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LINCHWE I AND THE KGATLA CAMPAIGN IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN WAR, 1899–1902*

BY R. F. MORTON

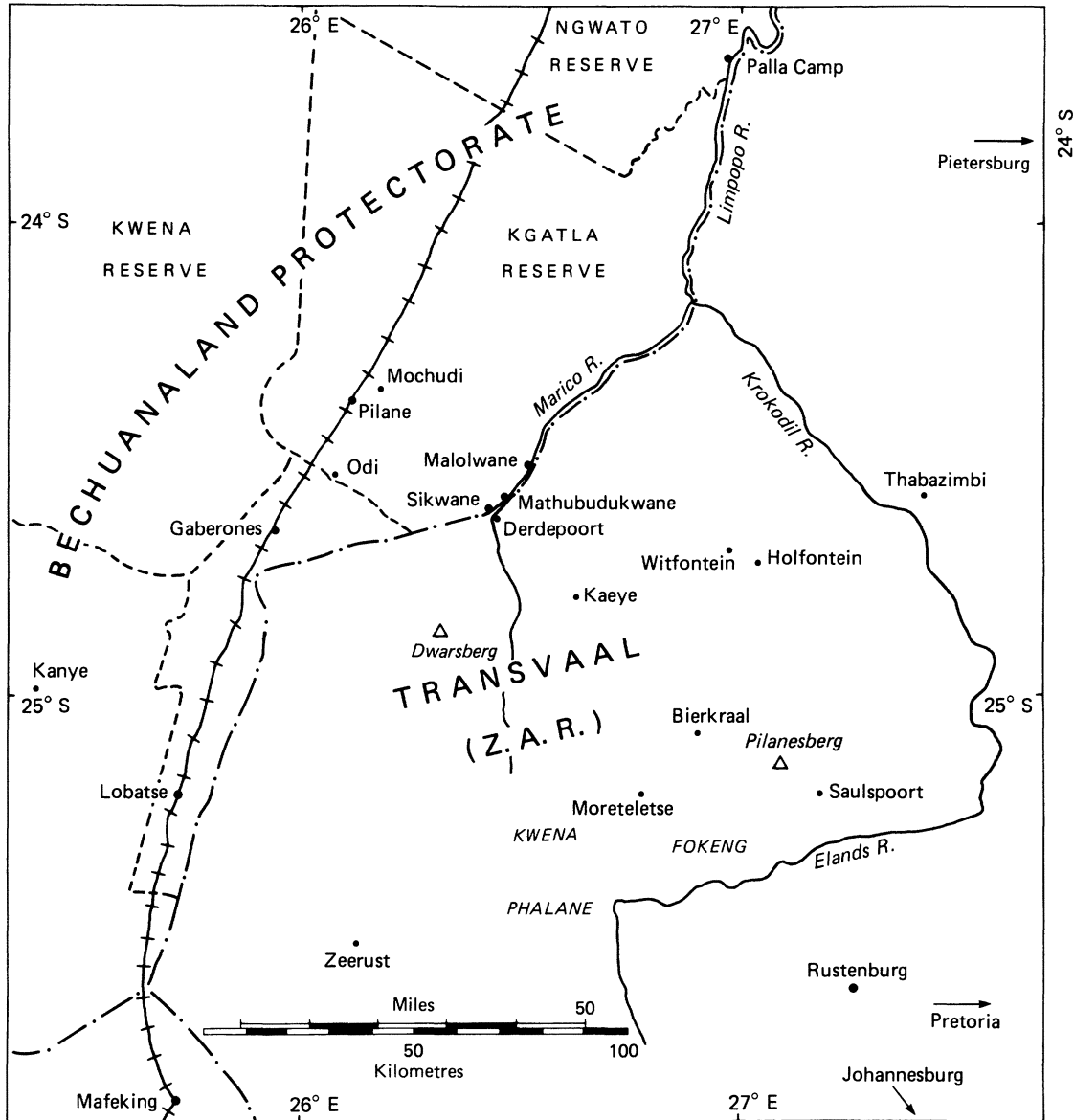
DURING the South African War of 1899–1902 the Kgatla people and their leader, Linchwe I, became deeply involved in fighting on Britain's side against the Boers, and the history of their campaign helps in many ways to explain why some blacks chose to take part in the 'white man's war'.¹ In contrast to recent studies which deal generally with black participation in the war, the account that follows examines the role of one specific African group and explains, in detail, how one black leader weighed his options, took deliberate action and tried to direct events in which he and his regiments were involved. Special attention is also focused on the Kgatla choice between Boer and Briton, their expectations when entering the war, their actual role in the fighting and their gains from participation balanced against the cost. Linchwe's Kgatla provide a particularly instructive case study, because in the years preceding the war part of his people were resident in the Bechuanaland Protectorate under British administration, while the other part lived in the western Transvaal under the rule of the Zuid Afrikanische Republiek (ZAR). The fact that they straddled two colonial worlds, which between 1899 and 1902 collided in war, was a major factor in Kgatla actions and deliberations. As 'partitioned Africans', directly familiar with and affected by both white colonial combatants, the Kgatla and their experience suggest many possible reasons why other Africans were involved in the fighting, whether against Boer or Briton.

For decades scholars and amateur historians have noted Kgatla participation in the South African War, but only recently has research begun to reveal the extent and significance of the Kgatla (and African) role in the conflict. The research of Schapera, Ellenberger, Hickman, Teichler and Truschel has yielded much evidence related to Kgatla military activity beginning with the battle of Derdepoort (25 November 1899).² Yet none explore why the Kgatla,

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¹ The Kgatla of this paper are properly referred to as Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela. Linguistically they belong to the Eastern Tswana cluster of peoples who are found principally in the Rustenburg and Pretoria districts of the Transvaal. I. Schapera, *The Tswana* (London, 2nd edn., 1976), 10.

² I. Schapera, *A Short History of the Bakgatla-bagaKgafela of Bechuanaland Protectorate* (Communications of the School of African Studies, University of Cape Town, n.s. no. 3) (Cape Town, 1942), 19–20; J. Ellenberger 'The Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Boer War, 1899–1902', *Rhodesiana*, xi (1964); A. S. Hickman, *Rhodesia Served the Queen* (Salisbury, 1970), 183–97, 233–251; G. H. J. Teichler, 'Some historical notes on Derdepoort-Sikwane', *Botswana Notes and Records* v (1973), 125–130; L. W. Truschel, 'Nation-building and the Kgatla: the role of the Anglo-Boer War', *Botswana Notes and Records* iv (1972), 185–193.



alone of the many peoples in the Protectorate and the western Transvaal, experienced full military mobilization for the war's duration. Another central flaw in the work of these writers is the distortion of context. They assume that, apart from the Kgatla, Africans stayed more or less out of an Anglo-Boer war and narrow their focus on the Kgatla to the exclusion of much of the war itself. In other words, Derdepoort and the Kgatla involvement thereafter represent a black episode in an otherwise all-white affair.

Peter Warwick's *Black People and the South African War* supplants this

older generation of historiography by demonstrating that the Kgatla were part of a varied, complex and extensive African involvement. Moreover, he adds new evidence, drawn mainly from government records in Britain, to show that the Kgatla role in the war was larger than previously depicted.³ Warwick's appreciation of the historical background to the conflict also enables him to approach the difficult issue of why Africans fought for and in other ways supported white adversaries. With regard to the Kgatla, their long-standing embroilment with the Boers of the Transvaal emerges as a crucial factor in their willingness to take up arms against them. Warwick also reveals how Linchwe's desire to acquire cattle and to protect his Kgatla followers in the Rustenburg district of the ZAR accounts for the movement of Kgatla regiments into the Transvaal. Yet Warwick falls short of understanding how the Kgatla, and Linchwe in particular, viewed the war in its crucial early stages and why Linchwe and his regiments decided to act when they did.⁴ Warwick's study is too broad in its focus for that purpose and too dependent on archival records; the African role in the war emerges clearly, but the African perception does not.

What follows, therefore, is intended to supplement Warwick's pioneering work by bringing into focus an African view of events. Available for this purpose is a rich assortment of documentary and oral evidence pertaining to October–December 1899, when the Kgatla were poised to enter the war. In addition to extensive published literature on the Kgatla and the war, material has been gathered from the Zimbabwe National Archives, Rhodes House, the Botswana National Archives, the State Archives (Pretoria) and from conversations with Kgatla informants in Botswana and the Transvaal (1979–82). Professor I. Schapera has also made available several pages of extremely valuable notes made in 1929–32 from his interviews with several Kgatla recollecting their war experiences.

Linchwe's Kgatla, who numbered approximately 30,000 on the eve of the war, were a recently partitioned people.⁵ In the middle of the nineteenth century they had lived united under Linchwe's grandfather and father at Saulspoort (Moruleng) in the Rustenburg District of the Transvaal, then under Boer administration. In 1869, after Boer rule became increasingly harsh, a group of Kgatla under Kgamanyane, Linchwe's father, fled northwest from their home in Saulspoort and sought refuge among the Kwena in an area that later became part of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Many of Kgamanyane's people remained in Saulspoort, awaiting the outcome of his attempt to relocate securely beyond Boer-controlled territory. By 1872, when Kgamanyane died, the refugees had established a tiny capital at Mochudi, 35 km west of the Marico River, and, soon afterwards, declared independence from chief Sechele of the Kwena, whose western lands the Kgatla claimed

³ (Johannesburg and Cambridge, 1983), esp. 38–52.

⁴ Warwick, *Black People*, 40, for example, assesses Kgatla-British relations in terms of Kgatla 'loyalty', and his statement that Linchwe's reluctance to resist the Boers was based on expediency is unsupported by examples.

