education at the PEMS School at Mohlanpeng and remained a member of that church throughout his life.[163] His subjects described him as ambitious and greedy, repeatedly accused of seizing the land that got "good crops."[164] Interestingly, Chief Lerotholi served abroad during World War Two as a member of the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps.[165] Although he fought with distinction, he was repeatedly passed over for promotion due to his ambition; his superiors described him as having a "troublesome attitude."[166] This ambition is a common thread in the descriptions of Lerotholi produced by police and administrators; evidently, he was actively trying to improve his status within society and his material conditions long before he even conceived of the plan to murder Mokale.

Lerotholi was not an ignorant figure on the colonial periphery. Instead, he was an integral part of the colonial system and understood his role within it.[167] In many ways, he was a model colonial chief who benefitted from the state's protection. It is hard to fathom how an "unpopular" chief like Lerotholi, who seized the lands of his subjects, could have remained in his role without the chiefly apparatus built by the administration after the 1938 and 1946 reforms.[168] However, Lerotholi was a restless figure who

[159] Ibid.
[160] 'Murder in Quthing,' (29/10/1959), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).
[161] Ibid.
[162] 'Police report on Quithing and Lesobeng killings,' (02/11/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[163] 'Consideration of death sentences Khopiso Lerotholi and Robert Salathiel,' (01/03/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[164] Ibid.
[165] Ibid.
[166] Ibid.
[167] 'Petition from Khopiso Lerotholi and Robert Salathiel,' (18/01/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[168] 'Further consideration of death sentences Khopiso Lerotholi and Robert Salathiel,' (05/04/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).

seems to have been stifled by the same system that likely kept him in power and was stated by member of his district interviewed as resenting the lack of "respect" his subjects showed him.[169] This characterisation is implied by the continued expansion of his lands at the expense of his subjects, his blocked army promotion and, crucially, rumours of being involved with medicine murders before Mokale.[170]

Whether his motivation was to strike terror into the hearts of his subjects to tighten his grip on them or he genuinely believed the *leneka* made from Mokale's flesh would bring him prosperity it does not matter, the desired outcome was the same; his motive was a desire to strengthen his prestige.[171] However, Lerotholi could not have committed the murder alone. Sharing accountability was his right-hand man and a key figure in his chiefdom's administration, Robert Salathiel.[172] Salathiel was Lerotholi's senior, born in 1898, and similarly was a member of the PEMS church. His fortunes were directly linked to that of his chiefs, sharing in Chief Lerotholi's "intense unpopularity" and supporting "his chief in everything he did."[173] Despite their age gap, Lerotholi was Salathiel's main patron, one he relied on for his economic well-being and status. The shared fortunes of these men likely encouraged Salathiel to willingly aid in committing the crime, with there being "no evidence" that Lerotholi coerced him to participate in any way.[174] Lerotholi and Salathiel were identified as the primary movers for the murder, planning and executing it with the aid of others who were there to witness; Feko Seatiele, Sekotot Chitjana, Masheane Thainyane and Liphanphang Peko.[175]

Lerotholi certainly fits the profile of the disgruntled chiefs seen throughout the medicine murder panic. Accusations of his previous connection to the crime and his well-documented ambition make him a near-model example of a perpetrator. Furthermore, he would have also been through the recent traumatic restructuring of 1946 treasury reforms, which give further context into the climate of political uncertainty that defined 1950s Basutoland. As the courts argued, the motive was "acquiring medicine" with Lerotholi and Salathiel the ones who benefited most from Mokale's death.[176] The selection of Mokale as the victim was seemingly a matter of circumstance, hence the inaccurate police description of the killing as having "no motive," but that does not mean the killing itself was a random act.[177]

There was seemingly no personal animosity between Mokale and Lerotholi, he was not, for example, a political rival or even one of his subjects, and with no connection to the battle of the medicine

[169] 'Murder at Quithing and Lesobeng,' (31/07/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[170] 'Consideration of death sentences Khopiso Lerotholi and Robert Salathiel,' (01/03/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Ibid.
[174] 'Further consideration of death sentences Khopiso Lerotholi and Robert Salathiel,' (05/04/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[175] 'Police report on Quithing and Lesobeng killings,' (02/11/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[176] 'Regina vs Khopiso Lerotholi and others,' (25/11/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[177] 'Petition of Khopiso Lerotholi and accused,' (19/03/1954), DO 35/4505, *TNA* (Kew).

horns. The viciousness of the killing could be misinterpreted as indicative of personal animosity between the murderer and victim. However, it should be read as part of the course for instances of medicine murder.[178] The way Mokale was murdered and butchered so brutally fit the established custom of acquiring flesh for a medicine horn. While colonial justice was often problematic, unable to consistently find the evidence needed to put murderers away, the case the state built against Lerotholi was strong and, as his later admissions would not, likely correct in its diagnosis. The extraction of flesh for medicine was therefore Lerotholi's primary goal over settling any score with Mokale, with the secondary goal to escape being prosecuted for the crime, something he failed spectacularly to achieve.

It took the police until 16 May, five days after the discovery of the body, to properly examine it. By this point, it had decayed significantly;

> "The body was viewed by the Deputy Commissioner of Police and Investigation Officer, Maseru... and at this time [it] was in an advanced state of decomposition and full of maggots. Some of the bones of the body were broken, and some of the flesh was missing. The post mortem report of cause of death was 'haemorrhage from multiple injuries, and there was a suspicion that some of the wounds had a clean cut appearance."[179]

Foul play was surprisingly not immediately considered until witnesses, including Thabo Railtau, came forward to say that someone had pushed Mokale off the cliff.[180] Not all witnesses were involved in the crime, including the farmer Moramang, whom Lerotholi had employed to work on his land, recording seeing the party travel to the murder site.[181] Overall, at least four witnesses offered statements to the police that implicated the group as the culprits.[182] By not pushing Mokale down the cliff himself in the open and committing the murder away from his chiefdom, Lerotholi must have felt he had done enough to stop himself from being identified as the culprit. He may have succeeded without this witness testimony, which is crucial for the state in many investigations.

On 7 September 1953, Khopiso Lerotholi and his accomplices, not including Thabo Railtau, who had already been acquitted, were arrested and sent to Maseru gaol.[183] The chief of police remarked in private correspondence that this arrest was proof that "it is not always expedient to notify the chief or headman of the area" upon discovery of the crime as said chief is often "himself a suspect."[184] The trial for the accused soon after in November did not last long.[185] The witness testimonies, valued so

[178] 'Political Significance: Chief Lerotholi,' (30/09/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[179] 'Medicine Murder Makotomane Mokale,' 07/10/1953, FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[180] Ibid.
[181] Petition of Khopiso Lerotholi and accused (19/03/1954), DO 35/4505, *TNA* (Kew).
[182] 'Police report on Quithing and Lesobeng killings,' (02/11/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew), 'Regina vs Khopiso Lerotholi and others,' (19/11/1953), FCO 141/609, (Kew) *TNA* & Regina vs Khopiso Lerotholi and others, (25/11/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[183] 'Political Significance: Chief Lerotholi,' (30/09/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[184] 'Police report on Quithing and Lesobeng killings,' (02/11/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew) & Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 88.
[185] 'Regina vs Khopiso Lerotholi and Robert Selatiele,' (20/01/1954), DO 35/4505, *TNA* (Kew).

highly by the Basutoland magistrates, which placed the accused at the crime scene, coalesced with Lerotholi's previous allegations of murder to ensure the prosecution's case succeeded in achieving heavy sentences for him and Salathiel.[186] The administration certainly believed they had got their man, the government secretary in Maseru writing that the conviction had removed someone "who has nothing good in him" away from society.[187]

The guilty men did not accept their convictions without opposition and immediately began a campaign to have their sentences overturned on appeal. Lerotholi petitioned the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London for their release, writing a letter to be sent to England along with a four months grace to gather the required £250 needed for the campaign.[188] The Basutoland High Court allowed them to pursue this campaign, with the only caveat being that they had only one month to procure funds, something they did easily. The accused sent a signed letter to the Privy Council on 18 January 1954.[189] This letter offers a brief window into the minds of those found guilty of murder. Inevitably Lerotholi and Selatiele focused on the evidence given by Railtau, pleading they were being sent to their deaths thanks to "false statements" relayed by accomplices based on a conspiracy of "hatred."[190] They highlighted how this evidence would not be definitive in any European trial. They argued the state should dismiss any charges as "I have not the vaguest... connection with the death of this person.[191] Although there is no direct confession contained within the letter, this was at the end of the day an attempt to appeal a death penalty sentence, there is still an acknowledgement by Lerotholi that "financial pressures within my area" due to the reforms which were creating "tensions in my people."[192] Furthermore he conceded, seemingly because the evidence against him was so strong, he had been at the scene of the crime near the time of the murder.[193] The chief ended his letter with a revealing plea which acknowledged he was "disliked" by many of his subjects and lamented for "a time when the chieftainship was like a father of a household."[194]

A formal appeal was submitted by the two accused lawyers on 19 March 1954, mirroring many of the same claims made by the pair in the January letter and on the belief that the autopsy was inconclusive.[195] African scepticism in the validity of colonial autopsies was not a new occurrence, given that Ruth Ginio argues that often "these so-called demonstrations of European scientific knowledge

[186] 'Petition of Khopiso Lerotholi and accused,' (19/03/1954), DO 35/4505, *TNA* (Kew).
[187] 'Further consideration of death sentences Khopiso Lerotholi and Robert Salathiel,' (05/04/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[188] 'Regina vs Khopiso Lerotholi and others,' (25/11/1953), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[189] 'Petition from Khopiso Lerotholi and Robert Salathiel,' (18/01/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[190] Ibid.
[191] Ibid.
[192] Ibid & Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 275.
[193] 'Petition from Khopiso Lerotholi and Robert Salathiel,' (18/01/1954), FCO 141/609, TNA (Kew).
[194] Ibid.
[195] Petition of Khopiso Lerotholi and accused (19/03/1954), DO 35/4505, *TNA* (Kew).

made no sense at all" to societies with different mechanisms to handle cases of unexpected death.[196] This suspicion gives more weight to this aspect of their plea for clemency, but ultimately it would not take long for this appeal to be rejected; on 27 March, the death sentences were upheld, and on 16 June, both men were hanged.[197] A short piece in *The Basutoland Times* would report the end of this brief but tragic episode; "a native chief Khopiso Lerotholi and another were found guilty of the murder, by a ritual process, with subsequent mutilation of one Makotmani Mokale and were sentenced to death."[198]

From the murder of Mokale on 4 May 1953 to the execution of Lerotholi and Selatiele on 16 June 1954, the entire affair lasted a year. It had proven to be a relatively simple case for the colonial state; they had quickly got their man and delivered some measure of justice. It may have lacked the drama of the murder of Paramente or the sensational murder of Akyea Mensah in Ghana; unlike those cases, it made little impact domestically or in the international press, but the testimony and investigation both offer a revealing insight into the motivations behind such a killing.[199] Similar to the conclusion Richard Rathbone came to in his investigation into the Kibi (Kyebi) murder case, it seems Lerotholi attempted to reinforce a "high office" in a time of flux by collecting body parts or blood.[200] That office for Lerotholi was his unpopular chieftainship, where he was simultaneously insulated from his subjects whilst also unable to improve his status. Those who assisted him with the murder appear to have either been coerced or had something to gain from the chief's improved status after the murder.[201]

The murder subverted the established colonial order, but Lerotholi was not involved in the "battle of medicine horns" between Bereng and 'Mantšebo, something stressed as crucial by Murray and Sanders, and did not appear to have any connection to any wider political faction.[202] A fall in his prestige, fear of material dislocation and pressures caused by the chieftaincy reform are a better explanation for why Lerotholi committed medicine murder. These were identified by the chief himself as being strains within his life that were causing tensions in his chiefdom.[203] Colonial justice was ramshackle, arbitrary, and often guesswork based on fragments of information rather than coherent investigations; it should not, as a rule, be trusted without reservations. However, in this instance, the direct testimony from the accused chiefs along with the interviews from members of the district,

[196] Gini, R., 'When Dead Bodies Talk: Colonial and Ritual Autopsies in French-Ruled Africa (1918–1945),' *Social History of Medicine*, Vol. 34 (2021): 983.
[197] 'Attorney general comments on Khopiso Lerotholi petition,' 27/03/1954, DO 35/4505, *TNA* (Kew), 'Letter from Commonwealth office refusing petition,' (30/03/1954), DO 35/4505, *TNA* (Kew), 'Confirmation of death sentences,' (24/05/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew), 'Confirmation of execution date,' (03/06/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew), 'Report in royal court declining appeal,' (13/04/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Death warrants from after execution,' (16/06/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[198] 'The Times,' (31/03/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[199] Rathbone, R., *Murder and Politics in Colonial Ghana*, (Bury St Edmunds: St Edmundsbury Press, 1993).
[200] Rathbone, R., 'A Murder in the Colonial Gold Coast: Law and Politics in the 1940s,' *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 30 (1989): 449.
[201] 'Response to petition,' (12/02/1954), FCO 141/609, *TNA* (Kew).
[202] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 338 & Jones, *Basutoland Medicine Murder*, 15-18.
[203] Attorney general comments on Khopiso Lerotholi petition, 27/03/1954, DO 35/4505, *TNA* (Kew).

something not always seen in murder cases, add credence to the final conclusions reached by prosecutors and support the view that Lerotholi killed Mokale to acquire *lenaka*.

This case in isolation does little to reflect the hysteria and moral panic that became so intensely associated with these killings. However, the noted response to the crime itself and observer's reaction to the execution of Lerotholi certainly indicate that those in his district were surprisingly not happy with the course of the investigation. The attorney general noted his report on the case that there appeared to be some "dissatisfaction" from members of the community surrounding Lesobeng village and the wider Maseru province on the verdict.[204] This concern took the form of a petition sent to the local District Commissioner asking for a retrial and a new investigation.[205] These petitioners did not trust the verdict in the court, although not necessarily because they thought the chief was innocent. Their main complaint it seems, according to the attorney general, was the "rough" conduct of the police in their investigations of the district.[206] This it seems had led to many doubting the overall validity of the arrest and trial, if the police were behaving so illegitimately then why should the people who knew Lerotholi and the other men trust this verdict?

Individual cases like the investigation into the murder of Mokale therefore fed into a general panic and became entwined with debates surrounding the very nature of colonialism in Basutoland itself. The dissatisfaction many felt in what they could see with their own eyes was far more convincing than any piece of government propaganda. The trial and execution of both guilty men may have been comparatively unremarkable to some other more scandalous examples. However, it is a representative incident within the wider wave of murders. It provides insight into how murderers committed the murders, the demography of the killers, how the colonial courts assessed who was to blame and the views of the accused themselves. Furthermore, the response by the public in doubting the validity of the verdict indicates that the government was failing in its attempts to get the public onside. There appears to have of been a lack of trust between the state and the people to the extent that even a successful guilty verdict was being challenged openly in public. This lack of trust as a result of the panic would be embraced by the emerging nationalist forces who emerged during this period alongside the height of the panic.

Passing the Torch: From *Lekhotla La Bafo* to the Basutoland African Congress 1952-56

In 1952, the anti-colonial struggle was given a new impetus with the founding of the Basutoland African Congress (BAC). Just as with LLB, the group was dominated by a single charismatic leader, Ntsu Mokhehle. He would be the dominant force within Basutoland politics for the next thirteen years and

[204] 'Attorney general's comments on Khopiso Lerotholi petition,' 27/03/1954, DO 35/4505, *TNA* (Kew).
[205] Ibid.
[206] Ibid.

transformed the BAC into the organisation that most directly affected the course of Basotho independence. They proved far better placed than LLB to take advantage of the post-war political climate to secure their agenda, chiefly due to their more articulated nationalist vision. While previous histories of the group have focused heavily on the rivalry between Mokhehle and his contemporary Leabua Jonathan after 1959, the BAC's early years of consolidation after their foundation have been overlooked.[207] Here, the path to independence took shape and central to this was the BAC's engagement with the wider *liretlo* panic. The party advanced LLB's *liretlo* messaging to take advantage of the disruption in governmental authority and used widespread dissatisfaction with the government's management of the killings as a tool to mobilise against colonial rule.

Mokhehle was a schoolteacher who helped found the influential Basutoland National Teachers' Association (BANTA) in 1947, the nation's first professional union. Unsurprisingly, the BAC and BANTA's "ideals and objectives coincided as many of the teachers active in BANTA gravitated to the new political organisation."[208] Mokhehle was an admirer of Lefela, having been a member of LLB since being a student. He shared his desire to protect "the Basotho culture in its indigenous and purer form" and rid the kingdom of colonial influences.[209] However, Mokhehle was also part of the younger generation, who wanted to "assert themselves in post-war politics" away from the shadow of Lefela.[210] At the same time, he also recognised that embracing the legacy of LLB had its advantages.[211] The BAC leadership held a lot of respect for Lefela for his decades of opposition to the British, viewing him as the "Moses of the Basotho" even if they disagreed with LLB's outdated worldview.[212] Accordingly, many younger members of LLB joined the BAC, and many saw Mokhehle as the natural successor to Lefela's legacy, albeit a younger and more competent one.[213]

Mokhehle agreed with Lefela's theories surrounding medicine murder and believed it to be a "trick intended to discredit the chiefs and pave the way for the eventual incorporation of Lesotho into the Union of South Africa"; who by that point, after its implementation in 1948, were following a policy of Apartheid.[214] From the beginning, a belief that these killings represented something greater formed a major aspect of Mokhehle's anti-colonial worldview, deeply entwined with the wider colonial exploitation experienced by his country. As long-time BAC deputy leader Bennet Khaketla recalled in his memoirs, "[Mokhehle] in all his political meetings never failed to say something about the murders... the whole thing had become such a threat that... none felt himself immune from its vile, all-embracing

[207] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho*, 4.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 132.
[210] Edgar, *Prophets with Honour*, 38.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.
[213] 'District Commissioner letter on joint LLB and BAC meetings,' (06/12/1954), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew).
[214] Ibid.

tentacles."[215] The BAC organised strikes, protests, and boycotts against the government that engaged citizens in active resistance. The targets of these demonstrations included private establishments, such as hotels with a racial discrimination policy and shops selling imported European goods.[216] Like LLB, they also participated in *pitsos*, making themselves a nuisance to local officials and chiefs, and distributed printed leaflets rejecting British presence within the kingdom.[217]

However, unlike LLB, the BAC did not believe that the nation's future was to be found in the historical models of the past. The party was sympathetic to some elements of western thought and believed a Western-style education to be an advantage in life instead of being something to be rejected.[218] Through the teaching union BANTA, the group had more connections to the *bahlalefi* class, western-educated middle-class professionals, who subsequently teachers took up key roles within the organisation.[219] Consequently, because of the divergent interests of both groups, Mokhehle struggled to build meaningful associations within the chieftaincy. Like Kwame Nkrumah's Convention People's Party (CPP), the BAC regarded chiefs as "barriers to… material modernisation and economic transformation."[220] However, as opposed to the CPP, they recognised that direct antagonism towards the chiefs was not wise when trying to construct a unifying nationalist movement against the colonial power. Despite such divisions, Mokhehle publicly desired his new party to be a "broad congress type organisation," a national coalition that incorporated multiple strata of Basotho society.[221] He was cautious not to attack the chieftaincy too much in public as he recognised, they represented a symbol of Basotho identity and national autonomy to many.[222] This caution would impact his early rhetoric on the killings.

The BAC's response to Britain's anti-*liretlo* efforts took shape shortly after its formation. Claims that the government was using *liretlo* to cover for a sinister plot were a major issue raised at BAC meetings, and the emotive subject was used to convince participants that British rule was hurting Basutoland.[223] The established counter-narrative did little to sway the educated or government-aligned but as Murray and Sanders assert, it was accepted broadly across society.[224] The group aimed to harness the "discontent, grievances and suspicions that were so abundant in Basutoland" to mobilise a coalition

[215] Khaletla, B., M., *Lesotho 1970: An African Coup under the Microscope*, (London: University of California Press, 1972), 50.
[216] 'Letter protesting incorporation,' (10/12/1953), FCO 141/745, *TNA* (Kew) 80b & 'The Friend,' (03/01/1956), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew).
[217] 'Transcript on BAC opposition in *pitsos*,' (21/01/1955), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew). 356-7
[218] 'Report on BAC 1956 conference,' (06/02/1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[219] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho*, 4.
[220] Rathbone, R., *Kwame Nkrumah and the Chiefs Nkrumah & the Chiefs: The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana, 1951-60*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.
[221] Nyeko, 'The Independence Movement,' 160.
[222] Coplan D., B. & Quinlan, T., 'A Chief by the People Nation versus State in Lesotho,' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (1997): 38-39.
[223] 'Government response to a BAC letter,' (09/05/1957), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[224] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 134-5.

to support Mokhehle's vision for independence.[225] BAC party leaders during the early 1950s made it clear to their supporters that Britain was to blame for the murders or at least deliberately hiding facts of cases to deceive the Basotho from some wider hidden agenda.[226] Some of the group's earliest public pronouncements included references to medicine murder, which was a key part of the party's worldview from the beginning. Although it never fully dominated the BAC's thinking during the early 1950s, discussions of the medicine murder panic were a major aspect of its political programme.

