

DEVELOPMENT, POLITICS, AND THE CENTRALIZATION OF STATE POWER IN LESOTHO, 1960–75*

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Abstract

The rhetoric of development served as a language for Sotho politicians from 1960–70 to debate the meanings of political participation. The relative paucity of aid in this period gave outsized importance to small projects run in rural villages, and stood in stark contrast to the period from the mid-1970s onwards when aid became an ‘anti-politics machine’ that worked to undermine national sovereignty. Examination of the democratic period in Lesotho from 1966–70 helps explain the process by which newly independent states gave up some of their recently won sovereignty, and how a turn to authoritarianism helped contribute to this process.

Key Words

Lesotho, Southern Africa, postcolonial, development, political culture.

In 1965, over a year before Lesotho’s independence from British rule, Leabua Jonathan’s Basotho National Party (BNP) was the surprise winner of elections. Jonathan, like leaders across the continent as colonial rule drew to a close, promised to bring ‘a healthy and dynamic economic programme and development’ to Lesotho.¹ There were many structural obstacles to achievement of this goal, including a lack of investment, virtually no planning capacity within government departments, few formal contacts with funding agencies and countries abroad, and Lesotho’s dependent position geographically and economically relative to apartheid South Africa. British culpability in this ‘underdevelopment’ was acknowledged by the last British government representative, Alexander Falconer Giles.²

* Funding for this research was provided in part by the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship program, the SUNY Cortland History Department, the International Seminar on Decolonization, and a grant from the Faculty Research Program at SUNY Cortland. Previous versions of this article were presented at the African Studies Association Meeting and the North Eastern Workshop on Southern Africa, as well as the 2013 International Seminar on Decolonization in Washington, DC. This article is stronger for all the feedback in these venues, as well as for the close read by the anonymous reviewers of *The Journal of African History*. Author’s email: aernif1@msu.edu

1 C. Lancaster, *United States and Africa: Into the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, DC, 1993), 11; ‘Chief Leabua Jonathan’s press conference’, *Basutoland News* (Ladybrand), 7 May 1965, 1.
2 Jack Halpern called Lesotho (along with Swaziland and Botswana) a ‘hostage’. See J. Halpern, *South Africa’s Hostages: Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland* (Baltimore, 1965).

He wrote on the eve of independence in 1966 that

Britain's neglect over the past century has led to Basutoland's complete dependence on the Republic of South Africa, and that by granting independence with insufficient aid Britain is in fact 'selling out' the territory to the Republic ... Impecunious independence will not be independence at all, and for this Britain must bear the responsibility.³

The belief that development was intimately tied to questions of sovereignty and independence was not confined to the British or to the ruling BNP, as all four political parties and many individuals also made development a central part of their independence vision. Many Sotho framed independence in developmentalist terms and hoped that it would enable individuals to find paid employment at home rather than in the mines, factories, and farms of apartheid South Africa. This was, in many ways, a reaction against apartheid and the conditions previous generations of Sotho migrant workers had faced, but the belief was widespread that independence *could* bring about substantial change. Despite the consistency of the rhetoric, there was little agreement on what exactly 'development' meant, how it could be delivered in the new country, or who should have significant input into the process. In addition, there was precious little funding for development in the first years of independence. The heady rhetoric of Prime Minister Jonathan and other government leaders did not translate into large amounts of aid from abroad as bilateral and multilateral funding from all sources was relatively paltry in the period up to the mid-1970s, and international organizations were slow to engage with the Lesotho government on development projects.

The story of the early days of foreign aid in Lesotho is important on a number of levels. Firstly, development became one of the main sites of political contestation within Lesotho. Individuals and politicians used the language of development to make arguments about the proper role of government, and how centralized governmental authority should be. Development was central to conceptions of politics and political belonging rather than being divorced, as it was in later eras, from the political process.⁴ Secondly, the study of aid highlights the very real lack of state involvement in rural life in the early independence era. Minimal state involvement combined with a vibrant and relatively open society, a free press, and a thriving multi-party system, suggests that there was a rupture, a moment perhaps, in the post-independence period when debates about development were meaningful in the lives of ordinary Sotho. Due to the paucity of aid and the threat of electoral repercussions, the government could not centralize and control projects as it could in a later period. This relative decentralization had been partly present during the late colonial period, but the inability of Lesotho to garner funds from non-British sources mooted the possibilities. It was also not possible after the coup of 1970, when the government cracked down on dissent, opposition political parties, and civil society organizations.

Attention to this post-independence period reveals that while the colonial state and the postcolonial state of the mid-1970s resembled one another, the line of continuity between

3 The National Archives of the United Kingdom, Kew (TNA) Colonial Office (CO) 1048/892, Basutoland: Final Report Before Independence, British Government Representative to Secretary of State for the Colonies, 3 Oct. 1966.

4 J. Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge, 1990), xv.

them was not direct. Aid and development in the form of 'big projects' helped the authoritarian state consolidate control in the rural areas, but also forced the newly independent government to relinquish some of its hard-won sovereignty to international funding agencies. Thus, the forms the state took after 1970 were, at least in part, responses to promises of development made to citizens in the early independence period and not simply the natural evolution of the Westminster package of governance received with independence. The hopes and disillusionments of the early independence era thus contributed to the authoritarian turn of the postcolonial state, which in turn enabled the state to work with development agencies and funding bodies to centralize power, but at the expense of sovereignty.

LESOTHO, DEVELOPMENT, AND METHODOLOGY

For this article, I use an expansive definition of development that encompasses projects designed to boost the macroeconomic productivity of Lesotho, as well as poverty alleviation programs. I also include general foreign assistance funding like food aid because Sotho tended to lump together all forms of support from abroad as they made them the centerpiece of public political debate. This study mainly examines small development projects that, after independence, fell under the aegis of the Community Development Department in the Ministry of Interior.⁵ Such projects are hard to access in the historical record because they were small-scale, mainly in rural areas, and theoretically at least, run partly on the initiative of local people. This limited historical visibility is especially true for Lesotho where state archival sources are not available for much of the late colonial period and completely unavailable for the post-independence period. The archives of the United States, the United Kingdom, and the World Bank provide details on funding and some civil servant responses, but as John Darwin cautions, these only tell part of the story.⁶

A better assessment of the meaning of these projects, therefore, requires alternate sources. Thus, this article draws upon interviews conducted with Sotho who experienced such projects. Such evidence needs to be handled with care as people tend to read the past in light of the present, and it can be challenging for people to reconstruct experiences that do not correspond to 'big events'.⁷ Today, many in Lesotho express disillusionment with development, believing that it has largely benefitted those with pre-existing ties to political power or resources. Since the electoral victory in 1993 of the Basotho Congress Party (BCP), the party that was denied power in the 1970 coup, and the failure of it and subsequent governments to appreciably change the results of aid programs, there has been a softening of opinion toward the BNP government of the late 1960s. As one man who had been a student and opposition supporter noted about the BNP government: 'In hindsight [they] did their best given the atmosphere of the time.'⁸

5 United States National Archives, College Park, Maryland (NACP) Record Group (RG) 286 USAID, Central Subject Files 1968–73, Bureau for Africa, Office for Southern Africa Regional Coordination, Box 5, Folder Assistance Plans, Annual Report Special Self-Help Report, 21 July 1969.

6 J. Darwin, 'Decolonization and the end of empire', in R. Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume V: Historiography* (New York, 2001), 556.