⁵ For the history of the Kgatla and the effect of partition, see R. F. Morton, 'Chiefs and ethnic unity in two colonial worlds: the Bakgatla-ba-ga-Kgafela of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Transvaal, 1872–1966', in A. I. Asiwaju (ed.), *Partitioned Africans: Studies in Human Relations across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884–1984* (London and Lagos, 1984).

as their own. Aided by regiments from Saulspoor and by other petty groups resentful of Kwena overlordship, the Kgatla under Linchwe held their own against the Kwena over a period of intermittent skirmishes and raids. When in 1885 the British proclaimed the Bechuanaland Protectorate and incorporated Linchwe and Sechele's territory, Linchwe began a diplomatic struggle to gain British recognition of Kgatla territory as independent of the Kwena. In 1899, only months before the South African War began, Linchwe achieved his goal when the Protectorate formally demarcated the Kgatla Reserve.⁶

While trying to establish his foothold in the Protectorate, Linchwe was unwilling to relinquish his authority over the Kgatla in the Transvaal. Throughout the 1880s and 1890s Linchwe attempted to retain the loyalty of the Saulspoor Kgatla by purchasing, from the Boers, some land on which his people could farm and settle. Due to limited resources Linchwe was able to buy only four farms – Saulspoor 269, the neighbouring Modderkuil 565 and Kruidfontein 649, and Holfontein 593. Most of his people remained scattered in the area living as squatters on Boer land.⁷ Linchwe did resettle several thousand Transvaal Kgatla in the Protectorate in the 1890s, but his territory was too small to accommodate the many others who remained behind. Thus, nearly a quarter of a century after his father fled Saulspoor, Linchwe had failed to relocate and unite the Kgatla in a new territory away from Boer control. And as long as his people remained divided, Linchwe found it impossible to sustain his chieftaincy on both sides of the border without having to come to terms with the Boer, as well as the British, administration. For the sake of his people in Saulspoor, Linchwe could not be regarded in the Transvaal as anti-Boer any more than he could afford to be seen as anti-British in the Protectorate. Throughout this period, therefore, Linchwe travelled often to the Transvaal to discuss Kgatla affairs with ZAR officials, many of whom he knew well, including President Paul Kruger himself.⁸ And in the Protectorate, Linchwe cultivated the respect of local officials, who often came to his defence against rumours and charges of disloyalty.

Nevertheless, as relations between Boer and Briton worsened in the 1890s, Linchwe and the Kgatla fell under increasing suspicion in both white administrations. In the Protectorate, after Linchwe interfered in the construction of the British South Africa Company (BSAC) telegraph line which passed near Mochudi in 1890, the British High Commissioner, H. B. Loch, became convinced that Linchwe was opposed to British rule. Within weeks, Loch accepted an offer from Pretoria to discuss the transfer of much of Kgatla territory to the ZAR administration. Negotiations broke down only when Loch was informed that the waters of the Marico and Limpopo rivers, which formed Linchwe's eastern border, would be lost to the Protectorate and the BSAC for the construction and maintenance of the proposed Rhodesian

⁶ Proclamation no. 9 of March 1899.

⁷ See résumé and translation of deVilliers to Superintendent of Natives, 1 July 1898, CAD NA 761/03, SNA 119, National Archives, Pretoria (NAP); Linchwe to Ellenberger, 16 Oct. 1902, RC 8/8, Botswana National Archives, Gaborone (BNA).

⁸ Commission of Enquiry re Kaffirs and Burghers, Marico District, 18 May 1885, HC 4/13, BNA; Res. Commr. to High Commr. 9 Sept. 1895, HC 140/6, BNA; Testimony of Dikeme, pp. 84–86, s. 343/24, BNA; P. L. Breutz, *Tribes of Rustenburg and Pilanesberg Districts* (Pretoria, 1953), 267; Res. Commr. to Windham, 1 Oct. 1902, NA 2160/2, SNA 62, NAP.

railway.⁹ In 1894 rumours linked Linchwe with the Ndebele leader, Lobengula, in an alleged conspiracy to resist BSAC rule in the region. In spite of disclaimers from Protectorate officials in touch with Linchwe, Loch called in BSAC troops in preparation for the possibility of a Kgatla revolt.¹⁰ And, in the following year, Loch's successor, Sir Hercules Robinson, and the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, decided to hand Linchwe's territory over to the BSAC for direct administration, a step not taken only because of the abortive Jameson Raid.¹¹ Meanwhile, in the Transvaal, the ZAR attempted to undercut Linchwe's authority by supporting a rival candidate for the Kgatla chieftaincy, Linchwe's cousin, Mokae Moseleketse.¹² In 1894 Mokae was effectively used for drafting Kgatla regiments in support of the Boer campaign against Mmalebogo in the northern Transvaal.¹³ Mokae failed to gain a large following in and around Saulspoort, because most Transvaal Kgatla lived scattered on Boer farms and looked to Linchwe as their only hope of easing, if not escaping, Boer rule. But Mokae's collaboration and Boer demands for Kgatla labour and military service reflected real limits of Linchwe's ability to protect the welfare of his Transvaal people.

On the eve of the South African War, Linchwe's economic and political position in the Kgatla Reserve was, in fact, deteriorating badly and, with it, his ability to support the Saulspoort Kgatla. Linchwe's wealth, as that of all his people, was based on cattle, and cattle provided much of the capital with which the Transvaal farms were purchased. Linchwe's people in the Transvaal cared for their own cattle and looked after a portion of Linchwe's herd, though the Boers restricted Kgatla grazing and charged a levy for the privilege.¹⁴ Most of Linchwe's cattle, with which he met the expenses of his chieftaincy on both sides of the border, were husbanded in the Kgatla Reserve. In 1896–7, when the rinderpest epizootic spread through the Protectorate, approximately 90 per cent of Linchwe's cattle and those of his people perished in a matter of weeks.¹⁵ The rinderpest dispossessed the

⁹ Morton, 'Chiefs and ethnic unity'. Like other people in the region, Linchwe and the Kgatla were extremely hostile towards the BSAC. For the telegraph incident, Loch Memorandum 24 April 1890, HC 8171, BNA; Shippard to Loch, 25 May 1890, and Fuller to Carrington, 29 July 1890; HC 116/3, BNA; interview with Harris Thulari, Modisane, Mochudi, 1982.

¹⁰ HC 108, BNA. The source of the rumours was Khama III of the Ngwato. Statement of Ratshosa, 23 April 1894, and of Khama, 9 May 1894, in AC 2/2/1, BNA.

¹¹ Chamberlain to Robinson, 19 Nov. 1895, HC 196/1, BNA. As fate would have it, the Jameson troopers, made up of BSAC and Protectorate Border police, assembled in the Protectorate prior to their raid in the Transvaal on the pretext that Linchwe was fomenting a rebellion against British rule. J. Ellenberger to D. R. Hunt, 8 July 1937, MSS. Afr. s. 1568 (6) Rhodes House, Oxford (RHO).

¹² Mokae was the son of Moseleketse, Linchwe's father's brother in the tenth (possibly ninth) house of Pilane. For an abbreviated list of the descendants of Pilane, Linchwe's grandfather, see Breutz, *Tribes of the... Districts*, 258–9, and I. Schapera, *Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom* (London, 2nd edn., 1955), 308.

¹³ Breutz, *Tribes of the... Districts*, 267.

¹⁴ Edmeston to Native Commr., W. Transvaal, 27 April 1903, CAB NA 6721/03, SNA 116, and 30 July, CAD NA 1405/03, SNA 140, NAP. Also the statement of Dikeme Pilane in Record of Evidence, s. 343/24, 85–86, BNA.

¹⁵ W. L. Maree, *Uit Desternis Geroep die Sendingwerk von die Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk onder die Bakgatla von Wes-Transvaal en Betsjoenaland* (Johannesburg, 1966), 123; also interviews with Amos Kgamanyane, Mosanteng (1979), Rramaiba Moremi, Makwadi (1979), Galemone Monowe (1979), all of Mochudi; and Duplex Pilane, Gaborone (1981).

Kgatla of their primary source of meat and milk, and together with the droughts and human epidemics of the 1890s made this decade for Linchwe's people one of extreme hardship, starvation and rising death rates. Coincident with this steep decline, internal dissension and political intrigues against Linchwe arose in Mochudi. For the first time since the early years of his reign, Linchwe faced a challenge for the chieftaincy, in this instance from his energetic and flamboyant half-brother, Segale. The most educated and westernized of the Kgatla royal family, Segale appealed to a small but growing progressive element desiring closer ties with the British, the promotion of western education and the adoption of European cultural values.¹⁶ In the Transvaal, too, Mokae's chieftaincy assumed still greater importance as Linchwe's resources proved inadequate to purchase additional farms for his people, who had been further dispersed by Boer enforcement of the Squatters Law of 1895, which placed a limit of five squatting families on every Boer farm.¹⁷ By 1899 most Transvaal Kgatla had become, in effect, landless tenants. Thus, on the eve of the war, Linchwe's divided chieftaincy was at best a fragile creation and in imminent danger of dissolution.

In October 1899, when Boer commandos entered the Protectorate at the beginning of the South African War, the survival of Linchwe's chieftaincy was placed in even greater jeopardy.¹⁸ In the early weeks of fighting, the Boer offensive achieved major victories in Natal and the Cape. Transvaal commandos moved swiftly into the northern Cape, took Kimberley and besieged Mafeking, just outside the southern Protectorate border. In order to cut off relief from the north, commandos launched several strikes at the Rhodesia railway, which stretched along the eastern side of the Protectorate and connected Bulawayo to Mafeking. Thanks to Khama's regiments, Boer raids into Ngwato country were repulsed, but south of Lobatse the Marico commando cut the rail, moved north along the line and, on 25 October, sacked the administrative headquarters of the southern Protectorate at Gaborone. The Rustenburg commando, under Commandant Harklaas Malan, laagered at Derdepoort on the Marico River bordering the Kgatla Reserve.¹⁹ co-ordinated raids with the Marico commando and sent forays into the Reserve to disrupt the railway passing a few kilometres west of Linchwe's capital. The Rustenburgers also demanded Linchwe's support against the British. For the

¹⁶ For Segale, see R. F. Morton, 'Separation and survival in two colonial worlds: Linchwe's Kgatla in the Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Transvaal, 1872-1899' (typescript), 23-4.