One only needs to look at the BAC's first meeting in January 1953 to gain insight into its agenda.[227] Anti-discrimination formed the crux of why Lesotho needed to break from Britain; Mokhehle argued that true equality within employment and opportunity could only be achieved when "the Basuto had self-government. It is high time they freed themselves out of the iron rule of the British."[228] Mokhehle "quoted extensively from the counter-narrative, from statements by the Lekhotla la Bafo" in this meeting to make a similar populist point.[229] However, unlike LLB, Mokhehle argued that the protectorate was just an efficient tool of domination, which used promises of economic development and security from incorporation to control the Basotho.[230] Mokhehle, even early in his new party's existence, aimed to start a youth-led "programme of action" to challenge British rule and focused his efforts on ending the stark inequalities it caused.[231] This new party wanted to end the climate "where comfort and luxury for the white people, no matter how lazy or how inefficient, are guaranteed" and create a new world for the Basotho, one where prosperity would be shared.[232] The material critique of colonialism extended into their discussion of *liretlo*. Mokhehle informed supporters that "just as elsewhere in the administration of our nation, the men who deal with these *liretlo* murders do not appear to be acting in earnest."[233] The *liretlo* panic therefore, not so much the event itself but as a politicised issue, formed an integral part of a broad repertoire of grievances against the colonial state.

This can be seen in the pressure the BAC placed on the government to abandon the 1954 Administrative Reforms Committee, led by Henry Moore, the former Governor of Kenya. Moore had called for a drastic reduction in the number of chiefs carrying out administrative duties and improvements in chiefs' pay based on performance.[234] The BAC believed this would delay the implementation of a legislative body, desiring a complete reform of the colonial system not a partial

[225] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho*, 93.
[226] 'Intelligence report,' (February 1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[227] 'Report on BAC's first meeting,' (05/01/1953), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew).
[228] Ibid.
[229] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 133
[230] 'Report on BAC's first meeting,' (05/01/1953), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew).
[231] Ibid.
[232] 'Basutoland Congress Party Manifesto,' (07/10/1952), ICS 28/4/B/1, *ICS* (London).
[233] 'Report on *liretlo* murders,' (20/03/1958), s3/20/1/51, *LNA* (Maseru).
[234] Ibid.

half measure, so campaigned to discredit the proposals.[235] It issued pamphlets across the country, which argued Britain could not be trusted and that the Moore proposals were just a part of the hidden agenda to undermine Basotho that was also a reflection of the *liretlo* panic.[236] They explicitly linked the failure of British power to control the killings to this new reform attempt, making the argument that if the government was handling this current crisis so badly they could not be trusted to have "a free hand" in this matter and Basotho instead should be deciding what happens in their country.[237] The BAC's lobbying eventually led to the National Council withdrawing its support, indicating the strength and popularity of the party's message.[238] A 1955 intelligence report produced by the state affirmed that the constitutional shifts the nation experienced were direct "the result of very intensive lobbying by the Basutoland African Congress."[239]

From its inception then, the BAC was strident in its criticism of Britain's handling of the *liretlo* panic and vigorously attacked the various components of the anti-*liretlo* effort. Britain's response to the murders therefore was a dominant feature of the BAC's early propaganda, with the party using the issue to highlight the UK's lack of legal impartiality. For instance, Mokhehle tried to undermine the government's investigation into the roots of the killings by arguing that these efforts, particularly the Jones Report, were not adequately unprejudiced; "Congress desires [that] the Government more effectively and realistically inquire into this unfortunate position to rid our nation of this stigma."[240] Jones was not a trusted figure to the BAC, and even before the publication was released, they cast doubts over its authenticity, arguing any "commission must be... better than Mr Jones's little anthropological survey."[241] While they conceded that **"**something is wrong somewhere," they fundamentally disagreed with any investigation which did not include themselves in the process and was closed to outside scrutiny.[242] Britain not translating the Jones report into Sesotho, not including Basotho in the data gathering and, eventually, not following through with its more structural recommendations opened it up for this line of attack.

These critiques carried into *Mohlabani*, a well-respected independent newspaper run by Bennet Khaketla, which, until 1960, supported Mokhehle's BAC. The pages of *Mohlabani* during the 1950s were not quite an official mouthpiece to the BAC certainly reflected the party line on the matter, as Khaketla was its deputy leader.[243] The paper dramatically declared that Basotho should reject the

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[235] *Machobane, L., B., B., J., Government and Change in Lesotho, 1800-1966: A Study of Political Institutions, (*Basingstoke*: Macmillan, 1990),* 257.
[236] 'Note on BAC,' (08/02/1955), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew).
[237] Ibid.
[238] Ibid.
[239] 'Intelligence Report,' (September 1955), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[240] 'Statement released by the BAC,' (18/04/1953), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[241] Ibid.
[242] Ibid.
[243] 'Mohlabani,' (March 1955), *Morija Museum and Archive* (*MMA*) (Morija) & 'Mohlabani,' (July 1955), *MMA* (Morija).

colonial narrative as it demonised Basotho in their own country; "very little action of the Basotho is looked at by suspicion by the Government."[244] Khaketla declared in its pages that Britain's fears of the Basotho "rules the land" and consequently lamented that "the British Officials in Basutoland have greatly developed a tendency towards a show of force."[245] Linking this directly to the end of British colonialism, he noted that British rule would die a natural death, and there would be no need for Officials to resort to a constant show of force."[246] The coverage in *Mohlabani* made some occasionally uncomfortable allusions for the colonial state. On one instance in September 1955, it claimed that District Commissioners touring districts was akin to "a propaganda machine similar to that of Goebbels has been set in motion," clearly indicating to its readership the strength of feeling the BAC felt towards colonialism.[247] Print media formed another way for the BAC to undermine Britain's narrative of the murders and present some of their arguments for independence.

The BAC presented any British attempt to regain the initiative of the situation as destined for failure. Khaketla argued that it would take someone who embodied the traits of "the great Moshoeshoe [who] had put an end to cannibalism" to put an end to medicine murder.[248] Rhetorically asking where such leaders may be and implying that for them to have to be Basotho, he indicated that the colonial government would be incapable of stopping the killings.[249] Here again, a clear link was being made between Britain's inability to stop the murders and its unsuitability to rule the territory. This new wave of political mobilisation was, therefore, partly a result of the state's fall in authority and subsequent inability to control the narrative on the medicine murders. The BAC implied that Basotho would not be physically secure until *liretlo* was dealt with, which the colonial administration could not do, and the nation needed to get rid of colonial rule for one's own security.[250]

The BAC did not just confine its criticism to rhetoric. Like LLB had done before them, the leadership became advocates for those who had suffered mistreatment and used their education to lobby for victims of police mistreatment. By actively involving themselves in difficult cases, they provided a public way to demonstrate themselves as defenders of the common interest against a police force widely perceived as overreaching its authority.[251] One example can be found in the accusations made against Chief Francis Lebihan Masupha of Berea District in 1956.[252] Investigators accused the chief of committing murder, but the chief alleged that the evidence used to charge him had been obtained through the use of witness intimidation.[253] The BAC, hearing of the case, soon involved themselves in

[244] Ibid.
[245] 'Mohlabani,' (August 1955), *MMA* (Morija).
[246] Ibid.
[247] 'Mohlabani,' (September 1955), *MMA* (Morija).
[248] Bennet Khaketla quoted in Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 177.
[249] Ibid.
[250] Ibid.
[251] 'Mantšebo complaint on police actions,' 23/06/1954, FCO 141/782, *TNA* (Kew).
[252] 'Letter from chief Masupha on rumours of a murder,' (14/03/1956), FCO 141/628, *TNA* (Kew).
[253] Ibid.

events, meeting with relatives of the chief and coaching them on what to say to the police.[254] They argued that the chief was the victim of a wider plot and should not be condemned on flimsy evidence, something that must have tapped into the fears of any other innocent chief.[255]

These defences of individual chiefs came despite the BAC's natural suspicions of the chieftaincy as an institution and Mokhehle's personal dislike of the institution. The reason for the chiefs' public support was purely political and fitted within their nationalist agenda.[256] It provided the BAC with proof of their conspiracy. They used the examples of chiefs seemingly persecuted by the state to demonstrate that their allegations, regarding medicine murder, against the government, were factual. The group emphasised they were defending the traditional Basotho institutions, which many still saw as guarantors of Basutoland's sovereignty, from the lies the government told.[257] As Rosenberg asserts, defending chieftainship was, in essence, a way to connect to the legacy of Moshoeshoe through his heirs, who remained the basis of "popular national consciousness in Lesotho."[258] Advocating for chiefs, no matter how much the BAC distrusted them as an institution, was a major way to present their nation-building project as a truly unifying one that respected the past institutions that had traditionally protected the Basotho. As Weisfelder reinforces, "Mokhehle countered criticism of BAC attitudes towards chieftainship by emphasising the BAC's defence of chiefs accused of medicine murder."[259]

As well as chiefs accused of murder, the BAC became advocates and supporters of commoners who made allegations of being victims of unscrupulous police practices. One such instance was a complaint by Mrs 'Matsekuuoe Tukula in January 1956 over constant harassment her family had received after her husband had been suspected of murder by police.[260] Mokhehle met with 'Matsekuuoe after she requested his help, and he accompanied her to the local magistrate's office with a petition asking for an investigation into the police's actions.[261] The fact that 'Matsekuuoe as a mother and homemaker with little previous connection to the BAC, recognised the value of making her grievance a broader political one indicates how political participation in the country was not exclusive to men. Ultimately though, their efforts would be pointless, as the government declared, as with most cases of accused police cruelty, that the allegations of incompetence were "unfounded."[262] However, cases such as these were a way for the BAC to counter police propaganda and, with their limited resources, offer a rebuke to the colonial claims that the police's only role was finding the culprits for the murders

[254] 'DC report on Masupha rumours,' (09/06/1956), FCO 141/628, *TNA* (Kew).
[255] Ibid.
[256] 'Basutoland Congress Party Manifesto,' (07/10/1952), ICS 28/4/B/1, *ICS* (London).
[257] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho,* 4.
[258] Rosenberg, S., 'The Justice of Queen Victoria': Boer Oppression, and the Emergence of a National Identity in Lesotho,' *National Identities,* Vol. 3 (2001): 133 & Rosenberg, *Promises of Moshoeshoe,* 58.
[259] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho,* 11.
[260] 'Memorandum on woman's complaint,' (05/03/1953), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew).
[261] Ibid.
[262] 'Government response to BAC,' (13/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).

responsible. These acts aided in sowing discord and fostered the belief in a wider conspiracy of which the police were a key component.

Observers noted that speakers at BAC gatherings also focused much attention on the more material matter of police malpractice.[263] An anonymous BAC article in the political journal *Mohlabani* states the police's true goal during the medicine murder investigations was to "facilitate the liquidation of any prominent citizen who does not sing "rule imperia."[264] *Liretlo* was a mechanism through which other aspects of colonial rule could be discussed, principally other problems that Basotho had with Britain's stewardship. For instance, Mokhehle asserted that the UK's oppressive response to the murders indicated the fundamentally repressive nature of the colonial system.[265] He argued that this situation would only improve when the said system was "overthrown," using a critique of the police to make a nationalist argument in favour of independence.[266] Criticism of the police was a central part of the party's nationalist message, something that was made easy by the force's overreach and instances of cruelty that was known enough to be a major scandal. Unlike LLB, who were also critics of police activity, the BAC directly tied this criticism to a clear political programme with an end goal of Basutoland's independence. They made it clear that police excesses were not an acceptable response to *liretlo* but an "excessive use of unjust force" propping up a spurious colonial regime, condemning the propulsion of police brutality that occurred due to the government response to stop the killings.[267]

The BAC publicly articulated and published articles that called the British efforts to convince the Basotho to abandon their cultural practices "slander."[268] They made use of ironic parallels between traditional Basotho beliefs and Christianity that demonstrated the ignorance of anyone blaming another culture for violent crimes; "ministers of religion gave people flesh and blood which they alleged to be the blood of Jesus, yet because they were white they were considered blameless."[269] Through these claims, Mokhehle and the other BAC leaders attempted to restore some of the Basotho pride lost due to the *liretlo* panic and highlight that the true savage practitioners were whites, not the misrepresented Basotho. The hypocrisy of what was not an acceptable practice highlighted that the nation was not as abnormal as the British repeatedly said. This rhetoric formed a key immediate way for the BAC to connect the panic to a nationalist vision. They argued that rejecting the government's narratives on the origins of the panic was a way to assert a lost national pride.

[263] Ibid.
[264] 'Mohlabani,' (December 1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[265] Intelligence report,' (April 1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[266] Ibid.
[267] 'Intelligence report,' (April 1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew) 58
[268] 'Mohlabani,' (December 1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[269] 'Intelligence report,' (February 1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).

These early years of the BAC, from 1952 to 1956, saw it both establish itself to the nation as a political force and propagate its counter-government views on medicine murder. Building on the foundations laid by LLB in making the murders a political issue, Mokhehle more directly linked the killings to a broader critique of colonial rule. In the *liretlo* panic, Mokhehle and his BAC identified a clear issue around which "the masses were already mobilising" and channelled that dissatisfaction into a clear political programme with an end goal of independence.[270] Mokhehle expanded on LLB's critique of colonial power by making promises of a materially better future for the Basotho when Britain withdrew from the colony.[271] The *liretlo* panic was a key component of the party's messaging during these years; in the press, public gatherings, speeches, propaganda, and internal party conferences. The extent to which the panic cut deep into the colonial state is revealed here in the significant impact it had on nationalist efforts to attack the state. Without the conditions of the panic or the failing government response this avenue of attack would not be open for the BAC to exploit.

Conclusion

The years 1952-1956 were defined by the continued inability of the administration to recognise the actions of a disinherited rural aristocracy for what they were. This period of high panic proved it was much easier for colonial administrations to explain in ways that did not recognise the impact of their racist exploitation. The works of fiction produced, and the views of ordinary Basotho offer a more nuanced and different perspective from that of the press during this period. While many individuals were afraid for their personal safety and desired a stronger response to stop the killings, it is apparent during these years that there was a growing scepticism toward the management of the crisis. Those ordinary Basotho who made themselves heard, through letters, newspaper articles or petitions, consistently displayed an uncertainly that the British administration was showing the strength needed to stop this crisis.[272] The panic then was being intensified by this perception of inaction and a sense that Britain had lost control of the situation to a significant degree.

The intensification of the anti-*liretlo* effort only provided more disappointment for the state, mainly due to the fact the constituent parts of the broader strategy all shared similar limitations. The production of propaganda and investigative enquiries focused solely on *liretlo* certainly developed yet still proved unconvincing to a Basotho audience.[273] The more coercive efforts to make the police and the courts more effective were viewed as key to demonstrating both imperial power and the competence

[270] Schmidt, E., 'Top Down or Bottom Up? Nationalist Mobilisation Reconsidered, with Special Reference to Guinea (French West Africa),' *The American Historical Review,* Vol. 110, No. 4, (2005): 984.
[271] 'Coventry Evening Telegraph,' (09/02/1955), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew).
[272] 'Complaint of the people of Mapoteng,' (10/03/1957), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Letter from sibling of victim,' (13/06/1957), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[273] 'HC to RC going over strategy,' (10/02/1956), FCO 141/489, *TNA* (Kew).

of British justice over the population. However, anxiety over the treatment of suspects and the number of unsolved crimes would not go away.[274] The advisory boards were a unique part of the wider campaign as they were not a coercive or rhetoric exercise but a constitutional one, a way to involve Basotho in the effort and invest them in a national effort. Ultimately, though, these bodies were not given any real power and, despite some successes, were ineffective.[275] Instead of amending some of the errors that had plagued the campaign in the previous years and embracing the more structural recommendations of the Jones Report, the administration publicly failed to improve the effectiveness of the overall anti-*liretlo* effort.

The context of *liretlo* was therefore also key to the shift in the success of opposition forces. Mokhehle used the support of BAC members to launch "ill-mannered attacks" against the colonial government[276]. These questions undermined the government's credibility and helped open up the question of political representation.[277] The BAC used the murders to make a wider point about the "wrongful practices and policies" of British rule and create a programme of political change to address them.[278] This fundamentally marked their rhetoric apart from LLB, who failed to link the conspiracy to a plan of action. While Lefela's organisation may have attacked the government similarly, the BAC took an extra step and mobilised it for a wider political project. The killings acted then as a rhetorical device for the BAC and a means of making colonial incompetence explicit and exploitable.

That makes studies of occurrences like the *liretlo* panic so important to understanding why colonial states failed to properly manage 'crises' and resorted to extreme actions that undermined their governing authority. Despite historians of Basotho nationalism and historians of *liretlo* not recognising the impact the killings had on the nationalist movement, the political opportunity that this inability to control medicine murder provided did, in fact, shape it to a significant degree. Britain was never able to really understand the roots of the murders; therefore, their response to the murders proved unconvincing to a great many Basotho. The colonial administration themselves admitted their failure to effectively address the issue had let it "dangerously weaken the prestige and authority of the administration as a whole" and made it a "heaven sent" political opportunity for Mokhehle.[279] This opportunity would be taken fully advantage if during the final period of the medicine murder panic, where Britain finally conceded that this crisis was beyond them and ceded power to the Basotho.

[274] 'HC on upcoming conference of DCs of *liretlo*,' (07/01/1953), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[275] 'Progress report on anti-*liretlo* propaganda campaigns,' (July 1954), FCO 141/489, *TNA* (Kew).
[276] 'Letter from the deputy High Commissioner,' (14/10/1959), ICS 28/4/B/4, *ICS* (London).
[277] 'High commissioner on BAC influence,' (05/03/1958), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[278] 'Letter from Mokhehle,' (30/11/1956), FCO 141/739, *TNA* (Kew).
[279] 'Letter from High Commissioner,' (06/02/1959), FCO 141/487, *TNA*, (Kew), 'Intelligence report,' (November 1955), DO 35/4490, *TNA*, (Kew) & 'Intelligence report,' (February 1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA*, (Kew).

Chapter 4: The End of the Panic and the Retreat of Colonial Power, 1956-1960

The Fraser Memorial Hall, located near the centre of Maseru, is a building with substantial significance to the history of Basotho nationalism [fig 1]. This space, still standing and functioning, was home to many of the early meetings of the parties that would lead Basutoland to independence. It was here on 4 January 1953 that the very first Basotho African Congress (BAC) (later renamed the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP) party) meeting was held; where attendees were called on to "sacrifice for their nation" and push to oppose British policy.[1] On 1 January 1960, it was also where the party held its seventh annual conference, a moment when attendees cast the alternatives to independence as being "confused, or moribund, or all these things put together."[2] Throughout these years, the Fraser Memorial Hall remained at the centre of BAC activities and, therefore, at the centre of the most dynamic force within the Basotho nationalist movement. It was also, therefore, a space which heard, in these early formative years of the BAC, the construction of a narrative on medicine murder that would greatly shape the fortunes of the party and the nation's future.

This final period of the panic was crucial to this. The years began with the clearest indication that the panic was still a major political issue and ended with a conclusive ending of the panic on multiple fronts. The BAC 1956 conference in the Fraser Memorial Hall formed the highpoint of the *liretlo* panic within nationalist discourse, the issue taking centre stage in a significant manner.[3] This conference set the stage for the BAC's approach for the next four years. It was during this period also that Ntsu Mokhehle, along with other BAC leaders, continued to weaponize the tangible government failure to stop the killings into a rhetorical instrument that they could use to attack British rule and present alternative solutions.[4] This proved to be however a time limited approach that was ultimately disrupted by the new political landscape created by the foundation of the BNP in 1959 and the 1960 National Council election. The election indicated Britain's acceptance that independence was not far off. It decreased the need for nationalist parties to attack the British government, whom they were then nominally working with as partners. The *liretlo* panic was, therefore, the touchpaper for the kindling of Lesotho independence. It helped start the flame but was not present as the fires of independence would burn.