7 D. A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York, 1995), 12–13.

8 Interview with Mohlalefi Moteane, Maseru, 27 May 2009.

1970 is a watershed for Sotho because the January elections marked the end of democratic rule. Between independence in 1966 and 1970, Lesotho enjoyed a free and open press, plus a vibrant, if vitriolic, political process with two opposition parties represented in parliament. After the January poll, the ruling BNP government refused to hand over power to the opposition BCP, which had won the election. They were able to do this because the security forces, especially the elite Police Mobile Unit (PMU), which was funded by South African aid in 1968 and again after the coup, supported the incumbent.⁹ Following the coup, there was scattered violence throughout the country that stretched into April. A failed BCP coup in 1974 led opposition leaders to go into exile in Botswana. Jonathan's BNP government ruled until they were ousted by the military in 1986, with multiparty democracy not returning to Lesotho until 1993. Thus, the time between 1966 and 1970 is unusually salient in people's minds as the only democratic period prior to 1993.¹⁰

In addition to local memories of independence, this article also makes use of interviews with American Peace Corps Volunteers who served from 1967 to 1971 in Lesotho. There have been a few tentative efforts to assess the role the Peace Corps played in particular African political and developmental contexts, but most of the literature on the organization has examined how the Peace Corps fit into US Cold War foreign policy, or how the experience changed volunteers.¹¹ By contrast, I look at these individuals as part and parcel of the politicization of development work as their arrival was trumpeted as the prime minister's political and developmental success. Their memories of Lesotho were also confined only to the late 1960s as most volunteers never returned after their two or three years of service.

Studies of 'big projects' in Africa, like dams or railways, have been used effectively to tease out changing conceptions of citizenship, relations with the state, and local engagement with global ideas.¹² In places without 'big projects', however, the rhetoric and practice of development still played a large role in local political conceptions. Analyses of smaller-scale projects have found, for instance, 'competing constructions of citizenship' in rural Tanzania around the rhetoric of *ujamaa* and self-help, and have been used to identify changes taking place in rural Uganda away from big development projects.¹³

9 TNA Ministry of Overseas Development (OD) 31/371, British Aid to Lesotho 1971/72 and 1972/73; B. M. Khaketla, *Lesotho 1970: An African Coup Under the Microscope* (London, 1971), 120.

10 Most in Lesotho refer to the time as *Qomatsi*, or the State of Emergency. It can refer explicitly to 1970 or more broadly to the period of unrest up to the failed 1974 BCP coup attempt.

11 J. A. Amin, 'Serving in Africa: US Peace Corps in Cameroon', *Afrika Spectrum*, 48:1 (2013) 71–87; J. A. Amin 'United States Peace Corps volunteers in Guinea: a case study of US-African relations during the Cold War', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 16:2 (1998), 197–226; F. Fischer, *Making Them Like Us: Peace Corps Volunteers in the 1960s* (Washington, DC, 1998); S. Meisler, *When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and Its First Fifty Years* (Boston, 2011); J. Zimmerman, 'Beyond double consciousness: black Peace Corps volunteers in Africa, 1961–1971', *Journal of American History*, 82:3 (1995), 999–1028.

12 A. Isaacman and B. Isaacman, *Dams, Displacement, and the Delusion of Development: Cahora Bassa and its Legacies in Mozambique, 1965–2007* (Athens, OH, 2013); J. Monson, *Africa's Freedom Railway: How a Chinese Development Project Changed Lives and Livelihoods in Tanzania* (Bloomington, IN, 2009); J. C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT, 1988).

13 P. Lal, 'Self-reliance and the state: the multiple meanings of development in early post-colonial Tanzania', *Africa*, 82:2 (2012), 230; B. Jones, *Beyond the State in Rural Uganda* (Edinburgh, 2008), 10.

In Lesotho, while there had been two larger agricultural projects in the 1950s, and the massive project that would become the Highlands Water Project in the 1990s was under discussion, there were no ‘big projects’ operating between 1966 and 1970. Small-scale development projects – those that did not involve major capital expenditures and were generally conducted at the village level – were, thus, the only development efforts afoot.

James Ferguson nicely elucidates the story of development in Lesotho from about 1975 onward.¹⁴ His account has been critical to explaining what ‘development’ does to local politics, and has been applied to a wide variety of cases in the developing world.¹⁵ His account, however, leaves aside the question of how development institutions came to occupy their place of prominence, picking up the story only after bilateral and multilateral organizations were well established in Lesotho. Similarly, Khabele Matlosa, in an unpublished paper, touches on the goal of the BNP to ‘consolidate its power base through coercion and co-option using aid as a convenient medium’, but does not go into depth about how the government effected these programs.¹⁶ The pace of development in late colonial and early independence Lesotho was slow, but funding and the number of organizations present both increased during this period. A key goal of Jonathan’s government was to increase external funding for development. Yet, in these early years, ‘development’ was not the overriding force it would become by the mid-1970s when it was able to expand and entrench ‘bureaucratic state power’; rather it was a highly contingent and contested process that many tried to shape for their own purposes.¹⁷ Tracing changes in the debates around development helps explain why the government of Lesotho, which had just attained independence, was willing to surrender sovereignty and control over territory to development institutions.

EARLIER DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS IN LESOTHO

The concept of ‘development’ was not new in the 1960s in Lesotho. Although Sotho politicians complained about the lack of funding for development in the late colonial period, people had strongly resisted the centerpiece of colonial development policy – the continuing soil erosion campaign that began in the 1930s. Lesotho was not a ‘traditional subsistence peasant society’ as the World Bank claimed in the 1970s. Rather, since the nineteenth century, Sotho had been participants in the regional economy, both as agricultural producers and migrant laborers.¹⁸ A combination of land shortages, drought, and the arrival of the railways meant that by the 1920s and 1930s, Lesotho was a permanent net importer of food and exporter of labor.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the colonial government strongly believed that Lesotho was an agrarian society and this belief ensured that most colonial

14 Ferguson, *Anti-Politics*.

15 See J. Wainwright, *Decolonizing Development: Colonial Power and the Maya* (Malden, MA, 2008).

16 K. Matlosa, ‘Aid, development and democracy in Lesotho, 1966–1996’ (unpublished paper, Centre for Southern African Studies, University of Western Cape, 1999), 7.

17 Ferguson, *Anti-Politics*, xiv.

18 World Bank Country Report on Lesotho (1975), quoted in Ferguson, *Anti-Politics*, 25.

19 C. Murray and P. Sanders, *Medicine Murder in Colonial Lesotho: The Anatomy of a Moral Crisis* (Edinburgh, 2005), 16–19.

development funding was directed towards education and the improvement of subsistence agriculture.

Following the drought of the early 1930s, the colonial government recruited Sir Alan Pim to conduct an economic survey. His 1935 report focused attention for the first time on soil erosion in the territory. On account of the report, the government received a loan from the Colonial Office to implement a territory-wide plan to build terraces on hill-side fields, create grass buffer strips, and put livestock on different grazing schedules for communally-held land.²⁰ The chieftaincy and some Sotho commoners initially supported these efforts, but others complained about the loss of already-scarce land for plowing, and the lack of local input into the process. By the early 1940s, resistance to the project became widespread as Sotho farmers noticed that the project actually increased erosion in many places, and covertly sabotaged anti-erosion works.²¹ Additionally, the similarities between these programs and 'Betterment Schemes' in South Africa increased skepticism of and resistance toward the projects.²² That the projects were quite similar is not surprising because many of the managers for the Lesotho scheme had moved from the initial project in the Herschel District directly into the Basutoland administration.²³ Thus, the resistance of Sotho to the soil erosion campaign was rooted not in a blind distrust of the idea of 'development', but in a reaction to their own experiences as farmers, the lack of formal structures that could take account of their views, and a general distrust of South African administrators in Lesotho. There were similar reactions to the two 'pilot projects' that the colonial government set up using Colonial Development and Welfare funds in the late 1950s. Both the Taung and Tebetebeng projects featured the promise of better agricultural yields through soil conservation and mechanization, but they again were modeled on South African betterment schemes, and failed to incorporate feedback mechanisms to allow local people the opportunity to voice concerns and contribute their own expertise. As Motlatsi Thabane explains, 'The Basotho had no mechanism for discussing the problems they saw in their fields with the government; independent action was their sole recourse.'²⁴ Both projects folded within a year of each other in 1960 and 1961, respectively.