¹⁷ For the impact of the Squatters Law ('Plakkers Wek') in the Transvaal, see S. Trapido, 'Landlord and tenant in a colonial economy: the Transvaal, 1880-1910', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, v, (Oct. 1978), 26-58.

¹⁸ The Protectorate and its people became involved in the war because of the strategic importance of the railway that passed along its eastern border. General description of the war has been based on Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, 28-51; despatches from the *Times* (I am very grateful to Neil Parsons for the copy of his detailed notes from this source); Ellenberger, 'The Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Boer War'; Truschel, 'Nation-building and the Kgatla'; A. Sillery, *The Bechuanaland Protectorate* (Cape Town, 1952), 89-95; D. Will and F. Dent, *The Boer War as Seen from Gaborone* (Gaborone, n.d.); M. T. Makaya, 'The African Role in the Anglo-Boer War in the Bechuanaland Protectorate' (B.A. dissertation, University College of Botswana, 1979).

¹⁹ The Rustenburgers occupied Derdepoort as early as 9 October (Hickman, *Rhodesia Served the Queen*, 193). Other persons have been labelled as commando leaders, including Johannes Rieckert and Cmmdt. J. F. Kirsten.

moment, Linchwe's regiments would be welcome auxiliaries to secure the railway line, and Boer successes to date were potent arguments in persuading Linchwe, who was summoned to Derdepoort for discussions with Malan, that the Boers represented the winning side.²⁰

Meanwhile, as Protectorate officials and their meagre police force retreated up the railway line, the British repeatedly encouraged Linchwe to defend his Reserve against the Boers.²¹ Overnight, the Kgatla Reserve had become central to British survival in the region. Loss of the Reserve, which straddled a hundred-kilometre stretch of the railway above Gaberones, could mean the loss of the southern Protectorate and a further, perhaps fatal, delay in relieving Mafeking. The British, desperately undermanned, suddenly found themselves dependent on Linchwe for their own protection. During these tense days, they plied the Kgatla chief with ammunition, promised him imminent support in the form of BSAC troops from Rhodesia, and reminded him of his duty as a chief of the Protectorate. Yet the commander of the British troops in the Protectorate, Captain Llewellyn, stationed no men in Linchwe's Reserve and visited Mochudi only to remove furniture and goods from the stores of British traders.²² Instead of giving Linchwe direct support, Llewellyn's men rode their armoured train up and down the line playing cat-and-mouse with mounted Boer parties, who were attempting to damage the railway. Privately the British doubted Linchwe's willingness to fight and were convinced that he was being influenced by pro-Boer missionaries of the Dutch Reformed Church. When the missionaries urged Linchwe's neutrality, the chief refused to take arms from the British.²³ The Boers, Linchwe told one Protectorate official on 25 October, were too many for him.²⁴

At the moment Linchwe was, in fact, stalling for time. In the fortnight following the sack of Gaberones, the Boers possessed the initiative in the Protectorate, and without British support Linchwe had little choice but to give the Rustenburgers the run of his Reserve. Though the chief was fairly convinced of a Boer victory in the war, his future and the welfare of all the Kgatla hinged on their defeat. To side openly with the retreating British, however, could only lead to the Boers retaliating swiftly against the Kgatla or, in the peace following the war, exacting a more pervasive revenge. Until the British committed themselves in force, Linchwe's only defence was, as one of his messenger-spies later put it, 'to blind the Dutch' by giving them

²⁰ Rev. Thomas Phiri, interviewed by I. Schapera, 6 July 1931, Schapera Papers. Phiri was, in 1899, Linchwe's secretary and confidant. According to Phiri, Malan convinced Linchwe that the Boers 'could drive the British into the sea'. If another report is to be believed, Malan also dangled before Linchwe the promise that 'if he sided with the Republic and obeyed the Boer government . . . , the Boers [would] restore to him a portion of his Father's country in the Pilandsberg [Saulspoort]'. H. R. deBertadano, Capt., Intelligence, Pretoria and Northern districts, to Ag. Commr. Native Affairs, Pretoria, n.d. [1902], NA CAD 857/02, SNA 26, NAP.

²¹ For a detailed account of Linchwe's relations with the British between 17th and 25th October, see Morton, 'Babolayeng BagaKgafela', 11–13.

²² Diary of J. Ellenberger, 4 Nov. 1899, EL 1, Zimbabwe National Archives, Harare (ZNA).

²³ Maree, *Uit Desternis Geroep*, 133; Ellenberger Diary, 18 Oct. 1899, ZNA. With the exception of Deborah Retief, the D.R.C. missionaries were eventually expelled by Protectorate officials to the Transvaal for the duration of the war.

²⁴ Ellenberger diary, 25 Oct. 1899, ZNA.

the impression that the Kgatla sympathized with their cause.²⁵ In response to Malan's request for tribute as a sign of Linchwe's readiness to assist them, the chief instructed his men to drive cattle, sheep and goats to the Derdepoort laager and to help the Rustenburgers build a drift across the Marico river connecting Derdepoort with the major Kgatla river village of Sikwane.²⁶ All this Linchwe concealed from the British, whose anger he feared much less than the Boers, but whose intentions were much more ambiguous. Instead, his aides and messengers paid daily visits to Protectorate officers and prodded them with selected intelligence in order to discover how far they were prepared to go in taking the fight to the Boers.²⁷

While waiting for a reversal in the general trend of military events, Linchwe was losing face in front of his own people. The Rustenburgers, persuaded they had nothing to fear from the Kgatla, began to raid for cattle in the Reserve and ride their horses through Kgatla villages without regard for the safety of children and the elderly. Linchwe did nothing about the raids. And, when he politely asked a party of Boers passing through Mochudi to rein in their mounts, he received from the leader, Hendrick Rieckert, a public insult of the first order. "Rieckert picked up a handful of dirt and said that the dirt was cleaner than the chief of the Kgatla, then he threw his handful of dirt in the air and said that the little stone falling was bigger than the chief of the Kgatla."²⁸ Linchwe bore Rieckert's cocksure display in silence. The chief's helplessness was made to appear the more acute by the behaviour of Segale, who was using the growing threat of war to promote his ambitions for the chieftaincy. Outspokenly anti-Boer, Segale clamoured for an attack on the Derdepoort laager, busied himself reconnoitring Boer positions, and made frequent visits to the British, whom he impressed as being the man in the Kgatla Reserve most eager for a fight.²⁹ Linchwe had nothing to gain by following his half-brother's lead, but the need to keep Kgatla regiments at battle readiness in Mochudi kept the atmosphere tense, lent importance to Segale's conspicuous activities and, to Linchwe's even greater disadvantage, risked giving the Boers the impression that the Kgatla were in league with the British. On 8 November, Segale compromised Linchwe's position even further when he and his men joined Llewellyn's troops in a surprise attack on Rieckert's party then attempting to tear up the railway at Mosupabatho, 8 km north of Mochudi.³⁰

²⁵ Klass Segogwane, interviewed by I. Schapera, 2 Sept. 1932, Schapera Papers.

²⁶ Segogwane and Phiri interviews, Schapera Papers.

²⁷ Information regarding peaceful contact between the Kgatla and the Boers has survived entirely in Kgatla traditions, even though Ellenberger, the magistrate at Gaberones, received almost daily reports from Linchwe and his messengers in October–December 1899 and recorded them in detail.

²⁸ According to Amos Kgamanyane, Mosanteng, Mochudi. Kgatla traditions have other versions, including Phiri and Segogwane, but all agree on the substance of the insult. As Hickman learned when talking to an Afrikaner of Rustenburg in 1967, Boer traditions also register this event and assign it key importance in the Kgatla decision to fight the Boers at Derdepoort (*Rhodesia Served the Queen*, 233).

²⁹ Maree, *Uit Desternis Geroep*, 137; Ellenberger diary, 2 Nov. 1899, ZNA; *idem*, 'The Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Boer War'; Schapera, *Short History*, 44.

³⁰ Ellenberger, 'The Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Boer War'. Ratsegana Sebeke, Marapo Lands, Mochudi (interviewed in 1982) gave a florid account of the surprise of Mosupabatho, on the Kalakane rivulet.

Linchwe then had little choice but to act. That night, after welcome reports were received that the BSAC troops had reached Mahalapye and were preparing to move south, the war horn was sounded on the hill above the Dutch Reformed church in Mochudi. On 10 November Linchwe told Assistant Resident Commissioner, W. H. Surmon, that the Kgatla were prepared to fight and wanted firearms.³¹ Promised a new supply of rifles, Linchwe despatched his regiments to patrol the countryside north of Mochudi. No skirmishes resulted, but within days two young Boers from the laager, accompanied by Mokae, rode into Mochudi unaware that the Kgatla had placed themselves on a war footing. Linchwe arrested all three and turned the Boer captives over to the British. One identified himself as Hans, son of Hendrick Rieckert.³² Word of young Rieckert's arrest, which amounted to a declaration of war, spread quickly. On or about 22 November, when Col. J. Holdsworth's Rhodesian 7th Hussars were coming down the rail from Mahalapye, one of Linchwe's principal loyalists in Saulspoort, Dikeme Mantirisi, galloped into Mochudi with disturbing news: Boer troop reinforcements had left Rustenburg for Derdepoort in preparation for a major offensive against the Kgatla, and they were coming with a price on Linchwe's head.³³

From this point, Linchwe seized as much initiative as possible in the war against the Boers. On 23 November, Llewellyn arrived with the Rhodesians at Mochudi station, where he and Holdsworth met with Linchwe and Segale. According to Ellenberger, one of the interpreters present, Linchwe was informed that a hundred of Holdsworth's mounted Rhodesians, together with a maxim gun, would march the following evening to Sikwane for the purpose of launching an attack on the Derdepoort laager and that Linchwe's regiments should be stationed in Sikwane ready to defend the Kgatla Reserve if the attack suffered a reverse. The Kgatla were enjoined to refrain from firing or entering into the battle and told to follow orders quickly.³⁴ All agreed, and Linchwe placed Segale at the head of the regiments marching with Holdsworth.