[1] 'Report on Meeting Held at Frasers Memorial Hall', (03/01/1953-04/01/1953), FCO 141-887, *The National Archives* (TNA), (Kew).
[2] 'Speech by B.M. Khaketla at the annual BCP conference,' (01/01/1960), 28/4/B/5, *Institute of Commonwealth Studies* (ICS), (London).
[3] 'Transcript of BAC Annual Conference,' (17/01/1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[4] 'Report on Meeting Held at Frasers Memorial Hall', (03/01/1953-04/01/1953), FCO 141-887, *TNA,* (Kew).

Fig 1: The Fraser Memorial Hall, Maseru, taken by author on May 2022.

On the other side, the colonial state saw some of their most sophisticated propaganda and in-depth reporting emerge during this final period, particularly the booklet *Away Vanishes Basutoland* in 1960, but these late efforts proved to be somewhat futile as the wider administrative strategy shifted.[5]After more than a decade of attempting to stop the killings, the government consciously surrendered its public responsibilities to stop the killings during the late 1950s, a decision reflective of its inability to manage the panic. [6] The *liretlo* panic had been a millstone around the neck of the wider administration of the territory for years but proved to be one that was only relieved when colonial anxiety abated, and the nation moved towards independence. The years 1956-1960 therefore were defined by growing nationalist success, a de-escalation of the panic, and a winding down of the anti-*liretlo* effort. By taking advantage of Britain's failure to stop the killings, the nationalist movement had pressured the government to cede more autonomy to the Basotho.

[5] 'Away Vanishes Basutoland through Medicine Murders,' (1960), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Secret report on 'Analysis of Ritual Murders and their Relation to Various Administrative Events,' (May 1960), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).
[6] 'Report on roundtable conference on *liretlo*,' (22/10/1954), FCO 141/738, *TNA* (Kew).

The wider panic literature rarely recognises the ways in which panics are politicised or nationalised in this manner.[7] There are major issues with reading the political impact of the *liretlo* panic in this manner, as Colin Murray and Peter Sanders do. The assertion that "medicine murder did not significantly alter the path of Basutoland political development" is mistaken.[8] While there is an acknowledgement that opinions on the medicine murder panic were "part of the BAC's nationalist programme," they do not ascribe it much influence beyond briefly impacting public opinion during the 1950s.[9] Furthermore, the argument within the literature that the BAC did not mobilise medicine murder as an issue beyond 1956 to any great degree, as "Ntsu Mokhehle's protracted and impassioned speech on the subject to his followers in December 1956… apparently exhausted its capacity to exploit the issue in order to discredit the colonial administration," cannot be accepted.[10] There is clear evidence of the issue remaining at the forefront of BAC rhetoric until at least the 1960 election.[11] There is, therefore, a serious gap within the historiography on the explanation of how *liretlo* was used within nationalist political programmes and how this "disruption in imperial authority" created by the panic helped foster an environment favourable to said nationalists.[12]

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first examines the winding down of the panic and the end of the anti-*liretlo* campaign. It will assess its overall impact and the factors in its failure. The second uses the case of a miscarriage of justice after a murder in Lekokoaneng in 1955 to explore the activities of the police in more detail, reinforcing how the state created opportunities for the nationalists to act. The third section is a case study focusing on the BAC's 1956 conference, which featured *liretlo* as a key issue and offers a revealing look into how party members viewed the subject. The fourth section focuses on the BAC and the last years of medicine murder as a major issue in the nation. It will explore how the group sought to take advantage of the unique situation created by evoking the murders in their rhetoric to argue in favour of independence, agitating in cases and using the murders within their recruitment literature. The final section concludes by demonstrating how the 1960 election hastened the end of medicine murder as a political issue and set the stage of Basutoland's independence.

[7] Pratten, D., *Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007), 238 & Van Brockhaven, V., 'Anioto: Leopard-Men Killings and Institutional Dynamism in Northeast Congo, c.1890-1940,' *The Journal of African History*, Vol.59 (2018): 44.
[8] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 293
[9] Ibid, 135
[10] Murray, C., & Sanders, P., 'Medicine Murder in Basutoland: Colonial Rule and Moral Crisis,' *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 70 (2000): 76.
[11] 'Letter from High Commissioner,' (06/02/1959), FCO 141/487, *TNA* (Kew).
[12] Lawrence, A., K., *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 223.

The Failed Attempt to Stop the Killings: Winding down the Panic and the End of Anti-*Liretlo* Effort

The panic remained a significant part of Basotho's life throughout the second half of the 1950s as the murders continued to occur at an alarming rate.[13] The Deputy High Commissioner's March 1956 overview of public opinion reflected the sense that anxieties were still high, with an all-time low "territory-wide distrust" in the chiefs and the police, two of the primary institutions of the colonial state.[14] Basotho were in this late stage of the panic far more vocal of their criticisms of the government, with the Manchester Guardian reporting that dissatisfaction and dissent was at a record high.[15] The South African press compounded this, criticising the government's perceived soft touch and inability to investigate the rumours surrounding 'Mantšebo.[16] Public debate had shifted significantly from an acknowledgement of the crime's horror to a focus on attacking the police along with the administration for using the crime to undermine Basotho interests; a factor that would make the later nationalist rhetoric on the killings so emotive and effective.

The shift in public opinion reflected how the panic had shaped the perception of the murders. The presentations of the panic as "shrouding" the nation in a miasma of "ruin and shame" heightened anxiety and ensured the event became integrated into a wider discussion in Basotho society over other points of political debate.[17] While the killings were real and did increase, the continued messaging of the colonial administration in treating them as a clash of different civilisations did little to alleviate the "uneasiness and fears on the part of the people."[18] The Basotho public had grown more critical of the perceived biases within the Jones Report as the literate opposition forces disseminated its contents to the people. By 1957, popular disapproval had grown to a significant backlash against it. The District Commissioners in the Maseru office reported that the public was increasingly viewing the contents as "weak," and there was a clamour for "a special team of investigators" independent from the colonial government to produce a new one.[19] A Colonial Secretary report from the same year remarked that the BAC made significant gains by using this as a propaganda tool and at that point, "another commission seem[ed] inevitable."[20]

To help calm this disquiet and reassure the people that Britain was still their protector, the government produced new propaganda material for a Basotho audience; one such resource was an anti-

[13] 'Discovery of human remains at Mohales Hoek,' (20/03/1959), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Suspected murder by chief Solomon Api Remabanta,' (20/04/1959), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[14] 'Deputy HC letter on public opinion and support for conspiracy,' (20/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[15] 'Manchester Guardian,' (20/09/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[16] 'Johannesburg Star,' (13/07/1959), FCO 141/617 *TNA* (Kew) & 'The Star,' (30/07/1959), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[17] 'Speech by paramount chief,' (07/04/1949), FCO 141/583, *TNA* (Kew).
[18] 'Letter to 'Mantšebo on above cases,' (06/03/1952), FCO 141/484, *TNA* (Kew).
[19] 'Draft reply rejecting a new commission by sec state,' (1957), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[20] 'RC note on BAC requests,' (13/05/1957), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).

liretlo booklet, *Away Vanishes Basutoland through Medicine Murders*, printed in 1960.[21] The pamphlet appealed to the nation to cease the killings:

> "Hello! Men and women of Basutoland, please listen. Because of these medicine murders, there are many persons who will be sceptical of the apparent degree of civilisation reached by the Basuto and of their ability to manage their affairs if you yourselves do not fight hard for the suppression of these medicine murders."[22]

Using images of the past, it attempted to shame the nation for the behaviour of its chiefs "will you not be ashamed of yourselves on the occasion of meeting your deceased ancestors."[23] The pamphlet encouraged Basotho to assist in the anti-*liretlo* effort, including reporting any words of a conspiracy "immediately" to the government.[24] It appealed to young educated people to be a model for their seniors and grasp the mantel of leadership to "save Basutoland, our fatherland."[25]

These nationalistic appeals however were undermined by the continued allusions that threatened the kingdom's sovereignty as a price it would pay if it did not get its house in order. The leaflet misunderstood what medicine murder was about because it ignored many socio-economic reasons why chiefs had committed killings within their districts. Instead, it highlighted supposed enlightened British values over barbaric Basotho ones. It is hard not to read this as an attempt to ensure the Basotho knew their place: "how can the Basuto ever hope to manage their affairs since the Basuto eat one another, and still adhere to filthy practices of brutality which took place in the very primitive days?"[26] It demonstrates that the British government were learning the worst lessons of the panic and that their analysis of events was shallow at best. It also reflects how a lack of involvement by the Basotho in the production of said material meant the voice of the supposed 'anti-*liretlo*' forces in public was distinctly European.

Interestingly, the booklet also held a "special message" just for the women of Basutoland contained in an addendum. It called on them to take over where their "men had failed' and "take up the men's trousers."[27] It emphasised their singular "responsibility" to prevent their husbands from committing murders, called on "homemakers" to ensure a harmonious household and accentuated the role of "mothers" in disciplining their sons.[28] Despite acknowledging the important role of women in public life, these were still explicitly patriarchal statements that reinforced female domesticity over actual political participation something that the colonial state likely believed reflected the political

[21] 'Away Vanishes Basutoland through Medicine Murders,' (1960), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew).
[22] Ibid.
[23] Ibid
[24] Ibid.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

economy of Basutoland at that time. In actuality, this representation was far from accurately reflecting the extent of female participation in politics at the time. As Marc Epprecht has shown, women in late-colonial Lesotho were a powerful and mobilised political force who organised their religious associations and participated in the burgeoning nationalist movement.[29] Far from being "apathetic or conservative by nature," Basotho women had a nuanced view of their role in society that was not appreciated by the British administration, resorting to condescension instead of engaging with them on an equal level.[30]

Away Vanishes Basutoland was flawed propaganda, with its efforts to convince the reader patronising at best. However, it is demonstrative of the more sophisticated propaganda effort developed by 1960, albeit one still heavily criticised for its futility. Private correspondence within the colonial state reveals officialdom who were increasingly sceptical of the propaganda efforts they were spearheading. Resident Commissioner Edwin Porter Arrowsmith argued efforts were compromised due to "the fatalistic and helpless attitude adopted by many Basuto towards the crime," blaming the lack of his subject's uptake for the campaign on their failure to embrace it.[31] Another letter explained this failure as the result of the Basotho's backwardness. Arrowsmith lamented the childlike nature of his subjects;

> "There is no objection to the children playing their childish games provided that if things get serious they must report to the grown-ups. This is just the attitude towards quackery and witchcraft which ought to discredit quickest."[32]

His condescension towards his subjects and lack of trust reflected why the public awareness campaign failed. The murders were not treated like normal crimes. The administration continued framing of them as a distinct threat to colonial society and the integrity of the protectorate, was a severely limiting factor in convincing Basotho that Britain was on their side.

Throughout the propaganda campaign as a whole, the government showed an acute lack of self-reflection over why Basotho people did not respond to the campaign. The fault was seen to be with their subjects for being too primitive to change their behaviour. Officials were concerned that the propaganda would imply British rule had "culpability for bad administration in not preventing such murders," an attitude that reveals the deep distrust many in the government had towards their subjects.[33] While the campaign had developed throughout the 1950s beyond the simplistic use of circulars to encompass a relatively extensive and sophisticated effort, its usefulness continued to be questioned by officials

[29] Epprecht, M., 'Women's 'Conservatism' and the Politics of Gender in Late Colonial Lesotho,' *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (1995): 29-56 & Epprecht, M., 'Domesticity and Piety in Colonial Lesotho: The Private Politics of Basotho Women's Pious Associations,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 19 (1993): 202-224.
[30] Epprecht, 'Women's 'Conservatism' and the Politics of Gender,' 42.
[31] 'Letter from Arrowsmith,' (08/04/1954), FCO 141/489, *TNA* (Kew).
[32] 'Handwritten note on medicine murder,' (05/10/1954), FCO 141/489, *TNA* (Kew).
[33] 'RC letter,' (20/10/1954), FCO 141/489, *TNA* (Kew).

whose influence meant its messaging remained paternalistic and ineffective.[34] The roots of its ineffectiveness lay in its poor messaging, remaining unconvincing and patronising throughout, and its decentralised nature that prevented a national uniformity. Officials' inability to see beyond "their day-to-day success" and lack of "long-term imperial ambition" meant that aspects of the propaganda effort long deemed ineffective continued beyond the point of use.[35] This extended to the *liretlo* panels, which had not developed in a manner that made them an effective counterweight to the panic.

The Resident Commissioner A.G.T. Chaplin reported to his superiors in 1959 that while not all possible panels had been formed, those working well were "not an embarrassment to the police."[36] District Commissioners similarly reported on their usefulness but stressed that for them to remain useful to the administration, they must be kept free of "BAC influence."[37] These statements indicate the fundamental factor that held the committees from being truly effective; a reluctance to delegate too much power to their subjects, a willingness to overlook ethical failings, and a steadfast refusal to engage with opposition figures. There were exceptions to each of these observations, yet, on the whole, they remained true throughout the years the committees and panels were active. Their impact is, therefore, somewhat difficult to judge. Official praise for how the committees operated was praise for the role assigned to them, to support the police and not make waves elsewhere. It was not necessarily a measure of their success in preventing *liretlo*. Ultimately, in September 1960, there was a decision not to open any more panels and gradually wind down the ones still operating.[38] Thus anticlimactically ending an interesting, but ultimately rather futile, endeavour.

Vigilance committees and anti-*liretlo* panels were the most significant institutional change to combat the killings initiated by the government during the crisis. It created a whole new administrative apparatus that could have, in theory, provided a check to both the chiefs and the police, something that could have aided in winning wider popular support for other efforts. Ultimately, the constraints placed on the committees and the biases in approving candidates limited their effectiveness as independent bodies. The attitude of officials towards these efforts was mixed, which contributed to the panels not having the degree of success the administration envisioned them to have. While some saw the panels as useful, like Resident Commissioner Chaplin, who argued their multi-racial nature was "impressive," others, such as Deputy Attorney-General Tom Scrivenor, believed that any trust in them was "naïve."[39] The panels were, therefore, a missed opportunity for the administration as one of the very few attempts at a genuine reform, which may have addressed some of the grievances of Basotho with the anti-*liretlo*

[34] Ibid.
[35] Reinkowski & Thum, 'Introduction,' 8.
[36] 'RC letter to HC,' (25/02/1959), FCO 141/487, *TNA* (Kew).
[37] 'DC letter on the usefulness of *liretlo* panels,' (29/04/1959), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).
[38] 'Suitability of *liretlo* panels,' (12/09/1960), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).
[39] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 164, 'RC letter to HC,' (25/02/1959), FCO 141/487, *TNA* (Kew) & 'The Star,' (09/05/1956), FCO 141/738, *TNA* (Kew).

effort and the actions of the government more broadly. Such reforms would certainly not have stopped the killings but could have gone some way to alleviating the existential crisis in the nature of the colonial system.

What was certainly less constructive was the continued oppressive hand of the police that had become by 1956 a major recruiting tool for the BAC, featuring extensively in their rhetoric and correspondence.[40] This was not lost on the state who certainly recognised that poor police practices were emboldening its opponents. A personal note written by the Resident Commissioner in March agreed with much of what Ntsu Mokhehle, the leader of BAC, was saying about policing but was "doubtful of the wisdom of saying anything about it."[41] Despite private reservations, the administration continued publicly displaying support for the police, calling BAC charges against policemen "unfounded" and "improper."[42] Far from demonstrating British power, the police were increasingly an indication of its weakness. The police had limited capacity to counter crime, and its justice was applied seemingly arbitrarily, furthering support for anti-government conspiracies.[43]

The nature of police violence in Basutoland was not a unique feature of the administration in this particular colony. However, it was a broader symptom of the condition caused by British colonialism in Africa. As elsewhere in the continent, the administration was unwilling to fund a force with appropriate manpower to tackle murder investigations consistently in a way that led to the police relying on physical coercion that had a diminishing return. Willow Berridge's work, focusing on Sudan during the late colonial period, provides a useful comparison. Just as in Basutoland, a lack of resources facilitated the Sudanese police force to be a repressive disciplinary power; "the resort to violence by the police while they were performing duties such as riot control, the suppression of rebellions, and everyday criminal was also a result of the vulnerable position in which they were placed the Condominium regime's neglect."[44] Berridge argues that the arbitrary nature of colonial policing was deeply related to the nature of British administration in Africa more broadly; despite the rhetoric that portrayed the police glowingly, administrations were reluctant to support it materially.

By 1960, the police certainly was the organ of government that encountered the most resistance and resentment from the public at large, seen by many as corrupt and lacking accountability.[45] Internal investigations in abuses would most commonly completely clear officers of wrongdoing and treat the allegations of police wrongdoings as an attempt by *liretlo* perpetrators and their supporters to discredit

[40] 'Complaint against police response,' (08/01/1957), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[41] 'Note on Mokhehele,' (10/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[42] 'Government response to BAC on mistreatment of woman by police,' (13/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[43] 'Deputy HC letter on public opinion,' (20/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[44] Berridge, W., 'Guarding the Guards: The Failure of the Colonial State to Govern Police Violence in Sudan, ca. 1922-1956,' *Northeast African Studies*, Vol. 12 (2012): 22.
[45] 'Paramount's complaint against police investigation,' (30/07/1960), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Report into allegations of police mistreatment,' (05/10/1960), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).

investigations.[46] The national council noted the failure of the police to improve their practices or reduce the murder rate: "although our intention was good in actual practice our changes to policing have made it less effective, which will result in our continued criticism of police."[47] The tacit state-sanctioned "forceful treatment of witnesses" did little to alleviate Basutoland's "general sickness," instead, it undermined the government's position with the public and gave ammunition to its opponents.[48] While an improvement of police methods would not have significantly reduced the number of murders that occurred, it may have gone some way toward limiting the political damage the panic was inflicting upon the administration.

Also in 1960, officials circulated a secret report that aimed to clear up some of the lingering questions left by Jones's report and present the case for further reforms to the native authority.[49] Similarly to Jones, the anonymous author targeted the removal of 'Mantšebo as a key requirement for peace in the nation, "this may sound fantastic but I believe we are dealing with a morbid person... who attributes her good fortune to the use of human parts in her *lenake*."[50] The report contained a broad agreement with Jones's findings, apart from his rejection of the link between *liretlo* and initiation schools, and encouraged the reforming Basotho society so as not to be so beholden to the chiefs. It reflected a shift in official thinking away from a blanket dismissal of the causes of medicine murder being just native superstition.[51] It was though too little too late to affect the course of the panic of the government response. Throughout the panic, the Britain produced a significant amount of material that investigated the origins of *liretlo*. Nevertheless, the extent to which this influenced policy or shaped public discourses favouring the government narrative can be questioned.

For many individuals in the administration, the experience of the panic had undermined their confidence in the colonial administration and their will to be in Lesotho in the first place. Some mirrored the assessment by the secretary of state that the country was "unmanageable" and that the "turbulence" the nation had experienced appeared unsolvable by colonial policy alone.[52] Others, such as the Butha-Buthe district commissioner in 1958, noted that the experience of trying to implement a reduction of killings in his district was "dispiriting" due to the resistance from members of the public.[53] At the height of the 'crisis', instead of being "cool, calm and collected while 'running the show'," the men tasked with governing the protectorate acted from a position of weakness and made excuses for their failure.[54] Will

[46] Ibid.
[47] 'Report by special session of the national council,' (29/07/1958), s3/20/1/52, *LNA* (Maseru).
[48] 'Report on liretlo murders,' (20/03/1958), s3/20/1/51, *LNA* (Maseru).
[49] 'Secret report on 'Analysis of Ritual Murders and their Relation to Various Administrative Events,' (May 1960), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).
[50] Ibid.
[51] 'Correspondence on *liretlo* trials,' (17/06/1954), FCO 141/738, *TNA* (Kew).
[52] 'Draft reply by sec state,' 1957, FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).
[53] 'Report to HC from Butha-Buthe,' (28/04/1958), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew).
[54] Fischer-Tiné & Whyte, 'Introduction: Empires and Emotions,' 1.