The Taung Scheme, especially, attracted organized political opposition as the BCP (known prior to 1960 as the Basutoland African Congress) used dissatisfaction with the project as a way of mobilizing new rural supporters.²⁵ As we have seen, most local people attributed its failure to the inability to incorporate local experiences and grievances, while colonial administrators, on the other hand, blamed Sotho farmers' lack of

20 K. B. Showers, *Imperial Gullies: Soil Erosion and Conservation in Lesotho* (Athens, OH, 2005), 155.

21 *Ibid.* 175.

22 TNA Records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) 141-887, Subversive Organizations, memo from District Commissioner Butha Buthe to Resident Commissioner Maseru, 2 May 1952.

23 C. J. de Wet, *Moving Together, Drifting Apart: Betterment Planning and Villagisation in a South African Homeland* (Johannesburg, 1995); Showers, *Gullies*, 178.

24 M. Thabane, 'Aspects of colonial economy and society, 1868-1966', in N. Pule and M. Thabane (eds.), *Essays on Aspects of the Political Economy of Lesotho, 1500-2000* (Roma, Lesotho, 2002), 118; Showers, *Gullies*, 227.

25 TNA FCO 141-181, Elias Monare Case, letter from District Commissioner Mohale's Hoek to Resident Commissioner Maseru, 26 Apr. 1961.

commitment to the project.²⁶ The Taung and Tebetebeng schemes represented the last attempts by the colonial government to implement large-scale rural development projects prior to independence and, somewhat ironically, served as the templates for BNP projects in the 1970s. Similar to the colonial schemes, postcolonial projects were also run in a top-down fashion, and deemed to be ‘failures’ on account of a lack of public support; however, the projects still lacked mechanisms or structures to incorporate local agricultural knowledge, or allow for local people to express grievances about how the projects were operating.²⁷ This recycling of colonial development plans is not altogether surprising because, as Joseph Hodge has demonstrated, colonial administrators often transitioned into positions with international organizations like the World Bank.²⁸

The desire for greater economic opportunity led to some small-scale experiments with agriculture run by local communities and the Catholic Church. In the late 1940s and 1950s, James Machobane developed a system of intercropping that promised to increase the food security and income of subsistence farmers. He started his own self-financed agricultural college in the Nqechane area of the Leribe District, and even garnered the support, for a short time, of the colonial agricultural department, which ran a field test of his methods in 1959–60. Worried about Machobane’s ability to mobilize rural populations in scattered lowland villages that were not part of large-scale government agricultural development schemes, first the colonial and then Jonathan’s BNP government harassed and shut down Machobane’s educational efforts in the 1960s.²⁹

Earlier in the 1930s, the Catholic Church organized cooperative societies, built new schools and clinics, and supported organizations (*kopanos*) working to mobilize the scant resources of rural communities, especially in the mountain areas. The colonial government was broadly supportive of efforts to ameliorate poverty, but worried that these church programs were undermining expatriate traders, a key government constituency. During the Second World War, the Catholic response to government attempts to regulate these programs ‘skirted the boundaries of treason’ in encouraging people to resist conscription and changes to the chieftaincy.³⁰ The Catholic programs, however, were popular with local people and even after the Church had to back away from its consumer cooperatives, it continued to support *kopanos* that increased the ability of women in rural communities to learn useful domestic skills, participate in self-help building projects, and earn some income through handicrafts and sewing.³¹ This participation, particularly by rural Catholic woman who were stereotypically seen as being the most ‘conservative’, demonstrated that it was the forms development took that engendered resistance, rather

26 Showers, *Gullies*, 59.

27 M. Ngqaleni, ‘A review of Lesotho’s agricultural policies and strategies for the 1990s’, in S. Santho and M. Sejanamane (eds.), *Southern Africa After Apartheid: Prospects for the Inner Periphery in the 1990s* (Harare, 1991), 130–2.

28 J. M. Hodge, ‘British colonial expertise, post-colonial careering and the early history of international development’, *Journal of Modern European History*, 8:1 (2010), 24–46.

29 J. J. Machobane and R. Berold, *Drive Out Hunger: The Story of J. J. Machobane of Lesotho* (Johannesburg, 2003), 43–62 and 70–3.

30 M. Epprecht, ‘This Matter of Women is Getting Very Bad’: *Gender, Development and Politics in Colonial Lesotho* (Pietermaritzburg, 2000), 181–2.

31 Epprecht, ‘Matter of Women’, 176–87.

than the idea itself.³² This continued into the post-independence period as well, as aid and government planners took resistance to particular forms of development as being synonymous with an aversion to the idea of development. Writing in 1966, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) planner N. Kaul claimed that rural Sotho, especially women, had a ‘pathetic contentment’ toward the idea of ‘development’.³³ In reality, however, rural Sotho were unwilling to buy blindly into top-down development projects.

DEBATES AROUND INCREASES IN DEVELOPMENT AID FOR LESOTHO

The 1958 constitution called for elections in 1960 to choose district councils. This step toward participatory democracy, and the implicit promise of movement toward independence, sharpened focus on development and the perceived lack of governmental efforts in this area. The regular operating budget of Basutoland had run a deficit since 1959/60 as government services increased without a concomitant rise in revenues. The UK government met this budget gap with grants-in-aid, but this flow of cash, which reached almost £3 million by 1967/68, did not cover any new development efforts, merely funding day-to-day governmental operations.³⁴ The grants from the British government to fund development (mainly the soil erosion campaign and school construction) came through the Colonial Development and Welfare (CDW) fund up to 31 March 1967, and afterwards came through aid packages negotiated at three-year intervals. The CDW monies, however, only totaled about \$23 million in the two decades prior to independence.³⁵

In the pre-independence period, there was some non-British assistance in Lesotho. From 1964, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) funded scholarships for students at the University of Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland, and assisted the Ford Foundation in funding the transfer of the university from the Catholic Church to the government.³⁶ The World Food Program (WFP) contracted with Catholic Relief Services to provide emergency food supplies to people in Lesotho in times of drought, with funding coming from the US government under Title II of the PL-480 law (Food for Peace).³⁷ In 1965, the colonial government had also negotiated a loan of \$4.1 million from the International Development Association (IDA), an arm of the World Bank, to pave the main road through the territory from Maseru to Leribe (see Fig. 1).³⁸ The gradual increase in these types of aid from non-British sources and the experiences of other African countries at independence gave politicians of all parties hope for more aid, causing them to place foreign development assistance at the center of their party platforms.

32 M. Epprecht, ‘Women’s “conservatism” and the politics of gender in late colonial Lesotho’, *The Journal of African History*, 36:1 (1995), 29–56.

33 N. Kaul, *Report on Local Government in Basutoland* (Maseru, 1966), np.

34 TNA OD 31/171, Post Independence Aid to Lesotho, paper on aid to Lesotho, 30 Dec. 1968.

35 Matlosa, ‘Aid’, 5.

36 Before 1964 it was Pius XII College and then the University of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland (UBBS).

37 NACP RG 286 USAID, Central Subject Files, 1968–73, Bureau for Africa/Office for Southern Africa Regional Coordination, Box 3, Folder PRM 3 Regional Activities-Lesotho, FY 69, Letter Frank Ellis Director, Food for Freedom Service to Mr. Ed O’Brien, Director Catholic Relief Services, 2 May 1969.

38 World Bank Archives, Washington, DC (WBA), 1859610, Roads Project, Lesotho/Basutoland, Negotiations Volume 1 1961–5; WBA 1859611, Basutoland Road Project Negotiations 2, 1966.