That night, and unknown to the Rhodesians and Protectorate officials, Linchwe took the Anglo-Boer war in the Kgatla Reserve into his own hands. Although Surmon insisted that the Kgatla simply stand by in Sikwane while Holdsworth's men attacked Derdepoort, Linchwe was not about to risk the outcome of this all-important battle on the resolve of one hundred mounted white Rhodesians. Their maxim gun was an advantage but, given the three heavy rock laagers the Boers had erected, it was hardly decisive. The maxim could pin the Boers inside but not drive them out. What was needed were armed men in numbers willing to overrun the walls. Holdsworth would not

³¹ Ellenberger diary, 10 Nov. 1899, ZNA.

³² Mokae was kept by the Kgatla 'under house arrest' in Mochudi during the war, and no harm came to him. He was released after the war and returned to Saulspoort (interviews with Amos Kgamanyane Pilane (1979) and Selogwe Pilane, Kgosing (1981), both of Mochudi).

³³ Interviews with Selogwe Pilane, Amos Kgamanyane, and Ratsegana Sebeke.

³⁴ Details of the meeting have been culled from the following Ellenberger recollections: diary, 23-25 Nov. 1899, ZNA; 'The Bechuanaland Protectorate and the War'; 'Notes on the History of the Bakgatla' as reproduced in Schapera, *Short History*, 47; Ellenberger to Hunt, 8 July 1937, MSS. Afr. s. 1568 (6), RHO.

risk the lives of his own men on a direct assault when his major objective was the relief of Mafeking. Furthermore, a Boer party under Malan was outside the laager in the vicinity of Gaborones. Unless attacked, they would be free to retaliate in the Reserve after Holdsworth and his men moved south. The only solution open to Linchwe was to engage his regiments in the conflict. Therefore, after his meeting with Holdsworth on 23 November, Linchwe sent word to the cattle posts along the riverine border and in the southern part of the Reserve that all Kgatla stock be removed to the Mochudi area.³⁵ Then on the evening of 24 November, as Segale and two regiments (Koba and Fatlha) set out with the Rhodesians towards Sikwane/Derdepoort, Linchwe quietly moved south with three other regiments (Janko, Thukwi and Thakana) and camped the night at Odi, in preparation for a dawn attack on Malan's party laagered nearby at Lemonyana.³⁶ Meanwhile, Segale led the other force through the darkness with one objective in mind: to induce Holdsworth to issue orders in accordance with Linchwe's plan. Segale had to create the opportunity for placing the Kgatla regiments, not in the safety of Sikwane as Surmon directed, but across the drift and into the hills beyond the border where the muskets of Koba and Fatlha could fire directly into the laagers.

With an hour or less of darkness remaining, Holdsworth arrived at Sikwane unaware of the plans laid by Linchwe and unprepared for the Kgatla attack on Derdepoort that he, unwittingly, had already set in motion. Before leaving Mochudi station, Holdsworth had been reminded firmly by Assistant Commissioner Surmon that Linchwe's troops were not to be used beyond the Protectorate border, 'as it might lead to deplorable consequences'.³⁷ Throughout the march, however, Holdsworth was entirely dependent on Segale to lead the way and describe the geography of the morrow's battle site. The Assistant Resident Magistrate, J. Ellenberger, who acted as Holdsworth's interpreter, was equally ignorant.³⁸ Before arriving at Sikwane, Holdsworth gave an order, based on information supplied by Segale, to position Kgatla regiments on a ridge overlooking the enemy laager. In effect, this required Linchwe's men to cross the Marico and enter the Transvaal.³⁹ Linchwe's

³⁵ Schapera's interviews with Rakabane and Maribe Mokotedi, 6 Aug. 1929, Schapera Papers. Amos Kgamanyane, at the time a ten-year-old herdboyc near the junction of the Notwane and Odi rivers, received the order to move the cattle in his care most likely on the morning of 24 Nov. He says he drove his cattle hard the entire day ('There was no time even to let calves suck their mothers'). He stopped that night and, just before dawn, heard the guns in the direction of Derdepoort.

³⁶ Rakabane/Mokotedi, Segogwane and Phiri interviews, Schapera Papers; I. Schapera, *Praise Poems of Tswana Chiefs* (Oxford, 1965), 99.

³⁷ Surmon to Holdsworth, 23 Nov. 1899, HO 3, ZNA.

³⁸ 'We trusted entirely to information given by Segale as to the position of the laager and how to get there.' Ellenberger to Hunt, 8 July 1937, MSS. Afr. s. 1568 (6), RHO.

³⁹ Ellenberger diary, 25 Nov. 1899. What remains unclear in Ellenberger's diaries and his other accounts of the events leading up to the battle is whether Holdsworth knew, before sunlight broke over the battle scene, that the ridge in question lay across the river and within the Transvaal. Holdsworth is emphatic in saying he did not. Before the battle occurred, Ellenberger himself did not know the pertinent lie of the land. If Segale in fact told Holdsworth that the ridge was in the Transvaal, he would have said so with Ellenberger present and interpreting. As the only British official present, Ellenberger would therefore have had to protest, on behalf of Surmon and the Protectorate, against

younger brother, Ramono, it was later discovered, took his men on to the ridge above the laager, and Segale remained with other troops on the Protectorate side. Holdsworth was stationed with the maxim and his cavalry on a ridge looking across from the western bank of the river into the laager, and was himself just inside the border.⁴⁰ All decisions regarding placement, including Holdsworth's own, were taken under advice from Segale before dawn and before Holdsworth could see the battle ground. When dawn arrived, Holdsworth saw smoke and heard shooting north of his position and immediately began discharging the maxim gun, the cue for all to begin firing.⁴¹

Only after Kgatla guns came into action did Holdsworth realize that they were positioned across the river and in the Transvaal. Holdsworth also found himself badly placed. The bullets and shot of Kgatla fire were passing through the laager and landing at Holdsworth's position, and the angle of the maxim put the Kgatla at similar risk. The mounted Rhodesians, ready at Holdsworth's side, had also no accessible drift for crossing the river quickly. Holdsworth therefore sent orders for a full retreat and withdrew his gun and cavalry out of the range of the Boer Mausers. For a short time, the Kgatla under Ramono were caught in heavy fire and suffered losses before extricating themselves. Fourteen Kgatla men died in battle and sixteen others came away with injuries. Ramono's men killed at least twenty of the enemy, including J. H. Barnard, member of the ZAR Volksraad. The Kgatla also captured a hundred oxen, thirty horses, and eighteen women and children, whom they turned over to the British. Holdsworth's Rhodesians suffered no deaths or casualties.⁴²

In the South African War, Derdepoort stands as a rare instance when Africans fought Boers in the presence of British troops, and Linchwe's involvement transformed one of the war's smaller battles into one of its larger controversies. President Kruger protested that Britain had violated the gentlemen's agreement to fight a purely white man's war and had, with Baden-Powell's use of Africans in defence of Mafeking, placed at risk the fruits of victory for both contestants. Africans were to be used as unarmed non-combatants.⁴³ Derdepoort also caused bitterness between British officers and Protectorate officials. Col. Holdsworth claimed that Linchwe's men had entered the battle against his orders; Surmon and Ralph Williams, the Resident Commissioner, remained convinced throughout the war that Holdsworth had deliberately used the Kgatla to do his fighting and caused them

Holdsworth's delivery of the fateful order. If such a protest were made, and it could have been made in time, no evidence that it was registered has survived in the record, Ellenberger's included.

⁴⁰ Ellenberger diary, 25 Nov. 1899, ZNA.

⁴¹ Holdsworth, 'Report on Reconnaissance in Sequani, Nov. 26th[sic] 1899'. 10 Dec. 1899, HO 3, ZNA.

⁴² *Ibid.*; *Times*, 28 Dec. 1899; Ellenberger diary, 25 Nov. 1899; Edmeston to Native Commr., 27 April 1903, CAD NA 692, SNA 116, NAP. It is possible that Boer casualties were even higher. Ellenberger diary, 30 Nov. 1899; Hickman, *Rhodesia Served the Queen*, 234-239, 249.

⁴³ Hickman, *Rhodesia Served the Queen*, 43; Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, 18, 41. Kruger's troops made use of Africans, too. For the best short summary of the role of Africans in the South African War, see P. Warwick, 'Black People and the War', in P. Warwick, ed., *The South African War* (Harlow, 1980), 186-209.

to suffer heavy casualties as a result of his early retreat. At the meeting the day after the battle, Linchwe's display of controlled anger before Holdsworth was a humbling moment for officials present, who felt the Kgatla had been betrayed.⁴⁴

Apart from the recrimination it caused among whites, Derdepoort evoked much deeper hostility between Kgatla and Boer. The battle marks the beginning of a long and costly struggle between regiments and commandos to gain control of the western Transvaal north and west of Rustenburg. The aggressiveness shown in the Derdepoort battle by Ramono's men originated in the ambition of Linchwe and his people to subdue an old enemy, reunite those Kgatla separated by the Boers for more than a generation and control the land and cattle needed for reconstruction.⁴⁵ The battle of Derdepoort, though insignificant to the outcome of the South African War, is important to the history of the Kgatla, and much of what Linchwe's regiments accomplished in the wake of this little conflict determined the future of the Kgatla people in the twentieth century.