Jackson reinforces this; “Beneath the pomp and ceremony, anxiety was perennial to empire. Fears of native uprising made manifest a collective vulnerability.”[55] Administrators' worries surrounding a loss of control reflected the tenuous nature of colonial power. Within Basutoland, the murders challenged the state's authority, but that authority was then irrevocably damaged by their failure to bring them under control.

Ultimately a combination of the perceived ineffectiveness of official campaigning and a shift in the government's priorities towards the business of independence signalled the end of any broad anti-*liretlo* effort.[56] The exact date for this is difficult to place exactly. There was no official winding down order, instead just a cession of efforts. Nevertheless, for reasons explored at the end of this chapter, efforts to combat *liretlo* began to attenuate at some time during late 1959, and by 1960 *liretlo* was virtually absent from the political discourse.[57] The anti-*liretlo* campaign had failed to meet almost any of its professed goals. It did not reduce murder rates, they continued to fluctuate as before, nor did it convince the majority of the public that engaging with the colonial efforts was an exercise worth undertaking.[58] This failure to control the forces causing the murders and the many poor decisions within the campaign can best be explained as a shared consequence of the weaknesses already present within the Basutoland government and the wider crisis affecting the colonial state. These weaknesses, particularly the reliance on the chieftaincy as the main organ of local governance and the continued underfunding of the administration, meant that the actual authority of the Basutoland regime did not extend nationwide to any great degree. Only due to the prejudices of administrators and the preceding decades of socio-economic dislocation did the panic happen the way it did. The anti-*liretlo* efforts intensified these forces and helped legitimise the idea that these killings were something to be concerned about. British officials did not abandon their efforts from a position of strength. By their various admissions, they had lost control of the situation.

The government's failure was not lost on it or the nation. Observers, such as American doctor Jeff Baker, could see the futility and fundamental contradictions of the effort first hand; “the British government can do nothing significant to stop such practices though they insist on punishing primitive customs with irrelevant Western law.”[59] Far from demonstrating colonial strength, the anti-*liretlo* campaign had proved indicative of a weakened government authority. As Eldredge states:

[55] Jackson, W., 'The Settler's Demise: Decolonisation and Mental Breakdown in 1950s Kenya,' in Fischer-Tiné, H. *(ed.), Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown,* (Zurich: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 73.
[56] ‘RC telegram,’ (23/08/1963), FCO 141/850, *TNA* (Kew).
[57] Murray & Sanders *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 172-175.
[58] ‘Letter from Gov Sec to Commissioner of Police,’ (21/05/1951), 2494/2, *LNA* (Maseru).
[59] Baker, J., *African Flying Doctor: A Young Man's Living Journal*, (London: W. H. Allen, 1968).

> "The British were ineffective in curbing the wave of murders, and even the execution of Bereng and Gabashane failed to act as a deterrent. Medicine murder was intricately connected to the struggle for power in colonial Lesotho in the 1940s, in which British colonial rule was by definition implicated."[60]

While her explanations on the origins of the murders are flawed, here, Eldredge makes a key observation on their impact. Similarly, to other examples of colonial administrations losing control throughout decolonisation, these murders caused a disruption in authority that revealed the fragile core of British power. William H. Sewell has emphasised the importance of events which upend the political order for producing "moments of accelerated change," the rapid growth of the opposition movement to Britain during and after the crisis was no mere coincidence.[61] Individual cases, which had repercussions lasting years for the local police's relationship with local districts, highlight this. The state's mismanagement of the panic did not just reflect the limitations it had to project authority over a population, cases such as the murder of Lekota Noa demonstrate it also opened the door for the emerging nationalist movement to step into.

Case Study: Allegations of Police Mistreatment in Lekokoaneng, 1956-1957

On 18 August 1955, Lekota Noa was found dead at the bottom of a cliff face near the village of Lekokoaneng in the Teyateyaneng District; medicine murder was immediately suspected.[62] Although no mutilation was reported when individuals found the body, the coroner's report found that the "right thumb was removed below nail – scratch marks across torso... Part of the skull missing... Knife seemingly inserted through nostril and blood collected."[63] Noa was dead on his back, seemingly posed, with his hat on his bent left knee, around 30 feet from where police believed his body should have been if he had fallen down the cliff.[64] Compounding this was the lack of external injuries on the body; if he had fallen down a rocky cliff face, it was supposed the body would have been far more mutilated than it was.[65] Although this case would not open up any major mystery, the investigations that followed it revealed how the police failed in their duty and how nationalist activists used these cases to undermine colonial authority.

It took nearly two months for an official cause of death to be recorded, deemed a haemorrhage from an object piercing the spleen and left lung.[66] The suspected perpetrators were quickly identified, as with many murder cases. However, there was a get deal of initial rumour and conjecture about the

[60] Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*, 183
[61] Sewell, W., H., 'Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille,' *Theory and Society*, vol. 25, (1996): 841-881.
[62] 'Letter to paramount on suspicious death,' (24/10/1955), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[63] 'Suspected medicine murder,' (13/10/1955), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[64] 'Alleged ritual murder Teyateyaneng,' (19/01/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.

culprit. Rumours implied that nine local chiefs possibly could have committed the murder, but one suspect stood out, Chief Fako. Fako was rumoured to have been involved in several killings during the 1950s, and police informants were already monitoring him.[67] They reported that the chief had threatened to "shoot himself" if the police investigation was concluded "satisfactorily," and he appeared "nervous" during interrogation.[68] Shortly after a series of interrogations, police established that Fako had sent instructions to an accomplice, Molau Sepheka, informing him he "had business to do" and told him to report to him on the day of the killing.[69]

The main source of this evidence was testimonies from witnesses and local citizens connected to Fako, focusing on his character and whereabouts during the crime.[70] Investigators, using fragments of various testimony, claimed that Fako had gathered with a group of accomplices three or four days before the killings to plan the murder.[71] They planned to invite Noa to the chief's house and get him drunk after an evening *pitso*. After Noa drank "plenty of beer," the chief supposedly instructed his followers to "carry out their duty," he then stabbed a knife up the victim's nose - after which flesh was extracted and the body disposed of over the cliff.[72] However, this interpretation remained theoretical. Unfortunately for the police, officers could not pin the killing on Fako. Despite the compelling narrative he formed, key witnesses pointed the finger away from their chief and there lacked any significant forensic evidence. There was no smoking gun that definitively proved Fako's guilt, no accomplices came forward to admit their role in the murder, and nobody conclusively admitted to seeing the killing take place.[73] Consequently, the investigation was dropped, and the case never went to trial.[74]

That did not mean that the controversy surrounding the death was over. Nearly as soon as the case against Fako was abandoned in January 1956, the government received a complaint from Matsikuoe Tukula, a woman living "three miles" from Fako.[75] Matsikuoe had an uncle who was one of the chief's supposed accomplices, and she became a potential star witness for the investigation.[76] Her proximity to the crime and lack of connection to Fako made her potentially vital to the case. It exposed her to potential mistreatment from a police force whose relationship with the public had frayed dramatically.[77] The complaint made damning allegations in the investigation, particularly how they extracted her testimony. She alleged the following: that police had detained her for "a total of eight

[67] 'Suspected medicine murder,' (13/10/1955), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] 'Alleged medicine murder Teyateyaneng,' (25/01/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[71] 'Alleged ritual murder Teyateyaneng,' (19/01/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[72] Ibid.
[73] 'Extract from minutes with meeting between RC and paramount,' (17/03/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[74] 'Extract from minutes of meeting between RC and paramount,' (16/03/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[75] Ibid.
[76] 'Alleged ritual murder Teyateyaneng,' (19/01/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[77] 'Letter from Penal Reform League of South Africa,' (04/08/1955), FCO 141/489, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Government response to mistreatment of woman by police,' (13/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew).

weeks with her child during the period of the investigation"; that two officers, Sargent Tsenoli and Trooper Ntsihlele, tried to force her to "falsely implicate" Chief Fako; that during the detention her and her child were not "given adequate rations" and were left hungry; that she was subject to cruel "ill treatment"; and that she was not allowed to speak to others during her detention.[78] The police publicly took these allegations very seriously.[79] Claims like Matsikuoe's had the potential to undermine trust in the police and therefore reduce the operational capacity of the force.[80]

In response, the District Commissioner for Teyateyaneng launched an enquiry to get to the bottom of and, in the administration's hope, publicly disprove Matsikuoe's claims.[81] The Resident Commissioner gave the investigative team a direct mandate to "carry out a detailed investigation into the unfortunate allegations made against members of the police force" and warned officers that failure to do this would be "intolerable."[82] The investigators called Matsikuoe back to the police station in January 1956 to give a new statement. She reiterated that policemen "asked me to say that chief Fako came to my house with blood and with him called Tukula [her uncle]. I denied this and said I would never say this... I told them I would not tell a lie that these people came to my house with blood."[83] Matsikuoe closed her statement by claiming she was reluctant to pursue this matter as she had "denied it to myself for a long time," but desired justice for what she felt was clear mistreatment. [84] While this may have been the end of the matter, the internal investigation uncovered something which Matsikuoe had failed to mention; Ntsu Mokhehle and his Basutoland African Congress (BAC) had been heavily involved in her claims from the start.

The first report of the enquiry was sent to the Government Secretary in Maseru on 9 February 1956, with the following revelation; "the crown witness [Matsikuoe] has been caught acting in a manner which suggests they have been tampered with by unscrupulous person's intent on interfering with the course of justice."[85] The BAC, it appeared, had instructed Matsikuoe to make a claim to discredit police efforts and coached her on what to say.[86] The BAC involvement concerned the administrators. They believed it could potentially disrupt "the rich dividends paid by having a good relationship with the chieftaincy" and hamper future investigations in the area.[87] They noted that the initial claims had only been made after she had met with a BAC activist named "Mpopo," this was enough to cast her entire

[78] 'Report on the investigation of mistreatment of Matsikuoe Tukula,' (1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[79] 'Colonial correspondence,' (27/06/1955), DO 35/4467, *TNA* (Kew).
[80] 'Complaint against police response,' (08/01/1957), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[81] 'Report on the investigation of mistreatment of Matsikuoe Tukula,' (1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[82] 'Extract from minutes with meeting between RC and paramount,' (17/03/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[83] 'Witness statement in Teyateyaneng case,' (05/01/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[84] Ibid.
[85] 'Complaint by Matsikuoe Tukula,' (09/02/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[86] 'Report on the investigation of mistreatment of Matsikuoe Tukula,' (1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[87] Ibid.

testimony into doubt.[88] As the February report declared, "the actions of Matsikuoe are not consistent with those of a person acting under police compulsion."[89]

Somewhat surprisingly, when the police revealed the BAC involvement to the party, they did not deny it. However, their interpretation of events was somewhat different and far less sensationalised. The group claimed to be "defending" the rights of an innocent woman and taking a stand against police violence more broadly.[90] The BAC leadership argued that Matsikuoe had approached Mpopo with her "complaint against the police at Teyateyaneng," and they were publicly acting in her and the nation's interests more broadly.[91] The circumstantial evidence seemingly supports that the nationalist presence was never meant to be a secret. The colonial enquiry discovered that known BAC members had "accompanied" Matsikuoe since her detainment, something the colonial police had missed in their initial reporting. While they read this as proof her claims were false, it equally could be read as protection from reprisal, Matsikuoe already noting that the police had made implicit threats against her. Instead of 'uncovering' some salacious scandal, the colonial investigation had only exposed the reality known to locals in the area.[92] The BAC did not immediately inform the colonial state of its involvement but crucially did not hide or repudiate it.

After being discovered, the actions of the BAC did fit the interpretation that the group did not intend their involvement to be a secret. Mokhehle was recorded making a public declaration at a rally in Teyateyaneng where he demanded the police give him "all of the information gathered on the case," including the internal police reports over the validity of Matsikuoe's claim.[93] The Resident Commissioner noted the gathering where Mokhehle made these demands was "well attended," despite his protestation at a meeting with 'Mantšebo in March that "Mr Mokhehle has no right to insist on anything."[94] The Commissioner conceded there might have to be some concessions to keep the people on the side of the government and agreed to take a petition signed by the people of Teyateyaneng on behalf of Matsikuoe to the Paramount Chief. Despite stating that complaints of this kind should be "dealt with at the district level," he also promised to oversee the final report on the matter personally.[95] The BAC had successfully placed Matsikuoe's complaint on the national stage; whether coached by them or not, her allegations had a much greater profile than if they had just remained within Teyateyaneng.

[88] Ibid.
[89] 'Complaint by Matsikuoe Tukula,' (09/02/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[90] 'BAC letter to HC on police fabricating evidence,' 06/04/1956, FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[91] 'Report on the investigation of mistreatment of Matsikuoe Tukula,' (1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[92] Ibid.
[93] 'Extract from minutes of meeting between RC and paramount,' (16/03/1956), FCO 141/621, TNA (Kew).
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid.

Evidence of the case gaining a national profile can be seen in a letter written by the BAC on 6 April 1956, addressed to the High Commissioner in Pretoria.[96] In the letter, the author, the BAC general secretary Nking Monokoa, presented the party's cause as a just one; "in spite of the unfounded hostility of the Basutoland government to the Basutoland African Congress we are trying to help in all matters affecting the Basotho."[97] He argued that the kinds of detention used in cases like Matsikuoe's were morally reprehensible and damaging to the nation's meagre budget, "why does the government afford them board and lodging? We take it to be unwarranted squandering of public finances."[98] Crucially, Monokoa presented the case as a moral outrage that was also reflective of wider colonial exploitation in the kingdom; "That the *liretlo* investigations are very shockingly conducted has long been clear to us... that the government ill-treats its suspect is no surprise to us."[99] Monokoa seemingly attempted to convince the nominally neutral High Commissioner, supposedly the figure who checked the Resident Commissioner's power, that the Basutoland government was rotten to the core. Monokoa also did not mince words when he declared the police actions "torture" and fitting in a broader pattern of abuse, quoting other cases where torture had seemingly occurred.[100]

Despite this, the government seemed more chauvinistically concerned that a hysterical "woman with worried mind" was making them look foolish than the event giving the BAC more ammunition.[101] While Mokhehle was making ample use of this political opportunity that Matsikuoe's allegations had provided him, the colonial state was seemingly blind to the potential impact it could have in increasing the BAC support in the district. Mokhehle was directly pitching the BAC to be the true protectors of the Basotho, willing to challenge state power and ensure that every Mosotho had their grievances fairly heard. This argument and the BAC's demands for transparency in the investigation of Noa's murder provided a strong message that the organisation was repeating nationally during this period. The police's opaque actions during this case and others had formed a pattern of abuse within the public psyche that the nationalists were exploiting. The affair would not have occurred, though, if the police investigation did not have so many failings.

The final report produced by the investigative team aimed to draw a line under the matter, and, unsurprisingly, it largely affirmed the current government's position. After breaking down the various components of the case, including Fako's role, the report concluded, that "we have no hesitation – and we testify to this jointly and severally without hesitation – in giving our opinion this no foundation for Matsikuoe's allegations."[102] The report argued that her initial claims and statement were "inconsistent"

[96] BAC letter to HC on police fabricating evidence,' 06/04/1956, FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[97] Ibid.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] 'Report on the investigation of mistreatment of Matsikuoe Tukula,' (1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).

and that she had been interned within two weeks, not the eight she had claimed.[103] It did concede that there had been questioning outside of this time, confirming the visit of the officers to her house that supposedly threatened her, but argued she was subject to "no ill-treatment" or "unlawful detention."[104] The commissioner of police hailed the publication of this report and noted that as this had officially closed the case, the BAC agitation surrounding it had "seemingly run out of steam."[105] The entire affair appeared to have been wrapped up neatly and to the satisfaction of the Resident Administrator. However, cases like these would have deep ramifications hidden from the eyes of other administrators.

The murder of Noa in 1955 and the police's attempts to charge Fako with the crime was not a particularly unusual or notable case for the period; the lack of clarity over what occurred and the police's inability to charge their lead suspect was not a particularly rare occurrence. However, the case's aftermath proved far more interesting than the murder itself. While it is impossible to know the actual validity of Matsikuoe's allegations, they are well within the realms of possibility. It is not impossible to imagine a scenario where frustrated officers saw Matsikuoe as a potential weak link they could exploit in the Fako case, assuming that, as a woman, she would be easier to intimidate. It is hard not to see the gendered and racist nature of the police force playing a part in how they treated her. Ultimately though, there is little conclusive evidence either way. Even the final colonial report conceded the police likely mistreated her to a degree in being detained, another incident of abuse that fed into the broader panic.[106]

Fundamentally, the Matsikuoe allegations and their impact demonstrated Britain's failure to understand the killings or how to respond to them properly. The incident was part of a wider pattern deeply affecting the relationship between the Basotho and their government. [107] It made the issue of colonial policing a political issue and drew attention away from the investigation of Noa's murder. The petition indicated that the people of Teyateyaneng believed the police had failed to arrest a key suspect, harassed an innocent woman and acted in a manner not befitting their supposed role as the deliverers of justice for victims. Cases like these became moments of local or national debate because the police failed in their role and could not communicate the justification for their actions to the public. Despite commissioning independent investigations and attempting to shift the blame for the dissatisfaction within Teyateyaneng solely on the BAC's agitation, the police force themselves were to blame for inflaming tensions.[108] The nationalists had used the opportunity of the allegations to take advantage of

[103] Ibid.
[104] Ibid.
[105] 'Commissioner of police to government secretary on complaints about police,' (18/01/1957), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[106] Report on the investigation of mistreatment of Matsikuoe Tukula,' (1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[107] 'Police reports,' (17/09/1954-21/09/1954), FCO 141/502, *TNA* (Kew).
[108] 'Extract from minutes of meeting between RC and paramount,' (16/03/1956), FCO 141/621, TNA (Kew).

a failed attempt to investigate an instance of *liretlo*, meaning that the underfunded police's hopes of protecting the regime against criticism of its methods failed.

This miscarriage therefore impacted British authority, specifically within the district of Teyateyaneng. Matsikuoe's allegations formed part of a pattern of events that undermined public trust in the institution of the police and widened opposition to the regime more broadly. This can be seen in the petition submitted by the district residents to the District Commissioner, which presented that they were not "satisfied" with the investigation and indicated they were no longer taking the police's narratives for granted.[109] This distrust was not a result of BAC agitation, as the colonial government argued. Instead, the BAC agitation resulted from the distrust building from the police's actions. The investigation opened the door for the BAC, not the reverse. The case shows that the police were not an effective institution in reducing the level of panic and limiting the opportunities for nationalists to exploit during this time; it was underfunded, understaffed, and relied on the public's goodwill to investigate cases. Allegations like Matsikuoe's, which were publicly dismissed as hearsay and resolved in a manner that favoured the official view, tangibly impacted the ability of the police to operate and created political issues where none had previously existed. They also fed into a broader programme of action and ideological understanding formulated by the BAC, best illustrated during the party's fourth annual national conference in 1956, a high point for discussing medicine murder within the party's political programme.

The Politicisation of the *Liretlo* Panic in Focus: The Basutoland African Congress's 1956 Annual Conference

Since the party's foundation in 1952, the BAC held an annual conference, usually around the New Year. It was a space where delegates from across the nation would gather and discuss party policy, sing songs together, pray and air any grievances they held from their districts. 1956 was no different to this recently established party tradition, and the year saw a conference occur in the Fraser Memorial Hall from 31 December 1955 to 2 January 1956.[110] The medicine murders cast a long shadow over the proceedings, taking a central focus in the leadership's speeches and a major issue discussed by delegates. From the top down, from Mokhehle's speech, which rhetorically used the killings to attack the state, from the bottom up, with members discussing how the environment created by the panic shaped their reasons for joining the BAC, the 1956 BAC conference was certainly shaped conclusively by the panic. While this conference certainly was a high point for the BAC's politicisation of the medicine murders, proving the public were still interested to learn about the party's theories concerning *liretlo*, it did not mean discussion of the killings vanished from their rhetoric after the conference. Instead of being the

[109] Ibid.
[110] 'Transcript of BAC Annual Conference,' (17/01/1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).

culmination of the killings as a political tool, the conference created a unified vision of how they should deal with *liretlo*, which the BAC would later spread to the nation throughout the remainder of the 1950s. Fundamentally, the event showed that the public was not tired of this rhetoric and that *liretlo* was a very important issue that the public wanted to hear more about.