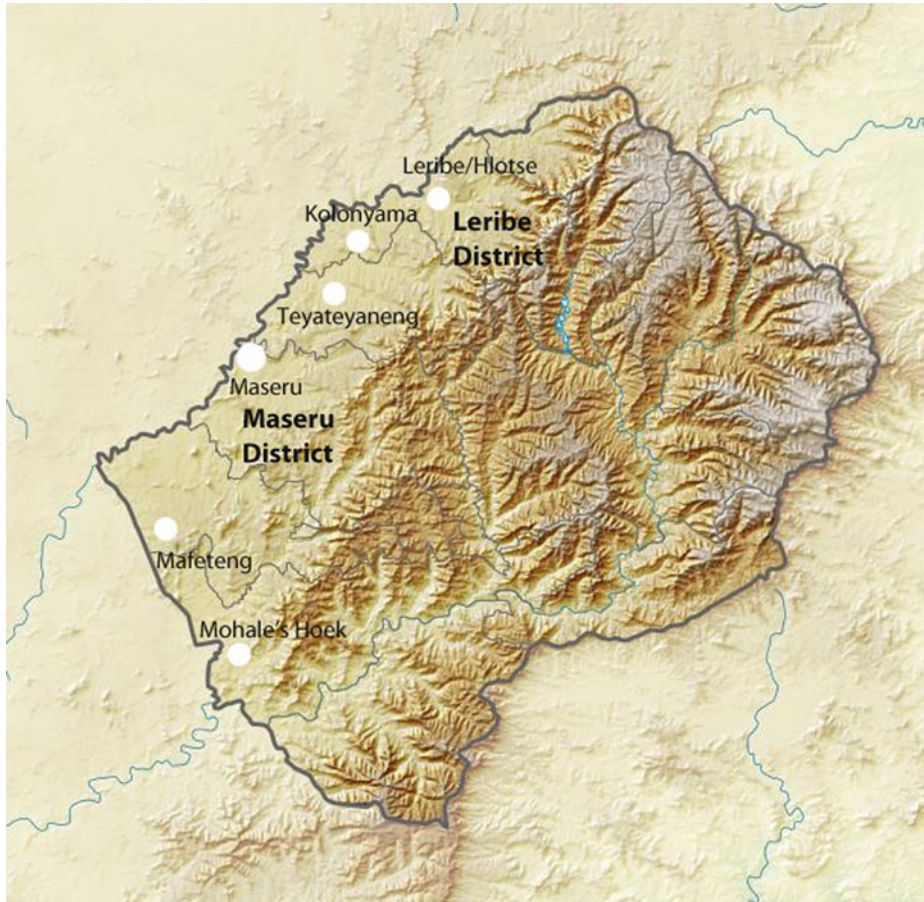


Fig. 1. Map of Lesotho.

During the 1965 election campaign, fissures around the questions of aid and foreign assistance came to the fore. The BNP pledged to work with South Africa to maintain current employment levels for Sotho, and promised that cooperation would lead to economic assistance as well from the apartheid regime. The BCP and the Marema-Tlou Freedom Party (MFP) both disavowed this possibility, pledging instead to look at all sources abroad *except* for South Africa. That both were taking money from communist countries (the MFP from the Soviet Union and the BCP from China), however, left them open to the BNP charge that they would introduce communism to Lesotho after independence.³⁹ Broad agreement with the principle of more foreign assistance did not translate into agreement on the proper source for such assistance.

When Jonathan won the elections, he faced the reality that the main source for development assistance in the late 1960s remained the British government. UK development funds

39 R. F. Weisfelder, *Political Contention in Lesotho, 1952–65* (Roma, Lesotho, 1999), 13–14, 36–7, and 45–6.

pledged at independence in 1966 totaled £2 million, which Jonathan considered inadequate. This was both because they fell short of the £5.3 million he requested, and because Botswana, independent the same week as Lesotho with a smaller population, was promised £2.5 million for development.⁴⁰ Jonathan and his government were disappointed in the total amount, and were worried about not meeting the lofty development expectations of the electorate.

Part of the reason Britain gave for not offering more aid was the lack of planning capacity in the Lesotho government. This was a technical problem and one that was at least partly the fault of the British administration. It also, however, had political implications as aid planning was part of broader efforts to promote modernization by using development, in the words of Larry Grubbs, as a means of ‘not only enhance[ing] the likelihood of economic success, [but] plac[ing] key decisions beyond politics’ and ‘helping to centralize authority’.⁴¹ In 1966, responsibility for planning rested with the Ministry of Economic Development, Industry and Commerce, which had a middle and senior level staff of four.⁴² A Central Planning Office was created in June 1967, to coordinate development efforts and create a five-year plan, but this office lacked clout within the government as ministries retained the ability to procure their own aid, encouraging jockeying for power and prestige. This lack of governmental centralization meant that in 1966/7, for instance, the prime minister personally negotiated the Peace Corps program with the Americans; Agriculture and the University were negotiating separately with the Canadians; Health with UNICEF; and External Affairs with the Austrians, to name a few.⁴³ This confused set of affairs at the top levels of government meant that the aid that did arrive in Lesotho in the late 1960s came in the form of small amounts for small projects. In 1967, the Swedish International Development Agency and the Canadian government both gave between \$100,000 and \$200,000, while US food assistance through the WFP totaled about \$2 million, the Peace Corps cost just over \$1 million, and the *charge d'affaires* in Maseru had around \$25,000 to disburse.⁴⁴

While these absolute numbers were not negligible, Jonathan’s government was not able in the early independence period to land ‘big’ development projects (outside of the World Bank loan that had been a colonial project) that would have provided prestige and significant employment prospects. This was not for lack of effort as Jonathan proposed an agricultural project to USAID and approached the South African government for aid on agricultural and industrial projects. USAID was hamstrung by congressional restrictions that limited African programs to ten strategic partners, which did not include Lesotho,

40 TNA OD 31/169, Lesotho Post Independence Aid, recorded conversation between High Commissioner, Maseru and Prime Minister Jonathan, 9 Feb. 1967.

41 L. Grubbs, *Secular Missionaries: Americans and African Development in the 1960s* (Amherst, MA, 2009), 76.

42 D. Hirschmann, *Administration of Planning in Lesotho* (Manchester, 1981), 13.

43 *Ibid.* 23–4.

44 *Parliamentary Debates of the National Assembly, Hansard, Official Report, 17th April, 1967* (Maseru, 1967); NACP RG 286 USAID, Southern Africa Regional Activities Coordination 1969–73, Box 6; NACP RG 286 USAID, Central Subject Files, 1968–1973, Bureau for Africa/Office for Southern Africa Regional Coordination, Box 3, Telegram Department of State to Maseru, 22 May 1969; NACP RG 59, State Department, Executive Secretariat, Visit Files, Folder V-42 Visit of PM Jonathan of Lesotho, 22 Sept. 1967, Talking points for meeting with Jonathan.

and the South Africans, in the midst of debates about betterment schemes, were unwilling to give development aid to Lesotho.⁴⁵ The idea of getting South African support for creating industry in Lesotho was always naïve as profitable industry on the borders of South Africa would have undercut Bantustan and border industries schemes. Thus, the South African government sabotaged efforts by the Lesotho National Development Corporation to recruit a Honda Motors manufacturing plant and a commercial radio station.⁴⁶ The South African regime did finance an expansion of the elite security forces, the PMU, to bolster the Jonathan regime, and to encourage continued cooperation between the Lesotho police and South African security forces. They also sent technical advisors, including economic planners, on secondment.⁴⁷ The ‘big’ project Jonathan worked so hard for was a precursor to the Lesotho Highlands Water Projects that would sell water and electricity to South Africa. Negotiations involved the governments of Lesotho, South Africa, and the UK, with the World Bank also present, but the project fell apart in 1972.⁴⁸ South Africa was not willing to put such critical infrastructure in the hands of a black-run state, and did not trust Jonathan to remain in power and supportive long enough for a project of that magnitude to be built.