As to whether Linchwe's men were ill-used by Holdsworth, there is little question that Linchwe wanted his men in the thick of the battle.⁴⁶ As Dikeme's urgent message reveals, the Rustenburgers had already declared war on Linchwe, and Linchwe was grateful for Holdsworth's men in what both regarded as a pre-emptive strike. On 25 November, however, Linchwe had no guarantee that the British would remain in the Reserve to help protect his people and no hope that they would march to the Transvaal to rescue Saulspoort. What Linchwe wanted at Derdepoort was a telling blow before reinforcements from Rustenburg had arrived. Linchwe could not allow the outcome to be determined by the whims of Holdsworth and his troops, who were locked in their own quarrel with the Boers. Linchwe's people faced more real and immediate dangers and needed support, not leadership, from the British.

What angered Linchwe about Derdepoort was Holdsworth's retreat. Apart from the losses sustained by Ramono in the presence of the Rhodesians' silent rifles, the withdrawal of troops before the Boers were defeated exposed the river villages to retaliation. As Holdsworth rode back to Mochudi station, Linchwe was drawn into organizing the defence of the river villages and evacuating civilians and property, especially cattle, into the Reserve. The day after the battle, Linchwe rode to the station and made known his views of the attack on Derdepoort and the man who had aborted it:

Linchwe asked [Holdsworth] how many men he had killed and how many wounded and he had to reply 'none' at which Linchwe told him he had fourteen men killed and sixteen wounded and told him that Colonel Holdsworth had gone not to fight but to see a fight – that when a native Chief went with another Chief to battle they won together or fell together, but that one never abandoned the other in the field.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ 'It was a melancholy incident which might well have lost us the whole of the natives of Bechuanaland and which destroyed the prestige of white men for many a day.' Williams to Lagden, 23 May 1902, NA 2104/02 SNA 59, NAP.

⁴⁵ These three motives for Kgatla participation surface commonly in the oral traditions of the Kgatla.

⁴⁶ Kgatla oral traditions make no mention of British duplicity. They relate that Linchwe wanted war from the day of Rieckert's insult.

⁴⁷ Williams, quoting Ellenberger's report, in Williams to Lagden, 23 May 1902, NA 2104/02, SNA 59, NAP. Linchwe said nothing about the previous day's twin attack on a Boer laager and herding party near Gaberones, which resulted in as many as sixteen Boer

Linchwe wanted another attack, immediately, to drive out the surviving Boers and protect his grain supplies near the river. On 30 November he reported that the Boers had already begun to shell Sikwane.⁴⁸ But the Rhodesians, expecting to push south and begin the overland drive to relieve Mafeking, remained at Mochudi station awaiting the arrival of a column from Plumtree and leaving Linchwe alone with the task of protecting the river villages.

In the following weeks Linchwe's regiments along the river struggled to hold their ground. In early December, Boer reinforcements began arriving from Rustenburg and Pietersburg until the numbers at the laager reached two hundred or more.⁴⁹ During the build-up the Boers sacked Sikwane on 14 December and, after the Kgatla attacked Derdepoort on 21 December, resumed their reprisals on 22 December by attacking Malolwane, Mathubudukwane and Sikwane, the last of which they burned on Christmas Eve.⁵⁰ On 29 December Linchwe's men again tried to dislodge the Boers in a battle that one report said lasted seven hours. The result was inconclusive, but after 1 January 1900 the Boers ceased their raids into the Reserve, thus allowing the Kgatla to take the offensive.⁵¹

In January, too, the tide of the South African War began to shift against the Boers. Early in that month, British troop reinforcements began flooding into South Africa, reversing the balance of strength in the south. From the Cape, Roberts and Kitchener's forces marched inland and, during February and March, relieved Kimberley and Ladysmith and in turn captured Bloemfontein. Boer forces retreated north deeper into the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, putting up modest resistance before the British advance. While these events were unfolding, the Boers continued their siege of Mafeking and reinforced laagers at Derdepoort and at Crocodile Pools, 6 km south of Gaborones, in an effort to prevent the relief of Mafeking by Rhodesians entrained from the north. In mid-January, Lt-Col. Plumer's column of Rhodesian mounted infantry was engaged in trying to destroy the Boer laager at Crocodile Pools and establishing an overland base at Kanye.⁵²

As soon as the effort to obstruct Plumer was concentrated at Crocodile Pools, the Derdepoort laager became fair game for Linchwe. In early December Linchwe had been instructed by Surmon to refrain from moving his forces into the Transvaal, an order Linchwe threatened to ignore should the Kgatla suffer another attack.⁵³ After the sack of Sikwane, however, Linchwe checked his men from retaliating beyond Derdepoort while sending

deaths. Phiri interview. He did report the capture of Boer cattle *north* of Odi, and asked permission to keep them. Ellenberger diary, 26 Nov. 1899, ZNA.

⁴⁸ Ellenberger diary, 30 Nov. 1899; *Times*, 21 Dec. 1899.

⁴⁹ Ellenberger diary, 7 Dec. 1899; Truschel, 'Nation-building and the Kgatla'. 189; *Times*, 18 Jan. 1900.

⁵⁰ Ellenberger diary, 18–25 Dec. 1899; L. S. Amery, ed., *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, III (London, 1905), and W. van Everdingen, *De Oorlog in Zuid Afrika*, as quoted in Schapera, *Short History*, 42–43, 45.

⁵¹ *Times*, 1 Jan. 1900. Small groups of Boers on reconnaissance continued to penetrate the Kgatla Reserve, exacting reprisals on Kgatla and their crops, and trying to attack the railway. Ellenberger diary, 17 Jan. 1900; *Times*, 22 Jan. 1900.

⁵² B. Gardner, *Mafeking: a Victorian Legend* (London, 1966), 141–4.

⁵³ On 7 Dec. 1899, Linchwe told Ellenberger that he was prepared to defend his Reserve and not attack the Transvaal, 'but, if they cross I shall cross and shall not stop at Sequane, I hear they intend to kill my people at Saul's Poort, and I do not want them to – you give them every possible chance'. Ellenberger diary, 7 Dec. (also 2 Dec.) 1899.

scouts to reconnoitre behind Boer lines. With Holdsworth in Mochudi and the laager receiving reinforcements, his hands were tied. When Plumer passed through Mochudi station in January, it appears that Linchwe was given permission to enter the Transvaal and received additional arms for the purpose.⁵⁴ What Plumer must have had in mind was for Linchwe's men to challenge the Derdepoort laager while Plumer's troops moved on Crocodile Pools. By early February Linchwe had grouped 800 men at Sikwane, as the *Times* reported, to 'defend borders from Boer invasion'.⁵⁵ Soon afterwards, on 16 February, two regiments circled Derdepoort and marched into the Transvaal to Kaeye, on the road halfway between Derdepoort and the Dwarsberg hills. There the Makoba, under Ramono, and Majanko, under Motshwane, lay in wait for a large convoy of wagons, troops and supplies, heading for Derdepoort. A third regiment, Mantwane, under Mochele, remained at Derdepoort to prevent the commandos there, estimated at 300 men, from breaking out of the laager.⁵⁶ When the convoy passed between the regiments, Ramono and Motshwane's men surprised the Boers in a vicious crossfire in which several Boers died and many others fled by foot, leaving behind their horses and supplies.⁵⁷ Soon afterwards, the commandos at Derdepoort abandoned the laager, which remained unoccupied for the duration of the war.⁵⁸

After Kaeye, the road into the western Transvaal lay open to Linchwe's regiments. Plumer's column moved steadily south, drawing Boer troops tighter around Mafeking, where the next drama of the war was reaching a climax. After Plumer's forces joined with a relief column from Kimberley, the siege of Mafeking ended on 17 May 1900. In other parts of the western Transvaal, British troops captured all the main centres: Johannesburg in May, Pretoria in June and Rustenburg in July. As British control extended steadily along the major roads and centres, Linchwe's regiments advanced into the hills and mountains north of Rustenburg where scattered commando groups were based near to his people at Saulspoort.⁵⁹ In May when word came

⁵⁴ Edmeston to Native Commr. 27 April 1903, NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP. Linchwe received 100 Martini-Henrys before the battle at Derdepoort in November 1899 and the following July the Kgatla turned over to the British at Rustenburg 250 rifles. Linchwe *et al.* to Lawley, n.d., in the same file.

⁵⁵ 23 Feb. 1900, as per report from Gaberones, dated 16 Feb. 1900. These men included regimental reinforcements from Saulspoort. Amos Kgamanyane Pilane, Mochudi.

⁵⁶ Edmeston to Native Commr. 27 April 1903, NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP; Ratsegana Sebeke, Marapo Lands, Mochudi; Segogwane and Phiri interviews. Mochele was the youngest brother of Segale.

⁵⁷ According to Thari Pumetse, whose father fought in this battle, many Kgatla were killed or wounded (Monneng sub-ward, Mochudi, 1979). The booty consisted of mealies, clothing, six wagons, 140 horses. It was taken to Mochudi, where Linchwe distributed most of it to Kgamanyane's dependants, Ramono, Motshwane and Mochele and kept the rest for himself. (Interview with Ratsegana Sebeke, Marapo Lands, Mochudi, 1982).