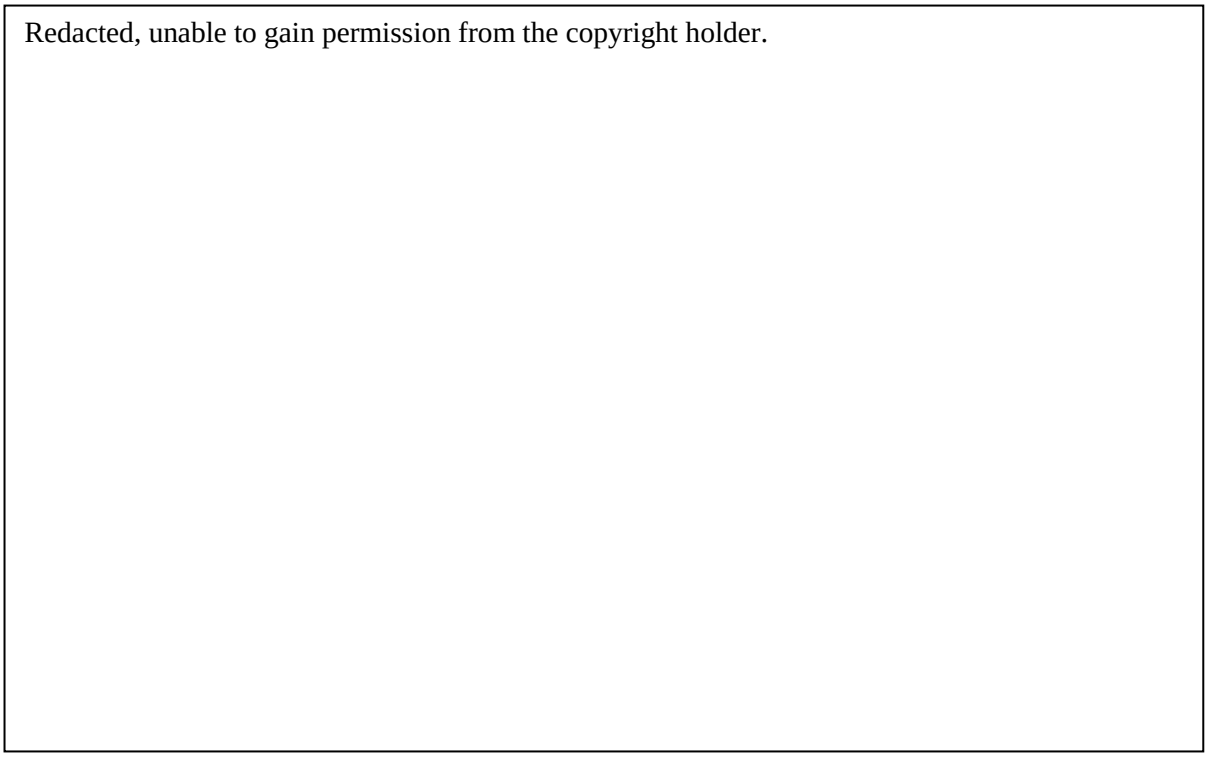

Fig 2: Picture of Ntsu Mokhehle addressing the BAC conference, January 1956.[111]

The party informed the government two weeks prior that this meeting would occur and where it would be held.[112] Consequently, the police were instructed to send a representative who provided a transcript and reports to administrators.[113] While some sessions were closed to the public and police, consisting of more senior party delegates, most of the conference was observed and recorded.[114] The opening day of the conference on New Year's Eve 1955 began with a procedural reading of a report from each branch containing items such as each branch's membership, whether subscriptions were paid up, the impact of the recent intensification of policing efforts and other such summaries.[115] These reports indicated that the party was expanding, with all of them noting more members from the previous year. However, some major challenges existed to further expansion, including the local police harassing members and a lack of membership cards.[116] Delegates complained that some of the large but sparsely populated highland districts, such as Qacha's Nek or Quthing, had not yet organised BAC cadres.[117]

[111] 'Mohlabani,' (April 1956), *MMA* (Morija).
[112] 'Letter from BAC saying where annual conference will be held,' (17/12/1956), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew).
[113] Ibid.
[114] 'Special intelligence report,' (17/01/1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[115] 'Transcript of BAC Annual Conference,' (17/01/1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.

These reports showed a party that, while still consolidating its position in the nation, had certain key successes despite challenges.

While these branch reports were important, the true introduction and heart of the conference came after when party leader Mokhehle gave his opening address [fig 2]. His long speech opened with the following summary of the state of the nation as he saw it in the time of *liretlo*:

> "Mr. Speaker, ladies and gentlemen, our country has of late, been cursed by an epidemic occurrence of dead mutilated human bodies, which have been discovered all over the country. Through its judicial courts, its crown witnesses; through the press; through its official circulars and official public talks; through its commissions and conferences; our government has declared to the Basotho and to the world, that these mutilated human bodies are the result of cruel murders perpetrated by chiefs and their followers."[118]

This claim, according to Mokhehle, was only a half-truth shaped by the British government's attempt to undermine the Basotho nation. After providing evidence of the government's viewpoints on the killings from the press and correspondence with colonial officials, he proactively stated the following:

> I have been patient in placing these declarations before you: they show what propaganda has emanated [from]… The government officials and the church authorities [who] have proclaimed the existence of *'liretlo'* within Basotho culture as a matter of unquestionable fact. It is Herr Hitler, who once wrote in his book that if a false assumption or lie is repeated often enough… it becomes an accepted fact."[119]

Creating an allusion between British propaganda and the Nazi regime indicates the BAC's strength of feeling toward Britain. They were no fans of Nazi "barbarity" and were creating an uncomfortable compassion for the government.[120]

Opening his speech this way was a deliberate political choice. Mokhehle was already acutely aware of the political capital that could be made from the panic, as any mention of *liretlo* had evoked a strong response in multiple forums before the conference.[121] However, this presidential address was a high point of this emotional rhetoric, which blamed the crisis on "official propaganda" that was manipulating the Basotho.[122] These murders, he claimed, were a "fiction of the imagination," a way to remove the chieftaincy and hand Basutoland over to South Africa.[123] While this is largely still within the then-established LLB critique of the British narrative on the murders, Mokhehle advanced this in his speech by arguing that the supposed killings were part of a wider pattern of colonial exploitation;

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[118] 'Presidential Address delivered by Ntsu Mokhehle at BAC Annual Conference,' (29/12/1956-31/12/1956), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] 'Report on BAC's first meeting,' (05/01/1953), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew), 'Government response to BAC,' (13/03/1956), FCO 141/490, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Mohlabani,' (December 1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[122] 'Presidential Address delivered by Ntsu Mokhehle at BAC Annual Conference,' (29/12/1956-31/12/1956), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[123] Ibid.

"Britain is committed to expropriating the resources of the Protectorates [the HCTs]... while not a single case has been proved but Britain is using these fabrications to align our administrations with that of the Union of South Africa."[124] This, in clear terms, was a synthesis of the popular and established theories of medicine murder with a material critique on the impact of socio-economic exploitation, directly linking an end to the murders with an end to colonial rule.

After explaining some of the key arguments used by the colonial state in their simplistic and anti-Basotho perspectives of the murders, Mokhehle went on to present how the British response to medicine murders had, in many ways, be more damaging to Basotho society than the murders themselves;

> "The net result of these official and judicial as well as ecclesiastical propaganda down the years is that division has created in the minds of the people belonging to different classes of our society that these mutilated bodies were by the Basotho chiefs and their followers."[125]

He admonished the false charges some chiefs had supposedly faced, naming Chiefs Gabashane, Berang Maltere, and Maphusa, explored previously in this thesis by name. The poor treatment some witnesses had received also received discussion.[126] He referred to the police as "crude" and merely agents of the government, not the neutral party they often pretended to be during investigations. The murders were for Mokhehle, "a criminal riddle" facing the Basotho as a people, one whose solution could be found by rejecting Britain's supposed attempts to "destroy the Basotho nation."[127]

This statement extended to the "attitude of the legal profession," with Mokhehle informing the delegates present that their pro-government bias "completely justifies the fears and suspicions the Basotho have."[128] Numerous deaths in detention, false trials, and the adoption of some, unnamed but implied to be discriminatory, South African practices seemingly disqualified any claims of any fairness under British law; "there is in fact no JUSTICE in the so called 'ritual murder trials."[129] Mokhehle concluded his opening address by arguing that the failures of the British response to the murders had shaped the party's expansion; "it is very easy to see why doubts exist in the minds of the public… people are increasingly coming more and more to consider the so called ritual murders as a political subterfuge and why so many have come over to seeing things our [the BAC's] way."[130] Here the BAC leader appeared to acknowledge that the panic had created a moment benefiting Basotho opposition

[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid.

forces, closing his comments with an affirmation that this movement would win the "battle" over Basutoland's future.[131]

An opening address to any political party's conference, no matter the context, which focuses on one issue so heavily, can only signify that the party's leadership wishes to make that issue the centre point of said conference. Mokhehle used his position as principal speaker to spread his core understanding of the murders as an exaggerated colonial deception and reinforce to participants that the various components of the government response, primarily the police and courts, could not be trusted. While not directly advocating for independence in those terms, Mokhehle used the killings to imply that Basotho needed to resist British rule and look to the future where independence would transform Basutoland. Medicine murder was an emotive rhetoric device, a way to engage his audience whilst always acting as a method to critique some of the specific grievances Basotho held with British rule.

Mokhehle's speech was the early focal point of the conference. However, it was followed by two more days of discussion between party leaders and ordinary members, drawn from the various branches in South Africa and Basutoland. Informed by the fiery rhetoric of their leader, delegates debated the issues facing the nation, but *liretlo* took the central stage. One of the first to offer their views was the president of the Port Elizabeth branch, Mr I. Mathibela linked the Basotho struggle to a broader regional one; "sons of daughters of the oppressed land. You should remember that your duty is to fight for the liberation of the oppressed land."[132] Mathibela then commented on the killings noting that the assorted delegates "should not be surprised that things of this nature do happen – they happen when justice is lacking."[133] Another delegate, Mr Hlekane Mofokeng, said it was true that "the government was wrong" and called on the party to intensify their efforts to investigate the allegations surrounding "the killing of prisoners in the Central Gaol were other aspects of injustice which were still under investigations."[134] Both delegates shared some of the concerns of their leader over the application of British justice in the time of the *liretlo* panic.

BAC chairmen, Mr Mtlamelle, offered a slightly different viewpoint on the killings. He argued they should be challenged as a falsehood, but the party should not focus its efforts on them; instead, he argued they should engage in an "economic war" with the British.[135] What this would consist of was not stated, but it does reflect that there was debate within the party over how far it should go in using the murders to score political points. John Mapefane, representing Leribe at the conference, used his allotted time to condemn the then-recent arrest of Josiel Lefela for sedition, claiming he was a man who

[131] Ibid.
[132] 'Transcript of BAC Annual Conference,' (17/01/1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid.
[135] Ibid.

had "provided so much wisdom" and denounce the "spilling of human blood" in the nation.[136] Interestingly, Mapefane agreed with Mtlamelle that the party should start to look beyond *liretlo* as while the issue had shown him personally "the injustice the Basotho suffer," is the reason he joined the BAC, ultimately colonial rule "needed to be attacked from all sides."[137] These comments reflect that the idea of *liretlo* as a shameful episode had been exaggerated by the regime and therefore needed to be moved away from. Another delegate, Vincent Taute, thanked Mokhehle for revealing the lies spread by Britain to the nation and called for Lefela to be released and reflected on a "political awakening" in himself and the nation.[138] Taute's views, along with the others mentioned, are only snapshots of the dozen or so voices captured by the official conference transcript. However, these perspectives indicate the party's mood and how party members viewed the politicisation of medicine murder.

Members were by no means uniformly male and some female delegates made their presence known. Mrs Ellen Maposholi Molapo was the most prominent of those during the three days, and her role in the conference was significant, leading the delegates in song at the beginning of each new day.[139] Molapo, when it was her turn to speak, thanked Mokhehle for his speech but said, that "she was sorry that women were not duly represented because she believes that women would influence the heart of every man, as Delilah won the confidence of powerful Samson."[140] She was keen to praise the party's agitation within medicine murder cases, noting that it had made the party known to the authorities; "the presence of so many detectives [numbering seven] showed that the movement was feared."[141] Molapo made personal appeals to the conference for the "wives and children" of those arrested by the governments of Basutoland and South Africa, including those arrested due to medicine murder, claiming they were "starving" due to their husband's detention.[142] Ellen Maposholi Molapo is a rare female voice heard within the male-dominated BAC during this period who played a key role in "motivating women in Basutoland to become involved in partisan politics."[143]

The government viewed this three-day conference with suspicion. The final police intelligence report by the unnamed officer warned that "the congress is still investigating the question of medicine murders."[144] The report, in particular, predicted there would be damaging "boycotts" of European goods because of the discontent caused by the murders and, on observing the age of the delegates present,

[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid.
[141] Ibid.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Epprecht, M., 'Women's 'Conservatism' and the Politics of Gender in Late Colonial Lesotho,' *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 36. (1995): 44.
[144] 'Intelligence Report,' (21/01/1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).

cautioned that the BAC appeared to be mobilising the "youth."[145] These reports shaped the administration's perceptions of the BAC and in turn shaped perception within the British press. The *Daily Telegraph*, for instance, theorised that such conferences were an attempt to form a "militant bridgehead" within Basutoland.[146] However, the response was not uniform, and local officials painted quite a different picture. [147] In correspondence with London, the High Commissioner claimed that various District Commissioners maintained that the BAC was not using *liretlo* as a tool for agitation and inferred the nation "were not impressed by what Mokhehle said about medicine murders" after the conference.[148]

Murray and Sanders argue that these claims indicate that the issue ceased to have political capital from this point and that the 1956 conference was the culmination of the politicisation of *liretlo*.[149] They argue afterwards that those colonial reports indicate the party stopped evoking it, but this view cannot be fully accepted for two reasons.[150] First, officials were unlikely to state any great support from the public toward narratives that questioned the foundations of colonialism, and their claims cannot be at face value. Secondly, as will be explored below, Murray and Sanders seemingly do not recognise the significant evidence within the BAC's productions that the issue played a key role in the BAC's arguments past this seminal speech. Mokhehle's speech and the discussions of conference delegates may have marked a high point for Mokhehle's mobilisation of this particular issue. However, it was far from the last time the BAC used the killings within their rhetoric. The conference was certainly a "tour de force," as has been suggested, but it was not, however, the final significant use of the murders by the BAC to score political points by any means.[151]

Regardless of what came after, the 1956 conference stands as a crucial moment in the politicisation of the *liretlo* panic. It is one where the BAC leadership and ordinary members directly evoked the murders as a key factor in the need to pursue nationalist objectives. Mokhehle's opening speech set the tone for an event dominated by the murders, a forum where the politicisation of Britain's response to liretlo took centre stage. The party was not wholly unified in their response, some saw it as less important than others, but broadly most members appeared to have concurred with their leader's viewpoint that Britain was lying about the murders, and this gave the BAC political capital.[152] The public seemingly did think it was still an important issue and were not tired of hearing about it. Regular conferences such as these proved vital to the BAC constructing a unified national response to the

[145] Ibid.
[146] 'Daily Telegraph,' (30/12/1958), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew).
[147] 'Letter on BAC conference in Maseru,' (06/01/1956), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew).
[148] 'High Commissioner on *liretlo*,' (05/03/1956), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew)
[149] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 292.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid, 132.
[152] 'Transcript of BAC Annual Conference,' (17/01/1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).

murders throughout the 1950s and a way for Mokhehle to assert the authority of his leadership. The agenda he set for the three days, focusing so heavily on the killings, can be read as an indication of his control over the party agenda. While this rhetoric was not a new development for the BAC, having already established much of its views on the killing, the conference marked an instance where discussion over the political consequences of the murders was pronounced. It was a moment where the politicisation of the medicine murders was made explicit, and the discussions over these three days set the tone of the party's efforts for the next few years.

The Final Years of Medicine Murder as a Major Political Issue: The Basutoland African Congress, 1956-1959

The years after the BAC's conference in 1956 have been suggested as devoid of discussions of *liretlo*, the party seemingly moving past the issue.[153] In actuality, the issue continued to have much political importance for the group and in Basutoland more broadly. It continually took up a significant proportion of the BAC's public and private discourse, remaining crucial to the overall strategy to achieve independence. While the constitutional advances from 1958, which saw a more concrete plan for independence take form, leading to the murders decreasing in prominence, the killings continued to be used to attack colonial rule until the 1960 election.[154] This propensity to use *liretlo* as a rhetoric tool allowed the BAC to organise a movement capable of damaging British power and facilitate "the agitation for constitutional advance in the 1950s."[155]

One indication that medicine murder was still a major issue for the BAC came when Mokhehle addressed the National Council in a dual session from 1957 to 1958.[156] In a long speech at the start of the session, the BAC leader opined on what he viewed as a ridiculous proposal he had heard to stop the killings with a new witchcraft ban.[157] He argued that this approach was out of date and did not reflect the reality of what was occurring; "we should first find out what witchcraft is and whether that witchcraft is real."[158] Mokhehle accused the colonial government of making life harder for the people of Basutoland for the sake of an overzealous attempt to implement colonial control of the situation, "we should not be in a hurry to make laws that will be hard upon the people."[159] Finally, he emotionally

[153] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 292.
[154] 'Report on BAC meeting,' (26/06/1959), FCO 141/647, *TNA* (Kew).
[155] Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho,* 253.
[156] 'National council meeting report special session,' (29/05/1957), s3/20/1/50, *LNA* (Maseru) & 'National council meeting reports 1958,' (20/03/1958), s3/20/1/51, LNA, (Maseru)
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.
[159] Ibid.

appealed to those present to reject the colonial rationale for pursuing the anti-*liretlo* effort as it was causing more harm than good; "there are people being hanged whereas they are innocent."[160]

Key to this link between the *liretlo* panic and nationalism was the BAC's ability to connect the event to colonial exploitation, in a wider critique of British power. This critique was sometimes explicitly stated, as in the 1956 presidential address, but other times it was implied implicitly. The BAC often referred to colonial "economic injustice" or "racial discrimination" when also talking about medicine murder, implying both processes were linked.[161] The BAC were keen to emphasise that the economic decline that Basutoland had suffered from was driven by the same forces causing the murders, both being symptoms of a corrosive colonialism that was eating up the nation.[162] These broader critiques were not lost on contemporary observers. As one exchange of letters between the District Commissioner of Butha-Buthe and the Resident Commissioner in Maseru revealed, many officials grew concerned that the BAC counter-narrative was making "our whole position here precarious."[163]

This fear of the BAC's improving position was not without some merit. There are some indications, namely recruiting leaflets, that the party used their *liretlo* rhetoric to directly recruit and mobilise potential supporters and channel this energy into their wider agenda. Official's warned that members of the public were being "imbued with BAC doctrine" that featured *liretlo* heavily, and a select few of these were going on to become "card-carrying members" of the organisation.[164] Unifying recruits to the BAC was a shared conviction in "Basotho cooperation" and that the "reprehensible practice" of medicine murder was either a colonial fabrication or exaggerated.[165] Drawly primarily on younger segments of society, these new political activists reflected Mokhehle's lack of "respect whatsoever for government officials."[166] They held a shared understanding that Basutoland would only be free from injustices when colonial rule had ended and a wave of anger at the government for its intrusive attempts to stop the murders. As one recruiting leaflet issued by the BAC in 1953 stated, Basotho should join the BAC as the medicine murder panic had proven the government could no longer be trusted; "it is wickedness; it is trickery; it is cheating – to take away your rights you Basotho... fight against these lies."[167]

Recruitment boomed during this period, aided by popular rhetoric that attacked Britain and called for more powers to be devolved to the Basotho, with the size of the party's loyal core activists

[160] Ibid.
[161] 'Report on BAC meeting,' (05/01/1953), FCO 141/887, *TNA*, Kew.
[162] 'BAC letter to commonwealth sec,' (29/01/1957), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[163] 'Colonial Correspondence,' (12/03/1957-21/04/1958), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[164] 'Spying order against the BAC,' (08/02/1955), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew).
[165] 'Telegram,' (29/04/1957), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[166] 'Letter from Mokhehle,' (30/11/1956), FCO 141/739, *TNA* (Kew).
[167] 'Handbill distributed by BAC,' (01/02/1955), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Transcript on BAC opposition in pitsos,' (21/01/1955), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew).