South African denial of aid and sabotage of projects was just one aspect of the inability of Jonathan’s government to attract assistance as its lack of coordination between ministries further hindered procurement. The turmoil in the government resulted in part from a partial purge of the civil service that followed the BNP victory. Jonathan and his close supporters perceived most civil servants and educated Sotho as opposition BCP supporters, and attempted to replace them with political appointees.⁴⁹ This politicization of the civil service tied directly into the politicization of development, and was related to the harsh partisan rhetoric emanating from parliament and the press in the first years of independence.

THE POLITICIZATION OF AID, 1965–70

The BNP’s razor-thin parliamentary majority in the April 1965 elections was won with only a plurality of the votes as the opposition BCP and MFP together split about 60 per cent of the vote.⁵⁰ Key to the BNP victory was support in the foothill and mountain regions, which were overwhelmingly Catholic. Jonathan pinned much of his hope for development assistance on a policy of engagement with the South African government.

45 C. Lancaster, *U. S. Aid to Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges, Constraints, and Choices* (Washington, DC, 1982), 27; De Wet, *Betterment*.

46 TNA OD 31/219, South African Assistance to Lesotho, 1967–9, Memo High Commissioner Maseru to the Commonwealth Office, 17 Oct. 1968.

47 De Wet, *Betterment*; TNA OD 31/170, Lesotho Post Independence Aid, memo from High Commissioner Maseru to the Commonwealth Office, London, 28 Feb. 1967.

48 TNA OD 31/219, South African Assistance to Lesotho, 1967–9. This project would eventually be negotiated after the military takeover in the 1980s, and construction on Phase II just started in 2014.

49 Khaketla, *Lesotho 1970*, 184; P. Sanders, *The Last of the Queen’s Men: A Lesotho Experience* (Johannesburg, 2000), 108 and 111.

50 Weisfelder, *Contention*, 107.

He argued that engagement would allow his government to garner more support than the fiery anti-apartheid rhetoric of the opposition parties. Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd contributed to this narrative by donating 100,000 bags of grain to Jonathan personally for ‘famine relief’ in June 1965 when Jonathan was engaged in a by-election. He had lost his own constituency in the April elections, and was forced to run for a safe BNP seat in the southern foothills. Jonathan, though he was initially ‘surprised’ by the announcement of the gift, quickly turned it into evidence that his engagement policy would enable him to deliver foreign assistance from sources his rivals could not.⁵¹ The opposition, on the other hand, condemned the grain gift as evidence of Jonathan’s willingness to acquiesce to apartheid in exchange for handouts.

This intense politicization of the grain gift was but one example of the highly polarized political environment in late colonial and early independence Lesotho.⁵² At the center of this tension was foreign aid, and more broadly, the concept of development. A UNDP assessment of development strategies at independence called on ministries to give people a ‘sense of involvement’ in projects as a way of ‘promoting national unity’, but the BNP government by-and-large did not do this.⁵³ Ill-equipped to carry this out in the first place because it was under-staffed, but more importantly unwilling to relinquish control over funded projects, the government relied instead on top-down control and maximum political symbolism. In 1968, they abolished district councils, set up by the late colonial regime in part to germinate and administer local development projects, because they were controlled largely by the opposition. Their decentralized mission also conflicted with BNP attempts to centralize projects.⁵⁴ National tree-planting day in 1968, for instance, saw the government mobilize Boy Scouts, other youth groups, and the constitutional monarch, Moshoeshoe II, to support the effort.⁵⁵ Tree-planting, however, had a long history in Lesotho as it was a key component of the anti-erosion campaign, so people in Lesotho read this not simply as an effort to put trees in the ground, but as an opportunity for the government to prove its competency and garner support. Opposition supporters, because of this, uprooted trees or let their animals graze on the tasty new plants.⁵⁶

The arrival of the first group of Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) in December 1967 was marked by similar politicization. Jonathan showed his investment in the success of the program by making time to visit their training camp outside of San Diego on his September 1967 trip to the United States.⁵⁷ On the other side of the coin,

51 TNA FCO 141/851, Oxfam, telegrams from British Government Representative, Maseru to Secretary of State, 9 and 10 June 1965.

52 S. Rosenberg, *Promises of Moshoeshoe: Culture, Nationalism, and Identity in Lesotho* (Roma, Lesotho, 2008), 63–5.

53 Kaul, Report.

54 G. Winai-Ström, *Migration and Development: Dependence on South Africa: A Study of Lesotho* (Uppsala, 1986), 82.

55 ‘King and premier to lead tree-planting’, *Lesotho News* (Ladybrand), 6 Aug. 1966.

56 Showers, *Gullies*, 62; interview with Michael Mateka, Lesotho, 26 Nov. 2008; interview with Ted Hochstadt, email, July 2012.

57 NACP RG 59, State Department, Executive Secretariat, Visit Files, Folder V-42 Visit of PM Jonathan of Lesotho, 22 Sept. 1967, Record of Conversation Secretary between State Dean Rusk and Jonathan, 29 Sept. 1967.

Ntsu Mokhehle, the leader of the BCP, took to the floor of parliament in October 1967 to denounce the impending arrival of the volunteers. He linked this to the secondment of civil servants from South Africa, the grain gift, and a 1967 agreement between the government and international mining giant Rio Tinto to explore diamond mining in country. He argued that these programs were a plot to 'sabotage ... the sovereignty of this country'.⁵⁸ His attacks continued after the arrival of the Peace Corps, with charges that the volunteers were an attempt by the BNP and US governments to 'undermine the UN resolutions on non-interference ... in the affairs of other states' and, in a different vein, that PCVs were 'attacking and belittling the King, the chiefs, the missionaries, the leaders of the opposition parties and even our inspectors of schools'.⁵⁹ At the heart of these charges was the fear that the Peace Corps program was legitimizing only the BNP vision for the nation. This politicization of the Peace Corps was not just confined to Lesotho, as volunteers in Cameroon also faced suspicion of their motives for living in rural areas. Across Africa, the program bore the brunt of diplomatic squabbles with the US government as it was one of the centerpieces of American foreign policy on the continent. From its inception in 1961 until 1980, the Peace Corps was either temporarily or permanently evicted from nine of twenty-four African countries where it had operations, with its volunteers often suspected of being Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) spies in many more places, including India.⁶⁰

In its Sotho translation, the Peace Corps translated as the 'Army of Peace', and the idea of young, mainly white, 'soldiers' residing in rural Lesotho did not always sit well with a population that had a tumultuous history with land dispossession by white settlers.⁶¹ The only non-Sotho allowed to live in the country were government administrators, missionaries, and traders, whose rights of residence expired when they retired. Thus, the presence of these volunteers in rural areas was indeed a new phenomenon for Lesotho, and presented Mokhehle and BCP supporters with a golden political opportunity.⁶² Moreover, since Jonathan had made the arrival of the Peace Corps a cornerstone of his political program, Mokhehle and the BCP saw it as fair game.

Many of the first group of volunteers to arrive in late 1967 recalled feeling unwelcome upon arrival, especially those who lived in BCP lowland strongholds like Mafeteng. Some reported receiving anonymous letters warning them not to go to certain villages for their work, or facing hostile stares and questioning as they attempted to shop at local stores or drink in the local shebeens.⁶³ This hostility mainly manifested itself verbally, but one volunteer remembered hearing about a house being burned down and stones thrown at

58 *Parliamentary Debates of the National Assembly, Hansard, Official Report*, 30th Oct. 1967 (Maseru, 1967), speech by Mokhehle, 2 Nov. 1967.