⁵⁸ *Times*, 19 March 1900. Edmeston to Native Commr. 27 April 1903, NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP. After the battle, when Boers complained about Linchwe's attack, Plumer replied that he could not be responsible for Kgatla raids if the Boers raided the Kgatla. Between late December and mid-February, there is, however, no record of a commando attack on the Kgatla.

⁵⁹ From the testimony of Morris's clerks in Saulspoort, the shop supplied commando camps to the east (Phalane, Palmietfontein), in the Saulspoort area at Ruighoek in Tlhakong and Derdepoort. Saulspoort Kgatla to Sub-Native [*sic*] Commr., 18 March 1903, NA 966/03, SNA 115, NAP.

that the Boers were commandeering and thrashing the Saulspoort Kgatla, Linchwe requested and received permission from Surmon for his men to enter the Transvaal, but by then it is likely his men had already gone.⁶⁰ In the country of the Tlhako, 30 km west of Saulspoort, the Kgatla ambushed another commando convoy at Moreteletse, at the foot of the Matlansberg and not far from the commando camp at Ruighoek. The Kgatla under Kgari Pilane, Linchwe's uncle, captured 300 oxen and three wagons.⁶¹ By then the Kgatla had already begun to loot cattle from Boer farms either abandoned or undefended. All this stock was driven back to the Kgatla Reserve and into the Ngwato Reserve for safe keeping. Largely on account of Kgatla raiding, much of the western Transvaal north and west of Rustenburg was abandoned by the time Smuts passed through the area in mid-1900.⁶² As British confidence of victory rose in step with their advance along the main roads, their need for Linchwe's assistance dwindled. Soon after the capture of Pretoria on 5 June, Linchwe was warned to recall all his men from the Transvaal and turn over all stock captured to the officer at Gaberones.⁶³ In July, however, Linchwe's men were still in the Transvaal when Kitchener's troops marched into Rustenburg. Kitchener summoned the Kgatla regiments into the town, demanded back all the rifles issued to the Kgatla when Britain had needed an ally and, as Kgatla bore witness, set their 250 Martini-Henrys on fire.⁶⁴

Little time passed, however, before Kitchener needed the Kgatla again. After the capture of Rustenburg, the South African War soon entered its longest, and most unpleasant, phase in which Boer guerrilla resistance was met by Kitchener's determined scorched-earth policy. For the next two years Boer commandos stayed away from the main routes and centres, looking for opportunities to strike suddenly at weak or undefended spots in British lines, while Kitchener strengthened his defences along railwaylines, roads and centres, sent his troops on sweeps of devastation through Boer farm areas, and rounded up Boer families, as well as suspected African sympathizers, and put them into concentration camps. With neither British posts under threat nor British troops outnumbered, the need for African allies to assist besieged Britons largely disappeared. Kitchener, though, had his uses for Africans in the campaign to break the spirit of Boer commandos. The extended lines made necessary by Kitchener's strategy required the employment of hundreds of African wagoneers, labourers, horsemen, messengers and, above all, scouts. And Linchwe's Kgatla, along with other Africans in the western Transvaal, were soon called on to perform these functions.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ The request was made formally by Segale. Truschel, 'Nation-building and the Kgatla', 189. See also Harbor to Nicholson, n.d., RC 5/4, BNA.

⁶¹ Schapera, *Short History*, 20, implies that the Moreteletse ambush occurred soon after the evacuation of Derdepoort. See also Edmeston to Native Commr., 27 April 1903, NA 672/03, NA 116, NAP; Maree, *Uit Desternis Geroep*, 137.

⁶² Smuts, 'Memoirs of the Boer War', in W. K. Hancock and J. van der Poel, eds. *Selections from the Smuts Papers* (Cambridge, 1966), 1, 597–8. Kgatla also stole cattle from Africans in the Transvaal. Ellenberger diary, 31 Aug. 1900, 2 Oct. 1900, 26 Nov. 1900 and 27 March 1901.

⁶³ J. Ellenberger's Judgment, 20 June 1901, RC 4/17, BNA. Two orders were issued to Linchwe, on the 14th and 25th June 1900, respectively. See also Ellenberger diary, 22 June 1900.

⁶⁴ Linchwe *et al.* to Lawley, n.d., NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP.

⁶⁵ Linchwe's men 'were of much value to our Intelligence Department', Edmeston

In the second half of 1900, Kitchener used the Kgatla primarily as cattle raiders in the western Transvaal.⁶⁶ This arrangement, clandestinely administered by military intelligence through Mafeking, fitted into Kitchener's plan of divesting the guerrilla zones of food and draught resources without risking British lives. The Protectorate employed a white civilian to enlist Linchwe's support and offered as a reward 25 per cent of the stock captured. Linchwe's men were supplied with tickets to be sewn into the collars of their jackets as a warrant for safe passage when returning through British lines.⁶⁷ How many cattle were removed from the Transvaal in this manner is not clear, but the cattle captured did not always compensate for the hazards run. In November 1900 Linchwe lost forty men while bringing one hundred head out of guerrilla territory.⁶⁸

As the war dragged on, Linchwe's regiments also became valuable as a surrogate force throughout the Rustenburg backland.⁶⁹ It is not clear at what point Linchwe began to extend his authority over this area, which eventually reached from Palla Camp on the Limpopo, south beyond the Elands River and east as far as the Middelburg district.⁷⁰ As late as August 1901, army headquarters in Pretoria issued what appears to be its first clear instruction permitting Linchwe's men to protect the Kgatla at Saulspoor.⁷¹ Yet military intelligence used Linchwe for cattle-raiding purposes long before that date and, as early as May 1901, Linchwe's people at Saulspoor brought to Mochudi six Boer 'handsuppers' wishing to surrender.⁷² What seems likely is that in early 1901 the Kgatla gradually took control of the Saulspoor area and raided for stock among the Fokeng, Kwena and Phalane, whom the Kgatla alleged after the war were Boer supporters.⁷³ In the meantime Linchwe established Dithlake as his deputy in Saulspoor for the remainder of the war.⁷⁴ In August 1901 Linchwe's request to send regiments to

to Lagden, 27 April 1903, NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP. See also Ellenberger, Memorandum, 31 Dec. 1927, s. 182/1, BNA, and Ellenberger diary, 20 and 21 Nov. 1900.

⁶⁶ And without the knowledge of Protectorate officials at Gaberones. Ellenberger diary, 21 Nov. 1900.

⁶⁷ Williams to Lagden, 23 May 1902, NA 2104/02, SNA 59, NAP; Edmeston to Lagden, 27 April 1903, NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP. By October the commission for looting had risen to 30 per cent. Mellwyn to ADT, Mafeking, 30 Oct. 1900, RC 4/14, BNA.

⁶⁸ Telegram, n.d., attached to Ryan to Ag. Res. Commr., n.d. [received 29 Nov. 1900], RC 4/14, BNA. 'Linchwe handed the cattle over... and refused to have anything more to do with [them].' Capt. Morgan (Senior Officer, Transport) sold the cattle at a profit to the army of £416. Morgan to Ryan, 27 Nov. 1900, in the same file. See also Ellenberger diary, 21 Nov. 1900.

⁶⁹ Williams to Lagden, 14 and 26 Feb. 1902, NA 407/02, SNA 17; Williams to Lagden, 23 May 1902, NA 2104/02, SNA 59; Edmeston to Lagden, 27 April 1903, NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP.

⁷⁰ Smuts, 'Memoirs', 627.

⁷¹ Williams to Lagden, 23 May 1902, in which he quotes a dispatch to the Intelligence Officer in Mafeking. NA 2104/02, SNA 59, NAP. See also Ellenberger diary, 16 July 1901.

⁷² Poultney to Ellenberger, 6 May 1901; also the statement by Smit, 7 May 1901, RC 4/14, BNA.

⁷³ Linchwe *et al.* to Lawley, n.d., NA 672/03, SNA 116; Griffith to Lagden, 10 Nov. 1903, NA 2482/02, SNA 71, NAP. Linchwe claimed that the abovementioned people were keeping Boer cattle, feeding the commandos and providing them with scouts.

⁷⁴ Statement of Ramono in Driver to Griffith, n.d. [1902], NA 2160/02, SNA 62, NAP.

Saulspoort was probably intended to procure tacit consent for attacking commando strongholds in retaliation for abuses against his people in the Transvaal. Cases of atrocities against Africans in the Rustenburg area began to surface in the press only in December 1901, but it is probable they had been occurring much earlier⁷⁵: according to a British official,

... there were 44 cases [among Saulspoort Kgatla] of what, to use an euphemism, one might call 'summary executions' by Boers, all of which were due to the well known Anglophile tendencies of the tribe. Numberless cases of cruelty by Boers took place in public at Saulspoort, amongst which the flogging to death of an invalid, Mosogae Segogoane, is the worst.⁷⁶

In August Linchwe's regiments stormed into the Transvaal and by September provoked a response. Pushing all the way to the Pretoria area and north to Thabazimbi, Kgatla parties sacked Boer farms and took cattle which they alleged had been seized on earlier commando raids.⁷⁷ In September, the Transvaalers retaliated, sending a commando 300-strong against the Kgatla in the Protectorate. Linchwe's men turned them back at the border, killing several men and capturing over a hundred oxen.⁷⁸ Then, in December, the commandos achieved fuller revenge by attacking Saulspoort and raiding cattle from Kgatla posts all the way to Bierkraal.⁷⁹

After receiving, at last, a new consignment of rifles on Kitchener's instructions, Linchwe's men returned to the Transvaal and secured the territory for the British until the end of the war. Between December and May two sets of rifles were supplied to the Kgatla, who fought two pitched battles near the Pilanesberg, one at Draaiberg and another at Janskop, before the Boers surrendered to the British on 31 May 1902.⁸⁰ In the final months, the Kgatla claimed they received additional inducements to fight that went well beyond the possession of Martini-Henrys: a British official reported,

The Bakhatla seem to have been under the impression that the Government relied upon them to hold the country, north of Elands River, and that if they were successful, they would receive in return, all the country held, or the farms at Saulspoort claimed as tribal territory by Kgamanyane, the father of Linchwe.⁸¹

⁷⁵ *Times*, 23 Dec. 1901.