from around a few hundred in 1952, 1500 in 1953 to "a few thousand" in 1958.[168] As one member noted at the party's 1958 conference, "my feelings are high… we do not make our own laws, the laws that govern us. This must change… only then will the nation move forward and we can put these unpleasant few years behind us."[169] Another young member, a student from Roma University, when asked what had encouraged him to campaign against colonial rule, mentioned his experience with "a cruel and unfeeling" police force during a *liretlo* investigation as a major factor for his political awakening. [170] The BAC's rhetoric on *liretlo* and clear criticism of the government's handling of the issue helped to make the party more popular and accessible for new members. While colonial officials argued these invigorated supporters were being "manipulated" by Mokhehle into believing the UK were to blame for the crisis, there was an acknowledgement by the police that the "politically active youth" had evolved into as "a vanguard" for nationalism more broadly.[171]

Central to this growth was on-the-ground activity and agitation within individual cases, such as the investigation in Lekokoaneng, Teyateyaneng, during the mid-1950s, explored above.[172] The supposed allegations made by Matsikuoe Tukula from 1956 to 1957 and the politicisation of those allegations by the BAC revealed how nationalists made use of the circumstances presented by the medicine murder panic. In their apparent zeal to gather evidence to arrest Fako and with a probable lack of resources available, the police's actions became a major public relations liability. Mokhehle was mentioned in the final enquiry report as "stirring up trouble," using the case to suggest that "all witnesses who are taken by the police are mistreated."[173] Administrators lamented that the whole incident was "avoidable," and while the final enquiry report cleared the police of all accusations, there is no doubt that the government position was slightly weaker than it had been.[174]

This distrust of the police and the wider dissatisfaction with Britain's anti-*liretlo* strategies crucially allowed the BAC to attempt to disrupt the investigation and subsequently undermine colonial power. Mokhehle and the BAC attempted to rally support for Matsikuoe, holding public rallies in support of her which let the rest of the district know that they were defending Basotho interests.[175] Despite the colonial investigation's conclusion that the BAC were the masterminds behind a secret plan to discredit the police, the party made no attempts to hide their involvement.[176] Their demands to be included in the internal enquiry over the police's actions were rejected. However, the organisation

[168] 'Letter to High Commissioner,' (19/08/1954), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[169] 'BAC Annual General Conference,' (26/12/1958-28/12/12/1958), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[170] 'Ban of students at Roma University from attending BAC meetings,' (21/01/1955), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew).
[171] 'Report on high school protest,' (21/03/1955), FCO 141/887, *TNA* (Kew), 'Intelligence report,' (October 1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew) 73a-73d & 'Intelligence report,' (June 1957), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[172] 'Suspected medicine murder,' (13/10/1955), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[173] 'Commissioner of police to gov sec on complaints about police,' (18/01/1957), FCO 141/621, *TNA,* (Kew).
[174] 'Extract from minutes of a meeting between RC and paramount,' (04/04/1957), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[175] 'BAC letter to HC on police fabricating evidence,' 06/04/1956, FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[176] 'Letter to RC complaining of police activities in Teyateyaneng,' (03/10/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).

elevated this local case to the national stage, enjoying some success in its strategy. Crucially, the BAC used Matsikuoe's case to engage others in their nationalist struggle, directly linking the treatment of Matsikuoe to wider colonial abuses. The BAC used its involvement in the cases to offer an alternative to the government where Basotho's grievances would be taken seriously, positioning themselves as the party for the people and against the unpopular police force.[177]

The purpose of the BAC agitation in the Matsikuoe case can be grouped under the two main headings defined in the introduction of this chapter, as it played multiple roles. It acted as a rhetorical device and a means of utilising colonial ineptitude to highlight the government's unsuitability unambiguously. By promoting the view that there had been a miscarriage of justice through private correspondences and at least one gathering in public in January 1957, the party transformed the individual injustice suffered by Matsikuoe into a national issue.[178] Furthermore, the actions of the police and the opaque nature of the investigations made the state vulnerable to such attacks. Evidently, its inability to administer justice in a fair, balanced, and legally consistent way did little to confirm its authority and, in fact, reduced its capacity to manage the situation.

The colonial state's poor handling of Noa's murder and Matsikuoe's subsequent claims certainly undermined the government's position in Teyateyaneng.[179] Here the *liretlo* panic can be seen as having created a window of opportunity that the BAC could exploit. The significance of this one case on the progression of the course of the Basotho nationalist project must not be inflated. Nevertheless, it should equally be recognised as a representative part of a wider strategy used by the BAC to take advantage of the medicine murder panic. Cases like Matsikuoe's demonstrate how aspects of the murder panic, in this instance, the police mistreatment of a witness, were politicised by nationalist activists. Mokhehle's rhetoric during the instance, both public and in correspondence, demonstrate how integrated the medicine murders were within the BAC's wider worldview during the 1950s.

Through experiences like these, *liretlo* provided an entry point into anti-colonial activism for many of the population. The colonial government's failure to manage the panic and end the killings demonstrated to many Basotho that Britain's rule was no longer unassailable or desirable. *Liretlo* was an important entry point into discussions of wider colonial exploitation. It was easy to understand, tangible, a known issue, and reflective in the experiences of everyday people who had been on the receiving end of years of discourse surrounding the killings.[180] As Aerni-Flessner notes, by the 1950s, "plenty of individuals in Lesotho and South Africa understood that power in the empire was

[177] 'BAC letter to HC on police fabricating evidence,' (06/04/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[178] 'Commissioner of police to gov sec on complaints about police,' (18/01/1957), FCO 141/621, *TNA*, (Kew).
[179] 'Extract from minutes of meeting between RC and paramount,' (16/03/1956), FCO 141/621, TNA (Kew).
[180] 'Report on BAC 1956 conference,' (06/02/1956), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Correspondence,' (June 1958), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).

fragmented" and could be challenged.[181] Britain's loss in prestige in failing to stop the killings had made the prospect of Basotho independence a more attractive prospect. Medicine murder had always been political, but the BAC managed to make it an issue that nationalists could organise around.

A key factor that aided in the continued spreading of the BAC's message after 1956 that allowed the party to expand its success and influence was the continued use of print media, particularly in the still influential *Mohlabani*. Throughout 1957 and into 1958, Mokhehle used the paper to offer a regular commentary on the killings in a column titled "President Speaks on *liretlo* murders," to counter, what he saw, as the false "propaganda" spread by the government. [182] Using this widely circulated and nominally independent newspaper, the BAC line was spread to the nation, with claims such as the murders being a "plot to exterminate the Basotho" or Basotho should join the BAC "to resist the imposition of British rule" made known to the public.[183] The inability of the courts to provide actual justice, instead of supposedly demonising the innocent and letting the guilty go free, was also argued by the BAC leader within *Mohlabani's* pages.[184] Less than a year before Basutoland undertook its first national election on 20 January 1960, articles disusing the murders were present in the paper; Mokhehle in July 1959 lamented "who will save the Basotho" from the twin evils of colonial rule and the medicine murder panic.[185]

The government was unsure how to deal with the expansion of a new hostile opposition organisation expressing itself within the boundaries of the protectorate. High Commissioner Percivale Liesching did not want to lend Mokhehle legitimacy by openly challenging him but instead aimed to "deprive the Congress of their platform."[186] He recognised that Mokhehle was undermining the state's credibility with the borrowed claims of a conspiracy. However, similarly to the official response to LLB, he believed the movement would implode on its own.[187] Resident Commissioner Edwin Porter Arrowsmith shared this view, believing the organisation was unworthy of a response and did not consider "drastic preventive or punitive action" necessary.[188] Local officials, alternatively, were much more fearful of the group, believing them to be "discrediting the good name of Basutoland in the eyes

[181] Aerni-Flessner, J., *Dreams for Lesotho: Independence, Foreign Assistance, and Development*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 762.
[182] 'Mohlabani,' (May 1957), *MMA* (Morija), 'Mohlabani,' (August 1957), *MMA* (Morija), 'Mohlabani,' (November 1957), *MMA* (Morija), 'Mohlabani,' (December 1957), *MMA* (Morija), 'Mohlabani,' (January 1958), *MMA* (Morija) & 'Mohlabani,' (December 1958), *MMA* (Morija).
[183] 'Mohlabani,' (June 1957), *MMA* (Morija).
[184] 'Mohlabani,' (January 1958), *MMA* (Morija) & 'Mohlabani,' (December 1958), *MMA* (Morija).
[185] 'Mohlabani,' (July 1959), *MMA* (Morija).
[186] 'Letter to High Commissioner,' (19/08/1954), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[187] Ibid.
[188] 'Telegram to commonwealth relations department,' (18/03/1954), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).

of the world."[189] There was a great deal of inconsistency, contradiction, and, therefore, inaction throughout the government's response to the BAC.

Articles in *Basutoland News*, the government gazette, noted in December 1958 that change was fast approaching and called for a special session of the Basutoland National Council (BNC) to facilitate constitutional development.[190] The nation, it claimed, was advancing "at an alarming pace," and while not directly attributing this to the BAC or the medicine murder panic, the coverage of both during 1959 indicates that the newspaper viewed both as important to national politics.[191] By 1958, they had built a national party with a significant cadre of supporters and had become the broad congress-type organisation Mokhehle desired; indicating the politicisation of the panic, taking advantage of the government's fall in authority, had been a seemingly rousing success.[192] Reporting on a BAC meeting in Maseru on 6 January 1959 *Basutoland News* called Mokhehle the "man of the hour" for his successes and implied that the BAC would lead the country in the future.[193] Two weeks later, it reported on a BAC protest over the dismissal of a chief's murder appeal, indicating the issue was still seen to have some national importance.[194] The then Resident Commissioner Alan Geoffrey Tunstal Chaplin wrote a confidential assessment on Mokhehle and the BAC during the closing years of the 1950s.[195] He noted feeling "depressed" at how his government had ceded ground to the nationalists and their "moonshine" on the causes of medicine murder.[196]

Debates over the *liretlo* panic had remarkable staying power therefore within nationalist discourse during these years. The reasons for this longevity were twofold; first, the emotive nature of the killings and the subsequent passions they inspired. It was an issue that directly affected ordinary people, with the panic making them feel unsafe or fearful of unjust police detention. These emotions did not simply vanish; Basotho continued to resent the state's handling of the panic and the loss of national pride it entailed.[197] Secondly, the "militant bridgehead" of the BAC effectively strengthened the perception that the *liretlo* panic was about more than just random killings but was symptomatic of the wider issue of colonialism.[198] This view had great resonance within a nation dissatisfied with the socio-economic conditions that imperialism had wrought. By reinforcing that these murders were

[189] 'Letter from Mokhehle,' (29/02/1957), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew), Secret Letter to Commonwealth Office, (13/03/1957), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Letter to Commonwealth Relations Office,' (29/03/1957), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[190] 'Basutoland News,' (09/12/1958), *MMA* (Morija).
[191] 'Basutoland News,' (02/11/1958), *MMA* (Morija).
[192] Colonial correspondence,' (June 1958), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Telegram,' (01/04/1958), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[193] 'Basutoland News,' (06/01/1959), *MMA* (Morija).
[194] 'Basutoland News,' (25/08/1959), *MMA* (Morija).
[195] 'RC private notes on Mokhehle,' (01/11/1950), CO 1048/530, *TNA* (Kew).
[196] Ibid.
[197] 'High commissioner on BAC influence,' (05/03/1958), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[198] 'Daily Telegraph,' (30/12/1958), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew).

connected to this deprivation and misrule, Mokhehle and the BAC efficiently made them a nationalist issue.

Peter Sanders, a government official within the Basutoland administration during the 1950s, remarked in his memoirs that Mokhehle had been deluded for his "idyllic" view of Basotho culture.[199] His recollections demonstrate a critical misreading of the BAC's aims regarding their conspiracy-mongering, which most administration members missed. For the message to be effective, it did not have to be believable to a 'respectable' white audience or even true; it just had to convince the people of Basutoland of the BAC's nationalist message. Whether Mokhehle was 'deluded' to men like Sanders did not matter as he was credible to the populous. The BAC message was effective as it was tailored for a Basotho audience, something that the British administrators never seemed to understand. By offering an alternative to the current situation, the BAC could incorporate "many contradictory elements" of Basotho society into a unified front.[200]

Despite this, the decline in *liretlo* as a political issue during the late 1950s has led to a perception that it lacked significant resonance within Lesotho society. Murray and Sanders erroneously state that there, "were probably as many murders, overall, in the late 1950s and 1960s, but after about 1956, they attracted much less attention and, after about 1960, they were generally, but inaccurately, regarded as a thing of the past."[201] Their view does not withstand careful scrutiny. While from 1958, it is clear that the constitutional debates were increasingly prominent in the national agenda, the killings continued to be a major part of BAC strategy.[202] The emotive issue did not disappear from the party's consciousness as Murray and Sanders imply. It formed the backbone of the wider nationalist effort during these years and underpinned the BAC's growth, expansion, and agitation.[203] The ascendency of the *liretlo* panic within political discourse would not last, however. After the foundation of the Basutoland National Party (BNP) in 1959 and the announcement of the 1960 election, the nationalist movement became divided and more focused on the business of independence.[204] Medicine murder, from this point on, was old news. It did not suit the agenda of the political parties or the government to keep it as a prominent point of discussion.

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[199] Sanders, P., *The Last of the Queen's Men*, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000).
[200] Pule, 'Politics since Independence,' 173.
[201] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 292.
[202] 'Spy report on annual general meeting of BAC,' (31/12/1958), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew), 'Secret letter on BAC calls for another commission,' (11/02/1968), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew), 'Meeting minutes for paramount and Resident Commissioner,' (19/09/1958), FCO 141/647, *TNA* (Kew), 'Correspondence between Government Secretary and BAC on *liretlo*,' (11/02/1958), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Intelligence report on BAC and opposition to Mokhehle,' (08/12/1958), FCO 141/463, *TNA* (Kew).
[203] 'Report on BAC meeting,' (26/06/1959), FCO 141/647, *TNA* (Kew).
[204] Weisfelder, R., F., *Political Contention in Lesotho, 1952-1965*, (Roma: Institute of Southern African Studies, 2002), 15

The End of the Panic and the 1960 Election

The last major spike of confirmed killings was in 1959, which, according to a white doctor in private correspondence, had been "absolutely the worst year I can remember" for *liretlo* deaths.[205] The reason for this final wave may have stemmed from the broader political shifts in the protectorate, the government blaming "heightened tensions" due to the oncoming 1960 election, but this would prove the last significant increase in recorded killings within the official figures.[206] This final wave also marked the last time the killings created significant moral outrage.[207] Although they would continue in reduced but still significant numbers, medicine murder no longer elicited the same passions.[208] By early 1960 therefore the panic had largely subsided, not because murder rates fell, but due to two key changes one in colonial policy and another in national politics.

The first main factor was the British government making an active decision to largely ignore the murders and stop framing them as a threat to national interests.[209] Administrators, frustrated with their lack of success, wound down the anti-*liretlo* effort and declined to discuss any further investigations into the issue.[210] This declining concern indicates how the panic over the murders was a mostly shaped by portrayals that emerged from colonial representations. The prejudices of administrators, the press and the missions had shaped the phenomenon of medicine murder into a panic. These forces helped legitimise that these killings were something to be concerned about, as Murray and Sanders put it;

> "There was an acute climate of anxiety from "the late 1940s and the early 1950s, to which the British colonial administration not only responded but also actively contributed, in many ways unwittingly; and on the later dissipation of that anxiety under changed political circumstances."[211]

Crucially, Murray and Sanders argue that the fall in the murder rate was artificial, and there was a far greater rate of cases reported to the government during the last decade of colonial rule than was

[205] 'Letter from a doctor,' (19/04/1959), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).
[206] 'Suspected Medicine Murder: Srjamololi Ward,' (31/10/1959), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Murder in Quthing,' (29/10/1959), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew).
[207] 'Minutes from National Council meeting,' (22/01/1959), FCO 141/740, *TNA* (Kew).
[208] 'Suspected Medicine Murder: Buthe Buthe,' (17/10/1959), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew), 'Report on planned murder in Thabang,' (07/12/1959), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Rumours of chiefs planning murders in Butha Buthe,' (10/10/1959), FCO 141/874, *TNA* (Kew).
[209] Murray & Sanders *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 172-175.
[210] RC telegram,' (23/08/1963), FCO 141/850, *TNA* (Kew), 'Copy of invitation to from commission by HC,' (24/09/1962), FCO 141/850, *TNA* (Kew) & 'King calling for commission, says it's urgent,' (16/11/1962), FCO 141/850, *TNA* (Kew), 'RC letter asking the cost of potential commission,' (12/06/1962), CO 1048/260, *TNA* (Kew), 'High Commissioner Letter to London on new commission,' (28/12/1962), CO 1048/260, *TNA* (Kew), 'Note on forming commission,' (28/12/1962), FCO 141/850, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Letter from HC on commission,' (27/02/1963), FCO 141/850, *TNA* (Kew).
[211] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 291-292.

officially recorded.[212] They explain this discrepancy as a "loss of official enthusiasm for investigation and prosecution of crime," which meant that only around two-fifths of suspected cases were formally verified.[213] The fall in the number of reported murders during the early 1960s was, therefore, reflective of the fact that the government was no longer feeling the pressure to pursue investigations, not that the actual amount victims had fallen to any great degree. That did not make it any less real or terrifying for those involved, but it does demonstrate how the panic itself was primarily a colonial invention.

The second major factor was the victory of the BAC in securing major constitutional developments in the protectorate, which signalled the end of the advantages it could give nationalists to politicise the issue.[214] The government assembled the Constitutional Reform Committee in London on 5 May 1956. The committee consisted of nine Basotho councillors, seven chiefs and two commoners, along with A UK delegation guided by D. V. Cowen, a professor of Law at the University of Cape Town.[215] They provided the theoretical background for a new Basotho constitution. While it argued that "it might take years before the idea of responsible government could be recognised," the committee called for the immediate democratisation of the country and the Africanisation of the civil service.[216] The BAC put pressure on the National Council to accept these recommendations and made it known to the thousand attendees at their 1958 Annual Conference that change was finally being implemented. [217] This change, Mokhele asserted, was certainly not because of British benevolence but because the Basotho, through the BAC, had demanded it; "the constitutional Reforms agreed in London are not a gift, but the first instalment of what is due to the Basuto by right."[218]

In 1959, Basutoland received its new constitution that would guarantee immediate elections to fill half the seats of a new 80-member legislative council. It was apparent that change was approaching, and this caused the administration significant anxiety. Officials feared that any BAC takeover could cause either a backlash from chiefs, "who would attempt to re-establish their influence by any means in their power, including *liretlo*," or mirror the violent "events in the Congo," referring to the Léopoldville riots in January 1959, because of Mokhehle's "anti-white rhetoric."[219] Despite this administrative fear, they sacrificed too much; the new constitution was not universally acclaimed. Both the BAC and prominent chiefs presented a united front in critiquing the proposed organisation of local governance that would "undermine the sanctity of the Basotho way of life" and make the nation a "miniature Bantustan" and pushed for an open franchise that included Basotho working in South

[212] Ibid, 60.
[213] Ibid, p. 61.
[214] 'Letter from the BAC,' (06/01/1958), DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Correspondence on *liretlo*,' 11/02/1958, DO 35/7332, *TNA* (Kew).
[215] Machobane, *Government and Change*, 259
[216] Ibid, 261
[217] 'BAC Annual General Conference,' (26/12/1958-28/12/12/1958), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[218] Ibid.
[219] 'Letter from Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner,' (02/02/1959), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).

Africa.[220] They would succeed in getting expatriated workers the vote, but they would not be able to achieve any other concession from Britain.[221] Regardless, Basutoland's first elected Basotho government was just over the horizon.

Also, in 1959 the BAC rebranded and became the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP). This change reflected a shift in the group's priorities towards a "pan-Africanist ideological thrust" in preparation for the election, something that was also aided by "stronger linkages with Nkrumah's CPP."[222] In response to this perceived hardening of the BAC's more inclusive message, the groups which had always been unenthusiastic towards Mokhehle's progressive political project, particularly Catholics, conservatives, and chiefs, convalesced to form the Basutoland National Party (BNP) under the leadership of Leabua Jonathan. [223] The BNP's founding constitution called for "responsible self-governance," "equal pay for equal work," elections with a secret ballot, an end to discrimination, opposition to South Africa and "economic self-sufficiency."[224] The BNP did not make mention of the *liretlo* killings in their rhetoric, partly because many prominent chiefs were the party's patrons.[225] It did not do the BNP any favours to challenge the existing BCP counter-narrative, which may upset their powerful clients or affirm the conspiracy so as not to alienate the colonial government they hoped to work with in the transition.[226] The concession of an election and the promises of more autonomy had changed the political landscape and made *liretlo* less of a political coup for nationalists, despite the BCP dominating politics for this brief election period.[227] Attacking Britain was no longer the focus as different nationalist factions turned their rhetoric on one another as the election loomed.