59 N. Mokhehle, 'The American Peace Corps (part I)', *The Commentator*, Aug. 1968, 21–3.

60 J. A. Amin, *The Peace Corps in Cameroon* (Kent, OH, 1992), 135 and 185; J. L. Brown, *Peasants Come Last: A Memoir of the Peace Corps at Fifty* (Sunnyvale, CA, 2012), 59.

61 M. Thabane, *Who Owns the Land in Lesotho? Land Disputes and the Politics of Land Ownership in Lesotho* (Roma, Lesotho, 1998), 4–6.

62 There were also 27 British Voluntary Service volunteers and occasional groups of Americans and Canadians with Crossroads Africa in the late 1960s: 'Voluntary service in Quthing', *Moeletsi oa Basotho* (Mazenod), 10 Aug. 1968; 'International Voluntary Service', *Leselinyana la Lesotho* (Morija), June 1967, 6; interview with Chaka Ntsane, Maseru, 24 Feb. 2009.

63 Interviews with Gary Bowne, Scott Brumburgh, and Bill Reed, telephone and email, July and Aug. 2012.

a British man working for the International Voluntary Service.⁶⁴ This initial period of discomfort lasted into 1968, as one volunteer reported being verbally harassed about the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr in April 1968.⁶⁵ Later that year, the political pressure on the Peace Corps from the BCP eased as the party's leadership backed away from the harshest rhetoric. The American Peace Corps administrator in Maseru noted at the time that this was largely a political ploy: 'The BCP does not attack the Peace Corps privately as rigorously as it does to the public.'⁶⁶ The volunteers themselves were in a difficult spot because while PCVs were told to avoid politics and political discussions, even this action carried political significance. This attempted neutrality drew suspicion as a Peace Corps memo noted: 'The non-political behavior of volunteers produces fear in many government circles that Peace Corps is disloyal to the government that invited the volunteers in the first place.'⁶⁷

Volunteers also remembered their efforts to thaw frosty relations as being mostly successful from the middle of 1968. Living most of his youth in exile in Lesotho because of the political activities of his pan-Africanist father, A. P. Mda, distinguished South African writer Zakes Mda corroborated the impressions of volunteers. Mda, who worked with the BCP in Mafeteng, recounted greeting the arrival of the PCVs with great skepticism because of Mokhehle's rhetoric, and condemning their presence in local shebeens. Not long after their arrival, however, Mda recalled that the volunteers 'disarmed us with their friendliness and we forgot that they were imperialist agents'; they were soon accepted as another part of the community.⁶⁸ The decline in attacks from the BCP was matched soon after by a rise in pressure on the program and volunteers from the government. Part of this was driven by fear of the decentralized nature of Peace Corps work, but the fact that most PCVs held non-specialist bachelor degrees also led to the charge that they were doing work that should have been done by local people. The Catholic newspaper *Moeletsi oa Basotho*, widely recognized as a mouthpiece for the government, voiced some of this concern in August 1968 about a separate group of volunteers who came through Crossroads Africa, but the charges applied equally to the Peace Corps: 'Some people say that there is no need for such people to produce [work] for Basotho which they can probably produce by themselves, because we will be a nation who cannot be self-reliant.'⁶⁹

This reversal of political arguments took on an even sharper tone in 1969 as the parties geared up for elections. Having staked his reelection bid on the delivery of aid, projects, and improved services, Jonathan realized that public perception of the development successes of the BNP administration was a paramount concern. That the government would eventually need to focus on this issue was noted as early as 1966 by British aid administrators. In that year, late arriving rains had obviated the preparations for what some feared would be a calamitous famine, but ministers in the Lesotho government

64 Interview with Ted Hochstadt.

65 Interview with Bill Reed.

66 NACP RG 490, Peace Corps, Office of International Operations, Country Plans 1966–85, Lesotho 1968–71: Program Memorandum.

67 *Ibid.*

68 Z. Mda, *Sometimes There is a Void: Memoirs of an Outsider* (Johannesburg, 2011), 135–6.

69 'Tsetsetso ea Baithaopi Quthing', *Moeletsi oa Basotho* (Mazenod), 10 Aug. 1968, trans. Teboho Mokotjo.

were ‘embarrassed by what they have said to people about outside aid and are reluctant to reduce demands on account of the improved situation’.⁷⁰ The perception of competency that large-scale aid from the WFP could engender was more important to the ministers than the actual need for aid at that point. Similarly, in 1967, Jonathan asked the UK to frontload its development funding because, in the estimation of British planners, ‘his government must show as early as possible (and definitely before their next election in 1970) that they are bringing some advantageous results to the people of Lesotho following independence’.⁷¹ This need to deliver on promises of aid, and to take credit for completed projects, culminated in a series of threats to voters that nakedly tied development projects to political support. Jonathan made this clear in Mafeteng in December 1969:

If you think that the roads we have constructed are a good thing, return us to power. If you think the electricity we have brought to Lesotho is a good thing, return us to power. If you think the air services and airstrips we have established and improved are a good thing. If you think the industries we have brought to Lesotho are a good thing, return us to power. If you think the food aid we have brought to this country is a good thing, return us to power. If you reject the Basotho National Party, then you reject the developments we have achieved.⁷²

One reason for such sharp rhetoric related to where the government had already undertaken development projects. Lowland districts had largely gone for the BCP or MFP in 1965, but had received development projects because of their accessibility from the limited road network. Showpiece projects included the newly tarred road that ran through Maseru to the northern lowland town of Hlotse/Leribe, a couple of small factories in Maseru, and a candle-making operation in the northern lowland town of Kolonyama, the constituency where Jonathan had been a headman and failed to win a parliamentary seat in 1965 (see Fig. 1).⁷³ Jonathan made sure the constituencies where these projects were located understood that their continued access to projects was dependent on electoral support. In October, he warned that lack of support for the BNP from Kolonyama could lead to ‘development priority [being] given to those constituencies that do’.⁷⁴ Similarly, a December speech in the Leribe District linked future assistance with water supply projects and road building projects to electoral support in 1970.⁷⁵

Many PCVs were stationed in lowland administrative towns like Mafeteng, Leribe, Mohale’s Hoek, and Teyateyaneng, where they worked closely with government officials. Jonathan worried that the volunteers were developing tight relationships with civil servants, who still largely supported the opposition and might try to take credit for the completion of small-scale development projects so necessary to his political fortunes. A 1969 Peace Corps report confirmed this situation as ‘the government has used community development to politicize the village unit, and the Volunteer is caught up in the

70 TNA FCO 141/976, Famine Relief, British Government Representative to FCO, 8 Mar. 1966.

71 TNA OD 31/169, Post Independence Aid to Lesotho, conversation between Prime Minister Jonathan and British High Commissioner, Maseru, 9 Feb. 1967.

72 Jonathan quoted in Khaketla, *Lesotho 1970*, 189.

73 TNA OD 31/221, Lesotho National Development Corporation.

74 ‘Support me or else ... Jonathan’, *Rand Daily Mail* (Johannesburg), 25 Oct. 1969.

75 ‘Development will come to winning constituencies – premier Jonathan’, *Lesotho News* (Ladybrand), 2 Dec. 1969, 3.

heated political current'.⁷⁶ In October 1969, Jonathan ordered PCVs to stay out of local politics 'either by actions or by words'.⁷⁷ This shift to seeing the volunteers as threatening was also noticeable from government departments like the Ministry of Education. In 1968, it merely noted the presence of 28 Peace Corps teachers, while the 1969 report complained that volunteers 'tended to be unsettled and mobile ... and it is hoped that more care [will be taken] in recruiting and re-orientation of Peace Corps'.⁷⁸ This new emphasis on claiming credit for projects and politicizing even the smallest of achievements threatened to overtake broader goals of development. This is not to say that Sotho political leaders were so cynical that they did not care about the projects; they did, but they foregrounded what their completion said about the state's successes over how they would benefit citizens.