⁷⁶ Edmeston to Lagden, 27 April 1903, NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP. See also T. Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London, 1979), 566. Boers replied with their own accusations of Kgatla atrocities on Boer civilians.

⁷⁷ Truschel, 'Nation-building and the Kgatla', 189. By November, 1901, Linchwe admitted to having captured 500 cattle. Linchwe to Ellenberger, 26 Nov. 1911, RC 6/13, BNA. Selogwe Pilane, Kgosing, Mochudi, 1981, *et al.*

⁷⁸ Truschel, 'Nation-building and the Kgatla', 189–90. Linchwe's men destroyed three wagons and captured 133 oxen, four horses, 46 donkeys and one wagon from the attacking commando. Draft to Williams letter, 7 Nov. 1901, covering Perry to Pvt. Secy. to Kitchener, 30 Nov. 1901, RC 6/3, BNA; also Williams to Milner, 7 Nov. 1901, in the same file.

⁷⁹ Linchwe claimed the loss of between six and seven thousand head. Edmeston to Lagden, 27 April 1902, NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP. *The Times*, 27 Dec. 1981, reported Linchwe's losses at '60,000 cattle'. Bierkraal is located on the northwestern side of the Pilanesberg, at a distance from Saulspoort of approximately 32 km.

⁸⁰ Linchwe *et al.* to Lawley, n.d., NA 672/03, SNA 116; Williams to Lagden, 27 May 1902, NA 2104/02, SNA 59, NAP.

⁸¹ Edmeston to Lagden, 27 April 1903, NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP. Also statement of Kgatla grievances, Driver to Griffith, 26 Sept. 1902, NA 2160/02, SNA 62, NAP;

Four months before the war ended, the Kgatla effectively controlled the country between Rustenburg and the Protectorate border and 'protected for us', noted the Resident Commissioner, 'a long frontier without the aid of a single man'.⁸²

Throughout the two and a half years war, Linchwe's Kgatla had served Britain's interests, and at heavy human cost. No accurate figures survive to quantify the personal price paid, but reasonable estimates seem possible. In 1903 the Transvaal commissioner at Pilanesberg placed the total number of Kgatla killed in action at 52, but that is much too low.⁸³ Fourteen died at Derdepoort and 40 in the September 1900 cattle raids alone, and 4 deaths and 22 casualties at Kaeye were reported at Gaberones.⁸⁴ There were, in addition, battles at Moreteletse (where Linchwe's adviser, Tlhatsi, was slain), Derdepoort again (November 1901), Draaiberg and Janskop, not to mention the fighting between Kgatla and Derdepoort Boers in December–January 1899/1900, the Kgatla raids of August–September 1901 and the December 1901 commando raid of Saulspoort and Kgatla cattleposts in the Pilanesberg. An estimate of 200 fighting men killed in action or on raids is probably conservative, and another 500 should be added to the casualty list. Informants in Mochudi still recall the many men who survived the war disfigured: amputated limbs, ears blown off and other permanent losses. With an estimated population of 30,000 Kgatla at the beginning of the war, probably 3,500 men would have been battleworthy.⁸⁵ Seven hundred dead or wounded, therefore, represents 18 per cent of the adult male population between eighteen and forty years of age, or roughly one in five.⁸⁶

There are other ways to estimate the suffering. The civilian population in Saulspoort lived in constant insecurity in what was guerrilla territory from August 1900 to February or March 1902. Those Kgatla who sided with the Boers did not fear reprisals from Linchwe's regiments, but Linchwe could not command loyalty without exposing his people to enormous risks.⁸⁷ Forty-four known executions by Boers in Saulspoort alone came to light after the war, and at cattle posts deaths also occurred during commando raids.⁸⁸ To the costs of such violence must be added the difficulties of getting enough to eat. Cultivating and harvesting on both sides of the border declined greatly in Kgatla areas during the war, in spite of good rainfall. Insecurity and the scarcity of men and cattle reduced agriculture to hoe-cultivation by women. Boys were needed to safekeep the herd deep into the Kgatla Reserve and in

Transvaal Government, *Annual Report of the Native Commissioner, 30 June 1903*, B27 Annexure D.

⁸² Williams to Lagden, 23 May 1902, NA 2104/02, NAP.

⁸³ Edmeston to Lagden, 27 April 1903, NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP.

⁸⁴ Ellenberger diary, 27 Feb. 1900.

⁸⁵ Operating on the assumption that of 14,000 males half were under age and a quarter were over.

⁸⁶ Most of these casualties were suffered by two regiments – Makoba and Majanko. Another regiment, Manthwane, spent most of the war inside the Protectorate at the border 'guarding the chief'. Casualty percentages for the two most active regiments are, therefore, likely to have been well above 18 per cent.

⁸⁷ It appears that no record or tradition survives stating that Kgatla collaborators were killed or harmed by Linchwe's supporters or regiments.

⁸⁸ Edmeston to Lagden, 27 April 1903, NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP.

Khama's country, and the men too old or too tired for regimental duties were organized, by ward, for standby defence in Mochudi and the villages. Surplus cattle were sold to purchase grain, equipment and supplies for Linchwe's people and regiments: the British were giving out only ammunition.⁸⁹

As for cattle, that was a different story. Linchwe claimed losses of more than seven thousand head, one of the few exaggerated Kgatla laments after the war.⁹⁰ The Boers did seize many Kgatla cattle during the conflict, but Kgatla regiments and raiding parties more than restored the balance. Such facts Linchwe concealed from British Protectorate officials, who before the war was over were attempting to restore stock to Boers claiming to be non-combatants or pro-British.⁹¹ The truth is that, between Derdepoort and the Boer surrender, the Kgatla expanded the national herd enormously. In 1904, the estimated size of the herd in the Kgatla Reserve alone was 16,091, which was probably as much as ten times the number of cattle the Kgatla possessed after the rinderpest and before the war. In 1911 when officials had fuller appreciation of the extent of Kgatla holdings, the number was 36,301, a figure that subsequent stock censuses show could not have been far off the mark.⁹² In the years after the war, cattle were so plentiful in the Reserve that beasts were slaughtered almost nightly in Mochudi for feasting.⁹³

Linchwe distributed the cattle spoils of war generously among the Kgatla, especially to those men who had distinguished themselves in war. During the conflict, Linchwe controlled the cattle arriving from the Transvaal with his regiments. The cattle were needed to feed his men while on duty and to sell for grain, clothing and other needed supplies.⁹⁴ After the war, Linchwe gave beasts to sons of men who died while fighting, as well as to the poor. And to the gallant men, including Molemane Monametse (Musimphila – 'ugly face') and Lebotse Motsete Phetu among many others, went the core of a new personal herd.⁹⁵ Headmen of the main wards received gifts, and to reliable

⁸⁹ Linchwe *et al.* Lawley, n.d., NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP. The Ellenberger diaries contain several references to imported grain for sale to Linchwe and other chiefs. Cf. entries for 29 Nov. 1899, 2 and 7 Feb. 1900. Linchwe was also required to submit Hut Tax returns throughout the war: *ibid.* 11 Jan. 1900, 1 Mar. 1901, 18 June 1902.

⁹⁰ Linchwe to Lawley, n.d., NA 672/03, SNA 116, NAP.

⁹¹ '[Linchwe] said that his principal grievance was that the Govt. took cattle from him and gave them back to the Boers under the impression that they were giving them up to the Boers who had surrendered... You think they are surrendered Boers, but they have fought against you.'

Draft of Williams' letter covering Perry to Private Secy. to Kitchener, 30 Nov. 1901, RC 6/3, BNA. In the same file see also Kitchener's minutes on the above. The same fear applied to cattle in Saulspoort. Linchwe *et al.* to Lawley, n.d., re restoration of stock to African collaborators with Boers, NA 672/03, SNA 116, and Driver to Griffith, 26 Sept. 1902, NA 2160/02, SNA 62, NAP.

⁹² Cattle censuses, 1904 and 1911, s. 295/2, BNA. In 1921, the figure was 33,231; in 1931, 30,000; and in 1946, when the first accurate census was conducted, 74,695. Daniel to Stanley, 1 Dec. 1922, s. 4/9, and Neal to Schapera, 15 Aug. 1933, s. 182/1, BNA; and Bechuanaland Protectorate, *Bechuanaland Protectorate Government Census 1946* (n.p., n.d.), iv, 66.

⁹³ Selogwe Pilane, Kgosing, Mochudi, 1981.

⁹⁴ Gabriel Palai, Makophane, Mochudi, 1979. According to Ratsegana Sebeke, Kgatla men also formed their own raiding parties, often hiding many of their looted cattle before bringing a few beasts before Linchwe; cf. also Segogwane and Phiri interviews, Schapera Papers.