On 20 January 1960, a new phase of Basotho politics began with Basutoland's first national election. Different interest groups attempted to secure "self-determination, internal democracy and economic advance" for the coalition they represented.[228] The introduction of electoral politics divided the nation along regional, religious, class, and ideological lines, something that ultimately spelt the end of *liretlo* rhetoric as an effective tool to attack the government as the focus became a sectarian competition. The first democratic Basotho election was a momentous but ill-tempered event for the

[220] 'Letter from BCP,' (25/03/1959), FCO 141/647, *TNA* (Kew), 'Joint memorandum presented by the BCP and BNP,*'* (21/08/1959), ICS 28/4/B/2, *ICS* (London) & BCP Statement on the draft local government proclamations, (12/08/1959), ICS 28/4/B/3, *ICS* (London).
[221] Ibid.
[222] Matlosa, K., T., and Sello, C., N., *Political Parties and Democratisation in Lesotho*, (Johannesburg: EISA, 2005), 19 & Grilli, M., *Nkrumaism and African Nationalism: Ghana's Pan-African Foreign Policy in the Age of Decolonization*, (London: Plagrave, 2014), 300.
[223] Halpern, *South Africa's Hostages*, 151.
[224] 'BNP constitution,' (1959), FCO 141/467, *TNA* (Kew).
[225] Ibid & Maqutu, *Contemporary Constitutional History of Lesotho*, 30.
[226] 'The Friend,' (26/06/1959), BNP 3500, *LNA*, (Kew).
[227] 'Moletsi,' (28/01/1961), BNP 3500, *LNA*, (Kew) & 'Chief Leabua's Speech,' (28/01/1962), BNP 3500, *LNA*, (Kew).
[228] 'Contact,' (08/08/1959), ICS 28/4/E, *ICS* (London).

kingdom. The various political factions did not present a united front against Britain and instead mobilised their respective supporters to campaign against the other parties.[229]

The High Commissioner John Maud and the Resident Commissioner Alan Geoffrey Tunstal Chaplins feared the political environment created by *liretlo* could be a "decisive factor" in a BCP victory.[230] Yet, in actuality, there was only minimal debate over the issue. Evidently, *liretlo*, as a political issue, only had power in a political realm when British rule was projected as absolute and unending. The government had effectively ended this paradigm by conceding its power with the election and providing a clear path to independence. There was now no need for the nationalists to attack Britain. In its place was the jostling between the BCP and BNP for dominance in the new Lesotho. A new paradigm had formed where *liretlo* would have little effect as both groups did not hold conflicting positions. The new political reality that Basutoland faced as independence crystallised saw competing factions become locked in "a perpetual struggle for power rather than the means of shaping consensus on national objectives."[231]

Party	**Votes**	**Percentage of Votes %**	**District Council seats**	**National Council (legislative) seats**
BCP	12,787	36	73	30
BNP	7,002	20	22	1
Others/Independents	15,516	44	57	9
Total	35,302	100	162	40

Fig 3: Results of the 1960 Basutoland election.[232]

The results of the 1960 election were perceived to be a "landslide victory" for the BCP, who claimed the majority of elected seats in the legislative and a plurality of the vote total [fig 3].[233] The South African press treated Mokhehle to glowing profiles as a "man of power" who would be central to the future of Lesotho.[234] Although he would ultimately not lead the nation to independence, this victory was in many ways a vindication for Mokhehle's focus on *liretlo* in the preceding eight years, as it had facilitated the construction of a base of support to claim this victory. It was the culmination of this phase of the nationalist struggle and the start of the next, a point of diverging objectives but one

[229] 'The Friend,' (16/01/1960), FCO 141/647, *TNA* (Kew), Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho,* 15 & 'Manifesto for the 1959 election,' (17/01/1959), FCO 141/647, *TNA* (Kew).
[230] 'Suspected Medicine Murder: Buthe Buthe,' (17/10/1959), FCO 141/492, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Letter from Resident Commissioner to High Commissioner,' (02/02/1959), DO 35/4490, *TNA* (Kew).
[231] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho,* 112.
[232] 'Contact,' (06/02/1960), ICS 28/4/E, *ICS* (London).
[233] Ibid.
[234] Ibid.

still firmly in the shadow of medicine murder.[235] The government had equally recognised that the killings, although continuing at significant rates, no longer held the same level of controversy and were consequently ready to move the political agenda forward.

The impact of the murders on Basotho politics was intense but specific to the climate of colonial panic. When that climate was relaxed, the issue lost the political capital that the opponents of colonialism had been able to exploit throughout the rest of the 1950s and murders returned to being framed as local crimes; not indicative of a major national crisis.[236] The forces driving the murders largely remained but as soon as British exhaustion with the "demands of the Basotho" finally bore fruit, and there were signs of the negotiated withdrawal of colonial power, there was no need for nationalists to continue attacking the state's authority in the same manner.[237] Although for many Basotho the murders continued to be a source of great embarrassment and national humiliation, and there would be calls after 1960 for new investigations, led by the newly coroneted king Moshoeshoe II, these calls did not elicit the same public support, or press controversy, as before.[238] The panic therefore may have had a shelf life where it was politically resonant, the importance of the colonial environment meant it was not destined to be a permanent feature of Lesotho's political life, but its impact was certainly not minimal. Without the "disruption in imperial authority" that the medicine murder panic shocked the administration with, the nation may not have reached the point where power was ceded in the manner it was in 1960.[239]

Conclusion

This final period of the medicine murder panic from 1956-1960 saw the poor colonial understanding of the causes of the killings bear fruit, as the government first wound down and then surrendered its efforts to stop the killings. Concern over the killings was still high but it was in these four years where the anti-*liretlo* strategy most evidently undermined Britain's position instead of strengthening it. Laid bare was the intrinsic weakness of colonial governance on the cheap, manifested in inadequate policing, reliance on customary rulers, and ineffective enforcement. Officials believed that a combination of coercive force, "lawfare," and anti-*liretlo* propaganda would allow them to control their spread.[240] In many instances, such as in the experiences of Matsikuoe Tukula, the increased police presence led to

[235] 'Letter from Attorney General to RC,' (11/10/1961), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[236] 'Letter from High Commissioner,' (06/02/1959), FCO 141/487, *TNA* (Kew).
[237] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 174.
[238] 'Paramount letter to RC on *Liretlo* Commission,' (07/10/1961), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Reply to paramount,' (26/10/1961), FCO 141/617, *TNA* (Kew).
[239] Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism*, 223.
[240] Lobban, M., *Imperial Incarceration: Detention without Trial in the Making of British Colonial Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 17.

heightened resentment towards the state that eclipsed the killings themselves.[241] The anxious and ineffectual management of the self-inflicted murder panic would have political ramifications beyond the cases themselves.

The killings shook the political order as the administration had intended to restore calm, stop the killings, and stamp their authority over an insubordinate populace. For several years, the state tried in vain to lower the murder rate through different means and increase the conviction rates in the courts. The available statistics for each measure demonstrate a failure to improve this consistently.[242] That the panic retreated when Britain abandoned these efforts reflected the extent to which it was a colonial invention and that the anti-*liretlo* effort was flawed, marred by orientalist thinking, and ultimately fruitless endeavour. By the early 1960s, the colonial regime showed increasing cynicism and anxiety over its diminished command and, as the stirrings of independence beckoned, lost interest in seeking to quell the murders. Though the number of killings appeared to abate, this was more a lack of concern on the part of the administration to record the numbers than a triumph of their policies. The mismanagement of the crisis consequently did not just reflect the state's limitations to project authority over a population; *Liretlo* acted as a lightning rod for civil discontent and opened a door for the emerging nationalist movement to step through.

During these final years of the panic, the BAC attempted to shift the political debate surrounding the medicine murders and helped make them part of a wider political programme in favour of independence. Without the application of medicine murder as a rhetorical tool to attack the real government failings within public discourse, the BAC's success would have looked quite different. Nationalist attacks on Britain for secretly orchestrating the killings helped restore a sense of national pride and demonstrated the need for independence. By transforming this emotional resonance to panic into a rhetoric tool, the BAC could translate the anger many felt into support from the public. By highlighting other injustices perpetrated by Britain aside from the panic the group were able to expand their support and influence. Associating British rule with the panic allowed nationalists to connect them with the material dislocation caused by decades of British rule. It also facilitated their highlighting of other ways in which colonial rule had let the protectorate down, such as by causing poverty and the disintegration of traditional social relations. This argument was facilitated by the very real decline in authority the government was experiencing due to its faltering anti-*liretlo* strategy. The police and the legal system, in particular, became regular targets of opposition attacks during this period, directly because they failed to execute their roles properly.

[241] 'Complaint by Matsikuoe Tukula,' (09/02/1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew) & 'Report on the investigation of mistreatment of Matsikuoe Tukula,' (1956), FCO 141/621, *TNA* (Kew).
[242] Murray, C., & Sanders, P., *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho: The Anatomy of a Moral Crisis*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 60.

Mokhehle understood how to produce a convincing counter-narrative against colonial claims precisely because their conspiracy tapped into a genuine grievance across Basotho society. Uniquely within the wider historiography of colonial panic, the medicine murder panic was framed as a crisis of colonial rule and nationalist rhetoric revealed the fundamental limitations of British power in the protectorate. The panic was, therefore, a "specific circumstance" that "provided openings for opponents of colonial rule and facilitated nationalist activity."[243] As with other colonial states, wider continental trends, such as the new global order after 1945, shaped the emergence of nationalism in Basutoland. However, this chapter has shown how local crises and absences of political authority, such as the *liretlo* panic, were vitally important in moulding the character of those movements. As Lawrence asserts, events such as the murders created an environment where nationalist activity seemed "more appealing and less dangerous than it is when the imperial authority's control is secure."[244] Britain's failure had made a future without it appear more desirable and, crucially, more attainable.

[243] Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism*, 6.
[244] Ibid, 138.

Conclusion

If the 1960 election tentatively but conclusively relegated medicine murder to the political margins, the following years would then establish that the environment of the panic was, firmly and finally, a figment of the past. As indicated in chapter 4, independence talks were a major factor that moved the government's attention away from *liretlo*, shifting the nation with it. Post-election, the Basutoland Congress Party (BCP), Basutoland National Party (BNP) and the newly formed royalist party the Marematlou Freedom Party (MFP) pushed for more powers to be "immediately" devolved to the Basotho.[1] This pressure would result in the government forming a new constitutional commission in 1962.[2] The commission recommended a British-style bicameral legislative, a bill of rights and an independent judiciary.[3] Observers, most prominently the former High Commissioner Evelyn Baring, praised this development, conceding that British rule had "borne heavily on some Basotho" and radical change was needed.[4] Negotiations began in London in April 1964 between the British government and a Basotho delegation consisting of members of the chieftaincy and representatives of the three major parties.[5]

As the focus moved toward working with Britain in the transition to independence, there was even less need to attack the record of the colonial government or discredit them. The political focus became the interparty rivalry, which would continue to dominate Basotho politics after independence, not the previous focus on medicine murder. The panic years had set much of the agenda for the Basotho opposition for more than a decade, indicating the potential that panics had to disrupt established orders, but this was because it was an issue with a great deal of political capital. When that capital was expended and the panic was being actively lifted, indicated by Britain ceding power, nationalists had achieved a major goal and moved to the next stage of their ambitions, independence. While Will Jackson has theorized that the end of empire was a contributing factor to creating an environment of panic within colonial Kenya during the Mau Mau revolt, it appears that in Basutoland the reverse is true.[6] The oncoming winds of decolonisation and the victory of nationalist forces was seemingly therefore a significant contributing factor in ending the medicine murder panic for the Basotho. The pathway to independence that would be outlined in the years following the 1960 election aided in moving the political agenda beyond the debates over the killings of the 1940s and 1950s.

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[1] 'The Friend,' (14/02/1961), FCO 141/647, *TNA* (Kew).
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.
[4] 'Letter by Baring,' (1963), GRE/1/15/1-32, *Palace Green Library* (*PGL*) (Durham).
[5] Weisfelder, R., F., *Political Contention in Lesotho, 1952-1965*, (Roma: Institute of Southern African Studies, 2002), 110-112 & 'The Friend,' (04/05/1962), FCO 141/467, *TNA* (Kew).
[6] Jackson, W., 'The Settler's Demise: Decolonisation and Mental Breakdown in 1950s Kenya,' in Fischer-Tiné, H. (ed.), *Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, (Zurich: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 87-89.

Britain set a timetable for elections in 1965 under a new constitution that removed unelected seats in the legislative and expanded the franchise.[7] A rapid registration programme ensured that 377,000 men and women, around 90% of the adult population, would be able to vote in an election poised to define the shape of the Basotho state.[8] The international press saw the 1965 election as a potentially unifying one; the winner would become a prime minister who could hopefully rise above the partisan divide.[9] Just as in 1960, the main issue that dominated debate was not medicine murder but how the future independent state of Lesotho would be governed and not attacks on the legacy of British rule.[10] The BCP portrayed the Basotho struggle as part of a wider pan-African one. They saw the nation as a starting point towards a fully united and liberated African continent.[11] The BNP campaign assumed an "inward-looking character" and had a concept of the nation that was much more limited.[12] BNP leader Leabua Jonathan denounced Apartheid as an oppressive system but pledged that material rewards, such as development aid, could be gained through working with South Africa.[13] This "bread and butter strategy" proved a persuasive argument for those who desired greater prosperity for the Basotho and an end to the years of socio-economic insecurity.[14]

While the BNP victory was far from overwhelming, it was conclusive [fig 1]. Leabua Jonathan was sworn in as Prime Minister on 6 May 1965, his focus on the 'kitchen sink' issues of many Basotho, who feared a South African takeover, bearing fruit.[15] The eventual failure of the BCP to achieve power was because Jonathan proved skilled at mobilising wider economic concerns into a winning coalition.[16] Although not particularly convincing, his victory indicated the nation had fully moved away from medicine murder. Weisfelder reinforces that these shifts and the shadow of South Africa are why the more radical BCP failed "to duplicate the electoral success of counterparts elsewhere."[17] Although the BNP did not claim any heritage from Lekhotla La Bafo (LLB) or the Basutoland African Congress (BAC), Jonathan owed them a great deal. Without their tireless campaigning during the previous decades over *liretlo*, among other issues, Basutoland would never have reached the point where he would have assumed power.

[7] The Observer, (16/05/1964), ICS 28/4/E, ICS (London).
[8] 'The Times,' (23/04/1965), ICS 28/4/E, ICS (London).
[9] (01/05/1966-03/05/1966), The Times ICS 28/4/E, ICS (London).
[10] 'The Times,' (28/04/1965), ICS 28/4/E, ICS (London), 'The Financial Times,' (06/12/1966), ICS 28/4/E, ICS (London) & Nyeko, B., 'The Independence Movement, 1952-66,' in *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, eds. Pule, N., W. & Thabane, T., (Morija, University of Lesotho, 2002), 170.
[11] 'The Financial Times,' (06/12/1966), ICS 28/4/E, ICS (London).
[12] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho*, 88.
[13] 'The Observer,' (19/06/1966), ICS 28/4/E, ICS (London).
[14] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho*, 89.
[15] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho*, 111, 'Basutoland Newsletter,' (June 1966), MCF COU 11, *MCF* (London), 'Lesotho Times,' (14/05/1965), ICS 28/4/E, *ICS* (London), 'The Observer,' (19/06/1966), ICS 28/4/E, *ICS* (London), 'The Financial Times,' (10/06/1966), ICS 28/4/E, *ICS* (London) & 'The Sunday Times,'12/06/1966, ICS 28/4/E, *ICS* (London).
[16] 'The New Statesman,' 30/08/1966, ICS 28/4/E, *ICS* (London).
[17] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho*, 99.

Party	Votes	Percentage of Votes %	National Council (legislative) seats	Percentage of Seats %
BNP	108,162	41.6	31	51.7
BCP	103,050	39.7	25	41.7
MFP	42,837	16.5	4	6.7
Independents/Other	5,776	2.2	0	0
Total	259,825	100	60	100

Fig 1: Results of the 1965 election.[18]

Lesotho achieved independence on 4 October 1966 after negotiations between Britain and a coalition of nationalist groups. This was an altogether remarkable achievement, given that British authorities considered genuine nationalist sentiment to have had "little support among the Basuto" by British authorities in 1955.[19] Vital to this process was the context of medicine murder. The business of independence may have been done in the 1960s, but the mobilisation of anti-government forces during the condition of panic set the path for that success. The shift from the actual murders themselves, which did increase in greater number as a result of numerous factors in the 1940s, to a condition of panic would prove to have major political ramifications. As concern over the killings was unleashed across society, the imperial state's inability to stop the killings, despite publicly pursuing an anti-*liretlo* effort through numerous reforms or initiatives, majorly damaged British power. Sensing an issue from which to undermine the state, some anti-colonial groups, namely LLB and the BAC/BCP, connected with those Basotho who were inclined to wonder why the British were stoking up an international scandal and hanging respected leaders who insisted on their innocence. They channelled the natural scepticism in society with the government narrative, into a wider nationalist programme aiming to overthrow colonial power. Fundamentally, this intense period of Basotho history indicates that colonial panic, in the right context and with the right opposition movement politicising the issue, could have a significant impact on a nation's political development.

Before considering the wider implications of the research presented here for Lesotho and in the literature more broadly, it is useful to summarise the core arguments of this thesis briefly. I have examined the period of the panic that began in the 1940s, developed during the 1950s and had receded by the 1960s, running parallel to the number of murders committed and demonstrating another reason

[18] Lodge, T., Kadima, D., & Pottie, D., *Compendium of Elections in Southern Africa*, (Johannesburg: Electoral Institute of Southern Africa, 2002), 96.
[19] 'Colonial Correspondence,' (27/06/1955), DO 35/4467, *TNA*, Kew.

to take the latter seriously.[20] This crucial and intense period of Basutoland's history deeply affected the political developments within the state during those years and can broadly be divided into four periods that correspond to the four chapters present in this thesis. The first was a pre-panic period where the conditions were created that expedited the increase in killings after 1945, afterwards the start of the panic itself from 1945-1952, then from 1952-1956 a period of high panic that also saw the formation of the BAC and lastly the final years of the panic, from 1956-1960, defined by the growing strength of the nationalist position along with the partial surrender of colonial power.

Chapter one analysed the legacy of colonial rule within Basutoland and the roots of the killings that followed. It assessed how the makeup of the Basutoland state and the way in which it was governed made it particularly vulnerable to a colonial panic like the medicine murder panic. The context of imperial rule is important to understand then as to why the murders had a major effect on the governance of the territory, more so than in other localities. The policy of 'benign neglect' and the continuation, from pre-protectorate era, of the chieftaincy as the primary agents of local governance created an insecure colonial power. While colonial rule had transformed the socio-economic nature of Basotho life, shifting the state from a primarily self-sufficient and prosperous agricultural economy to a dependence on labour migration; it left the organs of state skeletal and vulnerable to disruptions emerging from below. Chiefs were allotted significant power within the colonial government, which meant that their positions within the governance of Basutoland were "not only consolidated but virtually unassailable" as a result of nearly eighty years of British rule.[21] Despite this, the shifting nature of the chieftaincy's role left many feeling insecure within their customary roles in their communities, encouraging an increasing number to commit medicine murder.

This historical overview emphasised that the killings were not primordial traditions, but the expansion of killings was a response to modern phenomena and pressures. It demonstrates the necessity of recognising the long, medium, and short trends that affected the chieftaincy, which helped create the conditions where medicine murders increased significantly during the late 1940s. Although numerous short-term factors would affect the murder rate, principally the reforms, this would alone would not have caused a significant rise in deaths without the existing belief that murders were a way to restore customary prestige. The murders were, from their inception, a political event and deeply connected to the struggle for power in the kingdom. Basotho chiefs, threatened by a loss of privilege and power due to these circumstances, abandoned colonial institutions and norms and attempted to achieve their goal of retaining their positions of authority and control. Chiefs intended the fear created by the killings to create acquiescence and assist those in power in their efforts to continue staying in power. The declining

[20] Murray, C., & Sanders, P., Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho: The Anatomy of a Moral Crisis, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005) 60.
[21] Halpern, J., *South Africa's Hostages: Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland*, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1965), 117.

authority of the chieftaincy shifted the nature of *liretlo* toward this alarming status quo and led to the practice becoming more widespread than before.