CENTRALIZING DEVELOPMENT IN THE LATE 1960s AND EARLY 1970s

The BNP government, in addition to using development as an electoral strategy, also wanted to use aid to help consolidate and centralize their hold on state power. This led to tension over what the primary objective of development should be—macroeconomic growth or poverty elimination. This tension was certainly not unique to Lesotho during this time, or even into the present.⁷⁹ With Lesotho heavily dependent on foreign assistance for basic governmental and development funding, there was strong pressure to consider aid firstly as a vehicle for growth, with improved living standards a distant second priority. A British Overseas Development Ministry (ODM) report from 1965 pointed to this pressure to prioritize macroeconomic growth: 'A well-conceived development programme will increase the productive power of the economy and, while raising the general living standard, increase its taxable capacity.'⁸⁰ This was common donor language across the continent, at least from Western powers, in the 1960s and 1970s, as a US report pointed out that aid 'would not only contribute to economic and political stability in Africa but at the same time provide real benefits for individuals'.⁸¹ The post-independence government in Lesotho wanted macroeconomic growth, but struggled to achieve it. In part this was due to structural constraints in the regional economy, but in 1968 the government's chief economist blamed the civil service for their negative attitudes, incompetence, lack of insight, and for not being 'development oriented'.⁸² Similar to other generalizations about Sotho resistance to development, however, these comments reveal deep divisions within

76 NACP RG 490, Peace Corps, Office of International Operations, Country Plans 1966–85, Lesotho 1968–71: Program Memorandum.

77 "Keep off politics" Jonathan warns US peace kids', *Weekend World* (Johannesburg), 5 Oct. 1969.

78 *Annual Report of the Ministry of Education and Culture* (Maseru, 1969), np.

79 Lal, 'Self-reliance'; Jones, *Beyond*; D. Jones, *Aid and Development in Southern Africa: British Aid to Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland* (London, 1977), 46–8.

80 TNA FCO 141/988, Visit of ODM Mission Oct 1965, memo from ODM Mission Team to Government of Basutoland, 28 Oct. 1965.

81 NACP RG 287 USAID, Central Subject Files, 1968–73, Bureau for Africa, Office for Southern Africa Regional Coordination, Box 5, letter from Campbell, Regional Activities Coordinator, to *Charge d'affaires* Gebelt, Maseru, 27 Feb. 1970.

82 J. W. Biemanns, *Lesotho An Uphill Road* (Maseru, 1968), 5.

the civil service over what the purpose of development should be, and over who should control it.

Although infrastructure constraints had concentrated development efforts in lowland districts, the BNP government encouraged PCVs and civil servants to steer projects to villages that supported the government. A PCV working on water projects in Mafeteng District reported that political appointees at the district headquarters chose his worksites, steering him to BNP-friendly villages.⁸³ The Food-for-Work program that distributed WFP donations to people building roads in rural areas only provided for those who already were or who were 'willing to become' BNP members.⁸⁴ Similarly, at campaign rallies for the 1970 elections, government ministers told people that 'if they wished to be assisted with seeds and fertilisers by the Government they should register their names [join the BNP].'⁸⁵ In a few places, communities rejected road-building projects because they did not want to associate with the government, but most felt they had little choice.⁸⁶

Although the political dimensions of the projects could and did undermine their efficacy on the ground, many rural communities valued the services and resources they provided. Those looking to initiate community water projects, for instance, reported needing to find and utilize local intermediaries to break down suspicion toward their work, while others reported that their efforts to find chiefs willing to work with them took lots of time because of their association with the government.⁸⁷ In all cases, they agreed that the key to project completion was convincing Sotho women that participation would bring benefits like the freedom from having to carry water long distances. As Marc Epprecht has argued, with male labor migrancy leaving women a majority in most rural communities, their 'supposedly private activities frequently forced the political and economic agenda'.⁸⁸ For instance, 'Maleseka Kena, an older woman I interviewed in the rural Qacha's Nek District, recalled a development project's or organization's 'usefulness' as key to her decision of whether or not to participate.⁸⁹

Due to the limited availability of documentary sources, it is impossible to say just how many small development projects were proposed or completed. A funding document from USAID for fiscal year 1969 gives some sense of scale with 32 water projects in progress in villages with a population over 21,000. In addition, they funded 41 classroom buildings at 21 different primary schools around the country. Local volunteers supplied the labor for nearly all of the small construction projects in order to keep costs down.⁹⁰

83 Interview with Tom Carroll, telephone, Aug. 2012.

84 Khaketla, *Lesotho 1970*, 245.

85 *Ibid.* 186.

86 *Parliamentary Debates of the National Assembly, Hansard, Official Report, 3rd February, 1967* (Maseru, 1967), 17 Feb. 1967.

87 Interview with Scott Brumburgh; interview with Tom Carroll.

88 C. Murray, *Families Divided: The Impact of Migrant Labour in Lesotho* (Cambridge, 1981); Epprecht, 'Matter of Women', 189.

89 Interview with 'Maleseka Kena, Tsoelike Auplas, 17 Mar. 2009.

90 All figures from NACP RG 286 USAID, Central Subject Files, 1968–73, Bureau for Africa, Office for Southern Africa Regional Coordination, Box 5, Folder Assistance Plans, Annual Report Special Self-Help Report, 21 July 1969.

Additionally, Work-for-Food programs employed on average around 6,000 people a month, and a WFP school-feeding scheme fed 180,000 children daily.⁹¹ These numbers suggest that many rural inhabitants likely had at least some knowledge of development projects, as these efforts were spread broadly, if unevenly, across the country. Regardless of scale, the BNP government was focused on claiming credit for such projects. Pro-government newspapers loudly trumpeted the completion of projects, no matter how small, and cabinet ministers traveled to villages to inaugurate projects almost weekly in the lead up to the 1970 elections.⁹² The presence of cabinet ministers at the inauguration of projects designed to serve populations that numbered in the hundreds suggests that these projects had taken on outsized symbolic meaning as the government attempted to take credit and retain some illusion of centralized control over what was a decentralized system of planning and construction.⁹³

Although the failure of the BNP government to deliver on its development promises was not the only reason for its electoral defeat in 1970, it certainly played an important role. Jonathan lost much of his support from female voters precisely because he had failed to deliver jobs and critical infrastructure outside of the lowlands. The abolition of district councils in 1968 undercut BNP efforts to provide services, as these bodies had been responsible for the construction and maintenance of footbridges, bridle paths, and health clinics, to name a few, especially in regions that were not served by the lowland road network.⁹⁴ The BNP eliminated district councils as part of their effort to centralize development planning, implementation, and funding in order to better control actual projects and the narratives surrounding them. Voters *were* in fact judging the government on its ability to provide services and deliver development projects, as evidenced by the BNP picking up two seats in the lowland Leribe District near the new tar road, and losing seats in foothill and mountain constituencies that were supposed to be its base at the 1970 elections.⁹⁵ The ability, or inability, of the government to respond to local calls for employment, water projects, and roads played a key role in driving voting patterns.

The elimination of the district councils and verbal attacks on PCVs show that the BNP was not comfortable with their level of control over development projects in the late 1960s. This situation changed after the 1970 coup when the BNP government was better able to project state power into the rural areas through its control of the security forces, and the removal of the need to worry about electoral repercussions from local people. After 1970, the government started to attract and implement 'big' projects in the form of integrated rural development projects, like the Thaba Bosiu Project financed by USAID, the Senqu

91 TNA OD 31/171, Lesotho Post-Independence Aid, internal ODM memo, 30 Dec. 1968; NACP RG 286 USAID, Bureau for Africa, Office of Eastern and Southern Africa, Closed Subject Files of the Southern Africa Regional Activities Coordination, 1969–73, Box 4, Folder Regional Activities (Lesotho) FY 71, Work-for-Food program report, 4 Feb. 1971.