⁹⁵ Selogwe Pilane.

wardsmen Linchwe offered generous loans of up to ten head.⁹⁶ The Saulspoort Kgatla brought cattle over to the Kgatla Reserve during and at the end of the war, and those who fought with Linchwe returned to the Transvaal with their reward in kind.⁹⁷ The flooding of the Reserve with cattle from the Transvaal transformed the Kgatla herd as well as resurrecting it. Before the war, Kgatla cattle were tall beasts with huge horns and little carrying weight.⁹⁸ After the war, the herd carried an unmistakable Afrikander stamp.⁹⁹

The Kgatla could also take satisfaction in having dealt a blow to their oldest enemy, the Boers of the western Transvaal. In battling with the commandos, the Kgatla probably suffered a higher casualty rate, because the Boer was more experienced with the rifle and therefore a better shot. The Kgatla did take their toll in the Transvaal, nevertheless, and helped in many ways to end, for decades, Boer rule. Hundreds of Boer families departed the area for all time, and many of their farms stood vacant and unsold for at least twenty years. World War I came and went before the second Boer colonization of the Transvaal north of Rustenburg got underway. In that meantime, the Kgatla had more space than three generations before them. After the war, Kgatla cattle grazed undisturbed on both sides of the Marico and Crocodile Rivers and Kgatla in Saulspoort had much land available for agriculture. The post-war Saulspoorter had a reputation for being rich, even among the few Boers still farming in the area. Before the war, white farmers had no difficulties in getting abundant black labour at no cost to themselves. After it, they had trouble hiring a single man at the going rate. 'I know of one particular occasion', reported the Sub-Native Commissioner at Pilansberg, when a farmer told me that he was working on his land, putting in tobacco, and he saw some natives passing at the end of his land. As he wanted labour he went up to them and offered them 2s. 6d. a day to work for him, but they simply turned round to him and said 'If you would like to work for 2s. 6d. a day, baas, we shall be only too pleased to employ you.'¹⁰⁰

As late as 1914, Boer women and children gathering the harvest alone was another common scene.¹⁰¹

For their sacrifices in the war, the Kgatla achieved much of what they had set out to accomplish. Linchwe's regiments recovered far more cattle than the rinderpest had taken away, and the defeated Boer of the Transvaal ceased, or so it seemed, to farm or reign supreme. Prosperity, an experience unknown to Kgatla living before the South African War, became commonplace at the beginning of the twentieth century. The hand of the Protectorate government

⁹⁶ Dupleix Pilane (Gaborone, 1979) and Selogwe Pilane.

⁹⁷ Kgamanyane Pilane, J. R. Phiri, and England M. T. Pilane, all of Saulspoort (1981).

⁹⁸ Amos Kgamanyane Pilane.

⁹⁹ Nearly a half-century later, the 1948 'Report on the Cattle Industry' noted that the Kgatla owned good cattle '...which they admit owe their origin largely to the cattle acquired from the Transvaal during the Anglo-Boer War. Today there are in this Reserve a number of cattle that would rank high as Afrikander amongst Union cattle breeders.' v, 1/5/2, Box 1, BNA.

¹⁰⁰ Statement of H. D. M. Standford (Senior Native Commissioner, 1907-1910), in Union of South Africa, *Report of the Select Committee on Native Affairs* (Cape Town: Cape Times, 1911), 90-1.

¹⁰¹ Statement of P. G. W. Grobler, in Union of South Africa, *Report of the Natives Land Commission*, vol. 11, U.G. 22-1916 (Cape Town, 1916), 264.

was then light, and in the Transvaal a similar policy of British administration was being implemented. In 1902 Linchwe installed Ramono as deputy chief in Saulspoort, and in the Kgatla Reserve Linchwe enjoyed greater and firmer control over his people than perhaps any Kgatla king before.

The Kgatla did fall short of attaining one important objective: reclaiming ancestral land in the Transvaal. Kgatla gained immediate access to much land in the Saulspoort area and elsewhere, not because they owned the property, but for the simple reason that the Boers had vacated it. The promise, that in peace the Kgatla would be given the territory they had controlled in war, was disavowed. Farms owned by Boers, whether British enemy or friend during the war, remained their property under the new administration. British protection of Boer interests pleased neither the Kgatla nor the others who had helped Kitchener's forces: it was reported that 'natives are greatly disappointed at not being made grants of land in consideration of the services they rendered...; they fully expect that the farms would be taken from the Boers and given to them'.¹⁰² The Transvaal administration also postponed changes in their predecessor's land policies, i.e., that land so purchased was tribal property held in the name of the 'Native Commissioner'. No demarcation of reserves along Protectorate lines was undertaken, and in terms of legal occupation the Saulspoort Kgatla ended the war where they had started – with Saulspoort 269, Modderkuil 565, Kruidfontein 649 and Holfontein 593.

In spite of the obstacles of British land policy, movement towards reunification continued to characterize Kgatla political life. After the war, the Saulspoort Kgatla remained Linchwe's loyal subjects because he established the means to assist them materially and control them politically. Saulspoorters were a prosperous group after the war, but only Linchwe had enough wealth to afford the rising cost of land in the Transvaal. Linchwe was generous with cattle to all his people, and he sold many to purchase additional farms that gave the Saulspoort Kgatla space enough to compare with other African groups in the Rustenburg area. Between 1913 and 1920, Linchwe oversaw the purchase of additional farms around Saulspoort and more than doubled the area of Kgatla settlement. The Natives Land Act of 1913 made modest provision for the scheduling of farms which Africans were entitled to buy for communal purposes.¹⁰³ In the Pilanesberg a total of eighteen white-owned farms became available to the Kgatla, only twelve of which were suitable for farming. Linchwe bought eleven.¹⁰⁴ With the further additions of Middelkuil 564 (purchased 1903) and Witfontein 215 (1906), the area of Kgatla-owned land after the South African War increased thereby from 14,891 to 46,762 morgen, or from 127 to 400 sq km.¹⁰⁵ With gifts of land, Linchwe commanded respect and allegiance and, as the primary source of Transvaal Kgatla

¹⁰² Transvaal Government, *Annual Report of the Native Commissioner, 30 June 1903*, B.27, Annexure D.

¹⁰³ *Report of the Natives Land Commission*, vol. 1, 33.

¹⁰⁴ 1913: Cyferkuil 372, Rhenosterkraal 563, Legkraal 725, and Wilgespruit 631; 1915: Zandfontein 729; 1916: Rooderand 399 and Spitskop 298; 1918: Welgeval 749; 1919: Koedoesfontein 818 and Doornpoort 251.

¹⁰⁵ Farm sizes and purchase dates have been compiled from various files in the National Archives, Pretoria, the Botswana National Archives, and from Breutz, *Tribes of the ... Districts*, 244–5.

support, ranked politically above the British.¹⁰⁶ Territorial disunity continued after the war, but Kgatla on both sides of the border became, under Linchwe, very much one people and fellow members of a single political chiefdom astride two colonial worlds.

The Kgatla campaign in the South African War may also be viewed as a form of resistance to colonialism in Southern Africa in both its settler and imperial variations. As post-war developments in Linchwe's chiefdom illustrate, entry into the war went well beyond considerations of which white adversary the Kgatla preferred as ruler in the ensuing peace. Not only did Linchwe and his regiments promote Kgatla interests by securing cattle and land, but their accomplishments were intended to reduce the level of white control in the years following the war. Linchwe's primary objective was the defeat of the Boers, but he also distrusted his British allies and their intentions with regard to Africans. In the long run, he wanted to counter, if not frustrate, the exercise of British authority in his chiefdom. After all, his internal political opponents represented those elements wanting closer, more dominant colonial involvement in Kgatla affairs. Victory in the war removed support from Segale and Mokae, and Linchwe ruled within the Reserve and at Saulspoort more securely than at any other period in his long reign.

The Kgatla case suggests, too, that the non-westernized black African leadership entered the war with few illusions about the consequences of post-war British rule. Warwick notes that the black westernized élite, who favoured the British, expected fuller rights to follow a Boer defeat.¹⁰⁷ But traditional African leadership, still functioning actively in many parts of southern Africa, perhaps alone had the resources of communication and knowledge of the region to anticipate the course of events in the war and the dispensation of the peace. It was no coincidence that whites on both sides depended heavily on Africans for military intelligence or that Linchwe and his Kgatla regiments struck in advance of Boer and British movements and plans. Blacks lacked sufficient arms to influence significantly the course of the war on their own. But their knowledge – of Boer and Briton, of geography, and of themselves – gave such leaders as Linchwe a position of strength from which to orchestrate events in limited arenas of conflict and to shore up authority and power within their chiefdoms in preparation for the new phase of colonial rule to come.

SUMMARY

Although the importance of the African role in the South African War (1889–1902) is now recognized, this study of the Bakgatla ba ga Kgafela is the first to demonstrate an African perception of events and argue that the Kgatla initiated military action and pursued goals independent of a simple British vs. Boer formula. The war created major economic and political opportunities for the Kgatla, a people physically separated and colonially partitioned. Half the Kgatla lived in the Kgatla Reserve of the British-ruled Bechuanaland Protectorate, and the other half lived in the Saulspoort area of the western Transvaal under Boer rule. Their leader, Linchwe I (1874–1924), maintained his capital at Mochudi in the Protectorate and

¹⁰⁶ Minute no. 642, Edmeston to Native Commr., Transvaal, 30 July 1903, NA 1405/03, SNA 140, NAP.

¹⁰⁷ Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, 181–2.

received only partial allegiance from the Saulspoor Kgatla. Soon after the war began, Linchwe involved his regiments actively in fighting alongside the British in the Protectorate and raiding on their own in the Transvaal in an effort to eliminate Boer settlement and political control in Saulspoor and other areas of the western Transvaal. Kgatla regiments also emptied Boer farms of cattle which, in addition to restoring the national herd decimated by the 1897 rinderpest, Linchwe used in establishing his political hold over the Saulspoor Kgatla. Protectorate officials were grateful for Kgatla support, but Linchwe disguised the extent and nature of Kgatla operations and concealed from the British his political objectives. Linchwe's campaign made possible in the years following the war the reunification of the Kgatla under his authority, the distribution of wealth among all his people and the reduction of colonial interference in the political lives of his people.