Chapter two then examined the early years of the panic from 1945-1952 and the ways in which society and the administration responded to the crisis. The press and the Christian missions at times held relatively nuanced positions on the forces driving the killings, particularly the Catholic Church, but ultimately the combined weight of their commentary would place pressure on the state to frame the killings as a symptom of moral decline. This chapter then examined Britain's flawed conceptions of the forces driving the murders to explain why the attempts to manage the panic would prove to fail so completely and ultimately undermine the government's relationship with the population. It examined numerous key events in the construction of the panic, principally the execution of Berang and Gabashane in 1949, as well as the failed attempts by the state to initiate an effective response to stop the killings, notably Mantšebo's derided 1949 tour. The period also saw the publication of the Jones report in 1952, which proved to be the highpoint of colonial evidence gathering on the killings. Fundamentally then this period saw the establishment of the narratives and main strategies of colonial response that would be seen for the remaining panic.

This chapter demonstrated even in these early years that the government's inability to stop the killings was a disruption, a moment where Britain's control of the territory was partially interrupted due to their public failure. The killings shook the political order as the administration had intended to restore calm, stop the killings, and stamp their authority over an insubordinate populace. Britain's framing of the killings from 1945 onward as a moral panic would have major ramifications for how it responded throughout the next fifteen years. In response, the aftermath of WW2 saw the reconstruction of LLB after its wartime ban, speared-headed by the enigmatic Josiel Lefela. This proto-nationalist period established the popular *liretlo* counter-narrative. However, LLB failed to organise a coherent party structure and could not actively challenge the colonial state.[22] Lefela did not grasp the opportunities held by the post-war political climate and pursued an unpopular programme that limited his support.[23] The brief resurgence of LLB despite their eventual fall though still established that this panic was impacting upon opposition politics in the kingdom, to a degree that the colonial state was not yet fulling grasping.

Chapter three saw the panic reach its peak as the coverage of the killings intensified further from 1952-1956 along with a more interventionist anti-*liretlo* campaign. The four-year period saw a more sophisticated propaganda campaign emerge, along with a renewed attempt to formulate the concept of vigilance committees with the creation of *liretlo* panels and a strengthening of judicial procedure. It is during these years that a sense of fatigue began to take hold within both wider society,

[22] 'Subversive statements made by Lefela,' (06/08/1950-07/08/1950), FCO 141/502, *TNA*, (Kew).
[23] 'Leselinyana extract,' (14/02/1955), FCO 141/463, *TNA*, (Kew).

indicated by the publication of numerous works by Basotho authors, and within the administration itself. The panic was in full force and did not appear to be abating at all yet there was a growing, better organised, opposition to the government emerging. The actions of this new generation of activists would exacerbate the pressure on the administration and highlight the areas in which they were failing.

As is evident, *liretlo* was an integral part, directly and indirectly, of nationalist political discourse this period. The foundation of the BAC in 1952 shifted opposition politics towards a more independence-orientated nationalism, with an invigorated *liretlo* counter-narrative "part of the BAC's nationalist programme."[24] The BAC used its popular messaging to improve its support base and pressure Britain to withdraw from the kingdom. Ntsu Mokhehle, the BAC's leader and dominant ideological thinker, focused heavily on the components of Britain's response to the panic in his rhetoric. Mokhehle's party used the widespread dissatisfaction with the government's management of the killings, advancing the LLB perspective, to make nationalist arguments critiquing British power. These critiques would greatly shape the next period,

Chapter four surveyed the final years of the panic from 1956-1960, defined by the entrenchment of administrative melancholy over stopping the killings and a definitive weakening of colonial power. For several years, the state had tried in vain to lower the murder rate through different means and increase the conviction rates in the courts, yet in these final years of the panic Britain conceded the effort was fruitless. The available statistics for each measure demonstrate a failure to improve this consistently.[25] That the panic retreated when Britain abandoned these efforts reflected the extent to which it was a colonial invention and that the anti-*liretlo* effort was an unneeded, invasive, and ultimately fruitless endeavour. By 1960, the colonial regime showed increasing cynicism and anxiety over its diminished command and, as elections loomed, lost interest in seeking to quell the murders. Though the number of killings appeared to abate, this was more a lack of concern on the part of the administration to record the numbers than a triumph of their policies.

The mismanagement of the crisis consequently did not just reflect the state's limitations to project authority over a population and opened a door for the emerging nationalist movement to step through. Discussions over the colonial conspiracy surrounding the killings formed a major prong of the wider nationalist effort during these years and underpinned the BAC's growth, expansion, and agitation; indicated by its presence at party conferences such as in 1956. The ascendency of *liretlo* within political discourse would not last, however. After the foundation of the Basutoland National Party (BNP) in 1959 and the announcement of the 1960 election, the nationalist movement became divided and more focused on the business of independence. Medicine murder, from this point on, was old news. It did not suit the

[24] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 135.
[25] Ibid, 60.

agenda of the political parties or the government to keep it as a prominent point of discussion. Yet that is not to suggest the impact of the panic was shallow, quite the reverse.

Through these four chapters, I have sought to expand on the existing literature on colonial panics by examining the real political consequences of the response to them by the colonial administration in the 1940s and 1950s. The British government could never grasp the significance of a colonial panic or mount an effective strategy for limiting the killings. This failure significantly undermined colonial authority, opening a space for anticolonial nationalists to gain traction. These conditions ensured the weakness and incoherence of the state's response to the murders, which played a large role in evoking panic across colonial Basutoland society. The various efforts of the administration to remedy the situation tended to stress Basotho 'superstition' and unreason, and the people rejected them in favour of the narratives spread by the nationalist opposition, who rapidly gained ground after the formation of the BAC in 1952. As has been explored throughout this thesis therefore, the experience of panic overall damaged the position of the administration and fed into anti-colonial narratives spread by nationalistic groups.

The recognition that the medicine murder panic, particularly the British government's inability to control it, had a major impact on Basutoland's political development provides a great deal to the wider historiography. Previous studies have certainly noted that ritual killings can have long term effects on cultural practice within communities, notably Vicky Van Brockhaven's study, but the impact of the panic itself is rarely discussed.[26] While the factors in causing a panic, such as colonial anxiety have been discussed in detail, such as by Maurus Reinkowski, Gregor Thum, Harald Fischer-Tiné and Christine Whyte, the cases highlighted previously in the literature have made no attempt to indicate the contemporary political impact on the opposition existing in those nations.[27] Most of these previous studies, David Pratten's study of Nigeria included, keep their conclusions relatively local with no indication of any significant wider national political influence beyond the event.[28] It is this reason that makes the Basutoland medicine murder panic so important to our wider understanding of colonial panics more broadly. While other works focus heavily on causality, focusing instead on the disrupting effects of the failure to control panics opens new avenues to explore the phenomenon.

From the beginning, the medicine murder panic was intensely political and connected to more comprehensive discussions over the future of the territory. As previous authors, such as Jackson, have

[26] Van Brockhaven, V., 'Anioto: Leopard-Men Killings and Institutional Dynamism in Northeast Congo, c.1890-1940,' *The Journal of African History*, Vol.59 (2018): 21-44.
[27] Reinkowski, M., & Thum, G., 'Introduction,' in Reinkowski, M. & Thum, G., (eds.), *Helpless Imperialists Imperial Failure, Fear and Radicalization*, (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013) & Fischer-Tiné, H. & Whyte, C., 'Introduction: Empires and Emotions', in Fischer-Tiné, H. *(ed.), Anxieties, Fear and Panic in Colonial Settings: Empires on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown*, (Zurich: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[28] Pratten, D., *Man-Leopard Murders: History and Society in Colonial Nigeria*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

shown, colonial panic is often reflective of "a collective vulnerability" within colonial society; yet what Jackson does not suggest is how that vulnerability could be widened further by the subsequent panic.[29] British administration viewed the killings as a "horrible, abominable, endless" pandemic and responded with the ineffective but intrusive anti-*liretlo* efforts.[30] The inability to control this crisis, despite the public attempt to reign it in, proved exceedingly damaging to Britain's capacity to govern. It is this cession of authority due to the conditions of the panic that provide the most unique aspect of this instance when compared to other similar cases. Unlike in other cases, the state's ability to control the territory it nominally ruled was disrupted by the very panic it initiated; making it appear weak and out of control of the situation. However, this is not the only aspect of the medicine murder panic which adds to our understanding as the panic also helped initiate political change within the protectorate.

The fall in the Basutoland's administration's authority was not met with apathy by the general population or passive acceptance by the opponents of colonial rule. Throughout the panic, members of the public in print and in correspondence expressed a viewpoint, spread initially by Basotho opposition politicians, that the crime was a colonial invention and there was no actual increase in the number of murders after 1945.[31] This counter-narrative contrasted with a colonial view that these previously irregular killings had escalated rapidly and were an irrational reaction to administrative reforms.[32] In a sense, the attitude which rejected the government narrative on medicine murder was an act of self-determination, a way for nationalists to reject colonialism more broadly and demonstrate the oppressive system "would [not] improve their material conditions in life."[33] Nowhere else in the literature on panics has it been suggested politics were affected in this manner where not only was colonial authority disrupted but the conditions were also created for political change. This demonstrates the value of this study and the necessity of examining the ways in which colonial panics, specifically murder panics, were responded to and the effects they had in arenas of society not explicitly related to the killings.

Building on this intervention and in addition to contributing to this broader panic literature, this thesis offers a key observation on the existing understanding of Basotho nationalism. Even in a brief overview of the thesis, with its narrow focus on the late colonial period, it is starkly apparent that the history of medicine murder within Basotho is not one distinct from the public political realm in Lesotho's recent history. Despite this, medicine murder is virtually absent from discussions of Lesotho's independence. The key authors on Basotho independence, such as Richard Weisfelder, Scott Rosenberg and even John Aerni-Flessner in his more recent work, do not even mention the event much,

[29] Jackson, 'The Settler's Demise,' 73.
[30] 'Letter from concerned citizen T. O. Ntlamelle,' (01/04/1949), FCO/582, *TNA*, Kew.
[31] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 118-131.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Aerni-Flessner, J., *Dreams for Lesotho: Independence, Foreign Assistance, and Development*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), 11.

if at all.[34] The only impact of the murder panic presented in these texts, a view shared by Colin Murray and Peter Sanders within their wide-ranging volume, is the existence of a brief moment where the interests of the BAC and those of the chiefs briefly converged to "oppose colonial initiatives."[35] This extends to the other, less comprehensive, perspectives that have been produced on Basotho independence.[36] Two factors cast doubt on these previous assumptions.

Firstly, the presence of a significant amount of material produced by nationalists on the murders, indicating that the panic had compromised the colonial state and made it vulnerable to attack.[37] This took the form of public speeches, published articles in newspapers, propaganda such as leaflets and debates within the national congresses. Nationalists also involved themselves actively with medicine murder trials and agitated against supposed police injustices. The rhetoric and deeds concerning medicine murder undertaken by LLB and the BAC throughout their existence, have been largely ignored in the historiography. This thesis attempts to historicise and explain why these two groups engaged with the panic as a political issue, noting particularly that they did it as discussions of the panic held political capital during the period as colonial authority had been damaged. Without an examination of the impact of this specific national crisis that weakened British rule, creating space for opposition politicians to foster countervailing narratives that damaged the colonial position and built a base of popular political support, the peculiarities and nuances of the event can be lost.

Secondly, the nature of colonial power in Basutoland itself, depending so much on the chiefs, meant it was particularly vulnerable to be damaged in the manner it was by the murders themselves. A recognition of there being a major national crisis, which stressed some of the state's inherent weaknesses present since the point of its construction in 1868, is often missing from accounts of Basotho nationalism. These accounts focus primarily on the "personal interactions of candidates and party leaders with constituents" and the spread of "popular awareness and participation" after the 1960 election, few recognise the importance the importance of the structural conditions that shaped Basotho politcs.[38] Too often is the panic and the rise of Basotho nationalism separated totally, when in fact both share a root cause in a colonial state in crisis. As Adria Lawrence has shown nationalist mobilization was not omnipresent and specific state crises, like the panic, could give nationalist mobilisation

[34] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho*, Rosenberg, S., *Promises of Moshoeshoe: Culture, Nationalism and Identity in Lesotho*, (Roma: National University of Lesotho, 2008), Aerni-Flessner, J., *Dreams for Lesotho*.
[35] Aerni-Flessner, *Dreams for Lesotho*, 36 & Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 295.
[36] Nyeko, B., 'The Independence Movement, 1952-66,' in eds. Pule, N., W. & Thabane, T., *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (Morija, University of Lesotho, 2002), Pule, N., W., 'Politics Since Independence,' in eds. Pule, N., W. & Thabane, T., *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho 1500-2000*, (Morija, University of Lesotho, 2002) & Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho*.
[37] Lawrence, A., K., *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 43.
[38] Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho*, 86.

openings.[39] Looking at the panic from this lens then, it is clear that the previous consensus of an ultimately apolitical panic cannot be accepted.

The history of Basotho independence does not need to focus solely on the rivalries of the men who led the charge against colonial rule. Greater attention is needed to how this specific moment of disruption was politicised and became a major component within the early nationalist platform. From this building block, greater successes were built. The recognition of a more localised nationalist thought and action, not removed from the broader continental context but complimenting it, enables a more nuanced appreciation of how nationalists spread political ideas and what issues were deemed important in post-war Basotho society. It contextualises two late colonial manifestations, assumed incorrectly independent of the other, and demonstrates they are bound together. In challenging the perception that medicine murder did not have any significant political consequences, a test to the existing consensus on the history of Basotho nationalism has been produced. Lesotho's independence was "certainly not isolated from regional politics and global trends."[40] But, as this thesis stresses, local factors drove the process far more than has previously been assumed.

This study on the Basutoland medicine murder panic has demonstrated the extent to which panics can comprehensively destabilise colonial administrations by widening its structural cracks and strengthen its nationalist opponents. New approaches to colonial panics are needed to best capture their contemporary political impacts and the more structural effects they had. These panics were not merely episodes of hysteria but could also be indicative of wider political change, affecting the states involved on a deeper level than has previously been assumed. The politicisation of the medicine murder panic to take advantage of the weak colonial state indicates the extent to which this can be true. While not the only dynamic at play during this period from which nationalists mobilised, it was an important one that has been missing from the broader narrative of Basotho decolonisation. The intense political impact of these tragic years has been presented throughout the preceding pages and a new perspective on both colonial panics and Basotho nationalism has been produced.

This thesis began with a medicine murder and so ends with one final, if less gory, occurrence. A first-hand perspective on *liretlo* after 1960 emerges in the diaries of the Swiss missionary Bertha Hardegger.[41] Hardegger lived in Basutoland from the 1950s until 1986 in largely a healthcare capacity. Her medical expertise meant she was often called on to consult on post-mortems for the police, and it was here that she got into contact with medicine murders. On 21 July 1966, three months before independence, she, was asked to offer her opinion on a particular case which bore the marks of *liretlo*;

[39] Lawrence, *Imperial Rule and the Politics of Nationalism*, 6.
[40] Aerni-Flessner, J., *Dreams for Lesotho*, 20.
[41] Hardegger, B., *Diaries*, (Self-published: Luzern, 1975), 142-43.

> "I read through the files. It is according to the statements a very clear murder. What worried me the most was the spinal fracture in the neck? With the help of the book and the report I feel more secure this was ritual murder... They threw the deceased on the ground, held him, and then wounded to the head with a knife or axe. They then caught the blood in a basin."[42]

The murder shocked Hardegger. After the examination she asked the "white" police chief "whether "I should move out of my house," to which he responds that there is no danger of ritual murder but "to have all windows and doors locked securely" and make sure she is "be provided with whistles."[43] Hardegger was less than convinced by this answer and doubted that the police truly had "everything under control."[44] She recorded in her diaries that she had previously believed the killings had ceased and that in this new modern age, on the verge of a new tomorrow for the nation, *liretlo* was a thing of the recent past.[45] Even in 1966, the impact of *liretlo* was still being felt and shocking to those directly involved. While not a moment with any great significance, this entry from Hardegger's diary reinforces that even on the eve of independence, the shadow of *liretlo* loomed menacingly over the Basotho nation.

In examining the historical course of the medicine murder panic and its impacts, namely its role in shaping the early nationalist movement in the late 1940s and 1950s, this thesis has raised several potential avenues for further related research that could answer some lingering questions about the event. As mentioned in the introduction, this thesis has largely focused on one nation without much consideration of the effects of external ideological factors that influenced the production of nationalist interpretations. However, the focus here has been principally on the Basotho experience during the late colonial period and the role of its main opposition parties in formulating a strategy that could take advantage of British failure during the medicine murder panic to overturn colonial control. Further study could better link this to broader trends. This would enable a more complete understanding of African nationalism, which incorporates the individuals involved in such trends as Pan-Africanism and their audiences, as well as considering the influence of their work, the global reach of their ideas and their local contexts. Incorporating the focused, specific study of the medicine murder panic into this larger story would advance the understanding of both even further.

Moving away from a broader comparative approach, a focused comparison on one region, in particular, Eswatini/Swaziland, would be a second area that would benefit from more detailed consideration. Although briefly discussed in the introduction of this thesis, the dynamics and effects of the medicine murder panic that occurred in that other High Commission Territory were remarkably similar to the one in Basutoland, albeit with some major divergences, such as Swazi commoners committing more of the murders. This comparison could provide more concrete answers for why the

[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

panic in Swaziland was comparatively smaller and did not elicit the same domestic or international press hysteria, despite the conditions being very similar to Basutoland. The different systems of government, the influence of white settlers, the relationship with South Africa, the smaller number of dead and the influence of nationalist parties, along with the activities of the different royal households, could all be areas of assessment as to why the killings in Basutoland were more significant. This area of research would extend the analysis of medicine murder panics and their effects across different times, locations and particularly within the regional context of Southern Africa.

A third avenue could arrive in the discussions of gender in this thesis. With the logistical impracticalities of undertaking sustained field research, such as interviews, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a challenge to represent women's various roles during the period fully. Although there was an effort to some individual cases were highlighted that reconstructed some female agency, such as Matsikuoe Tukula or Mantšebo', it was difficult to present a female voice for those not involved directly in medicine murders. The dynamics of gender and different experiences of colonial rule have been discussed in this thesis. However, it is a complex relationship, the nuance and richness of which deserves much closer attention. Getting women's responses to *liretlo* would increase understanding of Basotho's perception of the killings whilst also providing illumination to the discussion of gender more broadly. The gender dynamics of medicine murder are another avenue that can certainly be explored further and placed into a broader study in gender. Murray and Sanders devote a few pages to their role as collaborators and their supposed more lenient treatment by the police. However, women there, as regrettably in this thesis, are somewhat peripheral to the wider narrative they tell.[46] A study that addresses some of the questions raised in this thesis of the political impact of the killings, but refocused to address the experiences of women first, likely using oral history techniques to address the deficiencies in the archive, would provide a new perspective on the occurrence.

Finally, an avenue emerges from the temporal focus of this study and the possibility of extending that into the post-independence period. While the late-colonial period saw the panic emerge and the peak in the number of recorded killings, medicine murders continued after 1966 until the Lesotho government stopped recording them in 1970 as a unique category of murder. An argument could be made that despite having a new government, the conditions created by colonial rule changed very little and this meant that the murders also continued. Lesotho, after 1966 for instance was still dependent on migrant labour remittances, chiefly influence within society had not changed, and the threat of South African annexation still loomed large. Is it any wonder then that, from the available statistics available, murders continued to fluctuate as they had done in the years prior to independence?[47] While there was never a panic again with the absence of a colonial press, the actual murder rate seems to have not changed drastically, beyond decreasing slightly. Precious little material has been produced

[46] Murray & Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho*, 205-6 & 273-5.
[47] Ibid, 59-60.

during this period concerning medicine murders. Further field study could illuminate lingering questions over these post-colonial legacy killings, the nature of colonial panic and the longer-term impacts of eighty years of imperial rule.

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