92 'St. Rodrigue library to be opened on March 16th', *Lesotho News* (Ladybrand), 11 Mar. 1969, 3; 'Water supply scheme', *Lesotho News* (Ladybrand), 29 July 1969, 1; 'Letsie opens Bokoro water supply scheme', *Lesotho News* (Ladybrand), 19 Aug. 1969, 1.

93 NACP RG 286 USAID, Bureau for Africa, Office for Southern Africa Regional Coordination, Box 5, Folder Assistance Plans, Annual Report Special Self-Help Report, 21 July 1969.

94 Khaketla, *Lesotho* 1970, 187.

95 Ferguson, *Anti-Politics*, 109.

Project financed by UNDP, and the Thaba Tseka Mountain Development Project financed by the Canadians.⁹⁶ This shift from development that was run at the grassroots by a thin bureaucracy to a fully centralized, top-down process where planning decisions overrode local concerns was symbolized by changes in the Central Planning Office. This department was staffed in the late 1960s mainly by ‘young Basotho graduates, PCVs, and British volunteers’, but in the post-1970 period expanded rapidly so that by 1975 it had over twenty professional staff members and administered a budget of R18 million.⁹⁷ It would be misleading to suggest that lack of electoral opposition was the only reason for the increased government bureaucracy, and the increased ability of the BNP government to garner foreign assistance. Changes in the USAID remit in the mid-1970s played a role in how much money the US State Department was willing and able to sink into projects in Lesotho. The growing desire to support Frontline States like Botswana, Swaziland, and Lesotho with development aid influenced the amount of money that was available for projects, but the ability of the government to override local opposition without fear of electoral repercussions played a role as well.

CONCLUSION

In contrast to the period 1966 to 1970 when aid to Lesotho was relatively small, foreign assistance increased dramatically in the 1970s.⁹⁸ After the coup in January 1970, the British temporarily suspended aid, and other countries followed their lead.⁹⁹ By April, however, Jonathan began talking to the opposition parties and violent clashes were on the decline. The British Labour government – potentially facing Tory criticism in the looming UK general election over its handling of aid to a former colony highly dependent on the increasingly unpopular apartheid regime – resumed its general budgetary support and development funding in June 1970. Proving that aid was political everywhere, Harold Wilson authorized the British high commissioner to recognize Jonathan’s government (a precursor to restarting aid) on or after 18 June, the day of the British general election.¹⁰⁰ This resumption of aid legitimized the regime, allowing others like the United States to follow suit. It also enabled Jonathan to break off talks with the opposition and consolidate his control of the government.

The Lesotho government needed aid more than ever as it attempted to rebuild popular legitimacy after the violence and turmoil of the coup. Its ability to shut down opposition newspapers, and the lack of a parliament helped silence criticisms of development, and the government rapidly completed its purge of opposition supporters from the civil service.¹⁰¹ Although the Peace Corps remained in country, Jonathan expelled seven

96 Showers, *Gullies*, 245–8.

97 D. Hirschmann, ‘Early post-colonial bureaucracy as history: the case of the Lesotho central planning and development office, 1965–1975’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 20:3 (1987), 459–64.

98 By 1979, the figure was approaching \$64 million a year. Ferguson, *Anti-Politics*, 8.

99 The Swedes suspended their aid for three years, for example. Matlosa, ‘Aid’, 6.

100 TNA Records of the Prime Minister’s Office (PREM) 13/3297, Lesotho Coup, memo from FCO to High Commissioner, Maseru, 10 June 1970.

101 Khaketla, *Lesotho 1970*, 316–8.

volunteers who he accused of being involved in 'internal politics'.¹⁰² The focus of the government after mid-1970 quickly turned to securing support for 'large projects' like integrated rural agricultural projects. These had a history of failure under the colonial regime, but that did not stop donors like USAID, the UNDP, and the Canadian government from pouring millions into projects from 1972 onward. These large projects were the objects of Ferguson's analysis where he determined that development was an 'anti-politics machine' that sapped national political cultures of substantive debate and sidelined local input from the planning and implementation of projects. The government's newfound ability to ignore local protests after 1970 is demonstrated in the substance of a 1972 petition from people living in the area where the USAID Thaba Bosiu project was proposed. The petition complained that the project was run by outside 'experts' who were not versed in local practices and who could not 'enhance and safeguard the interests of the farming community'.¹⁰³ Moreover, it noted that giving power to agricultural experts could 'empower persons unversed with or opposed to the political policies of the Government, to embark on policies diametrically opposed to established policies in such fields as employment, Credit, Marketing and general execution'.¹⁰⁴ USAID officials who read the petition admitted that local people had not been 'consulted in the planning process' but attributed many of the complaints to the petitioners' status as 'opposition supporters'.¹⁰⁵ It is likely that most of the petitioners *were* opposition supporters because, again, this region went strongly for opposition parties in both the 1965 and 1970 elections. By couching their criticisms of the project as a warning to the government about *its* potential loss of power and sovereignty, the petitioners acknowledged the new reality of their limited influence over government policies and projects, and the tremendous power of outside experts.

Despite these warnings, the Thaba Bosiu project went ahead as planned and soon the area of the project had, according to a contemporary analyst, 'Chiefs, foreign aid personnel and policemen controll[ing] larger and larger areas in the countryside at the expense of villagers, who had earlier participated in the control via cooperatives and elected committees'.¹⁰⁶ The inability of people in the project area to have significant input into development efforts provided a marked contrast from the late 1960s when the Lesotho government had been unable both to quell political debate and to secure support for 'big projects'. The ability to garner funds in large blocks, along with the elimination of electoral considerations, meant that the government no longer had to cultivate and court small-scale rural projects. The price the government paid for this freedom was a loss of control over aspects of the projects, especially those related to land tenure and use.

102 NACP RG 59, State Department, Bureau of African Affairs, Office of Southern African Affairs, Records Relating to Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, 1969–75, Box 1, Folder: Lesotho Government Emergency 1970, letter from *Charge d'affaires* Gebelt, Maseru to Secretary of State, 26 Mar. 1970.

103 NACP RG 286 USAID, Central Subject Files 1968–73, Bureau for Africa, Office of Southern African Regional Coordination, Box 12, Folder PRM 3 Lesotho FY 1972, Petition 7 Jan. 1972.

104 Ibid.

105 NACP RG 286 USAID, Central Subject Files 1968–73, Bureau for Africa, Office of Southern African Regional Coordination, Box 12, Folder PRM 3 Lesotho FY 1972, Memo Athol Ellis, USAID to Robert Dean, Division Chief, Eastern Africa, International Bank for Reconstruction, 28 Jan. 1972.

106 Winai-Ström, *Migration and Development*, 94.

In a country like Lesotho where control over land was closely associated with national sovereignty, giving up control over its management was a significant political trade-off.¹⁰⁷

The authoritarian turn of the BNP government in 1970 that allowed for the delivery of ‘big’ development projects had two main consequences. Firstly, it led to less emphasis on the smaller projects that had been so prominent during the years of multiparty democracy, where a focus on basic needs was central to electoral strategies. These projects still existed after 1970, but their reduced significance made the government less accountable to local political demands. Secondly, it forced the government to relinquish some of its sovereignty, in this case over the highly evocative issue of control over the land, to international development organizations because its legitimacy was tied so tightly to delivery of the assistance these organizations provided. While the electorate had ‘reject[ed] the National Party’ and their early development efforts, Jonathan’s coup allowed him to utilize foreign assistance and development projects as a basis to maintain power for eighteen more years.¹⁰⁸

107 Thabane, *Who Owns the Land*, 1.

108 Khaketla, *Lesotho 1970*, 189.