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'HAVE YOU EVER CAPTURED ANYTHING FOR YOUR PARENTS?' WAR, CAPTIVITY, AND SLAVERY ON THE PRECOLONIAL SOUTHERN AFRICAN HIGHVELD, C.1800–71*

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Abstract

The article analyses various cases of captivity in a region comprised within modern-day South Africa and Lesotho in the late precolonial period. Focusing on a single social institution, *bohlanka*, the article follows its traces scattered among the Batlhaping, the Basotho, the Barolong, the Bataung, and other smaller precolonial communities. Generally considered by scholars as a form of clientship based on cattle-loans, *bohlanka* is here redefined as originating from warfare and captivity, and later expanding to include the destitute. The fundamental elements of the institution — violence, natal alienation, and suspended death — lead to the conclusion that *bohlanka* constituted a local form of slavery that pre-dated colonial influences.

Key Words

South Africa, Lesotho, Botswana, Precolonial, Slavery, War, Oral Sources, Women.

INTRODUCTION: SUBJECT, STRUCTURE, AND SETTING

This article proposes a new reading of the institutions of personal dependence on the Southern African Highveld in the nineteenth century. In particular, this work focuses on a local form of slavery, *bohlanka*, that was qualitatively different from the system of chattel slavery in use in the Cape Colony. Contrasting well-established scholarship that identified *bohlanka* with clientship based on cattle-loans, this article points to war captivity as the original and distinctive element of the institution.

The analysis starts with a summary of the clientship paradigm, reassesses the forms of violence that are part of the history of the Southern African Highveld, and places the argument within the context of African slavery on the continent more broadly. Violence, both physical and psychological, lies at the centre of the analytical framework of the present article. First, the article distinguishes between the practice of taking and ransoming prisoners,

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and the enslavement of kinless individuals. Various examples of both cases are described. The article then narrates and analyses a military expedition led in 1871 by two princes of Lesotho against one of the last San communities of the Maloti-Drakensberg. The richer sources available for this case — the praise-songs of the princes, and the interviews conducted by a missionary almost a century ago — allow for a deeper understanding of *bohlanka*, which concludes the article.

The area studied is the Highveld, a vast grassy plain that extends in the Southern African interior from the Maloti-Drakensberg range in the south and east to the Bankeveld ranges of the Magaliesberg in the north. In the west and south-west, precipitation is scarce, the landscape becomes more arid, the soil sandy, and the Highveld slowly changes into the Thornveld and Karoo.[1]

The communities inhabiting this area in precolonial times spoke languages belonging to the Sotho-Tswana family of Southern Bantu and to the Khoe and Khoesan language groups. Scholars used to view the corresponding speech communities as discrete cultural entities, but this approach is no longer considered viable. In *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa*, Paul Landau criticised what he defined as the remains of academic tribalism and described the multilingualism and cultural mixture of precolonial Highveld communities as the precolonial *status quo*.[2] This article does not focus on matters of political organisation and cultural identity; following Landau's insight, it refers to the protagonists of this story both by the generic name of 'Highveld communities', and with the ethnonyms they gave themselves.[3]

The subject of this article, *botlhanka*/ *bohlanka*, was conceptualised in what became known as the languages of the north-western and southern Sotho-Tswana, Setswana and Sesotho.[4] Indeed, past analyses of this institution were located within the conceptual borders of single Sotho-Tswana 'chiefdoms'. By contrast, this article looks for a general explanation across all of them and argues that isolating evidence on ethnic lines has been detrimental to the understanding of some features of the precolonial history of the region. The timeframe considered begins in the period of the first colonial expedition to reach the Highveld, the Truter-Somerville expedition of 1801–2, and concludes with the last military action taken in Lesotho before the annexation to the Cape Colony in 1871.[5] The article deals therefore with the late precolonial life of *bohlanka*; the period preceding the first written sources — the eighteenth century — also needs further scholarly examination.

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1 T. Maggs, *Iron Age Communities of the Southern Highveld* (Pietermaritzburg, 1976), 11; K. Shillington, *The Colonisation of the Southern Tswana 1870–1900*, (Johannesburg, 1985), 3–11; N. Jacobs, *Environment, Power, and Injustice: A South African History* (Cambridge, 2003), 1–31.

2 P. Landau, *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa, 1400–1948*, (Cambridge, New York), 2010, XII–XIII, 1–73.

3 I have adopted the orthography employed by the Cambridge History of South Africa: no prefixes for ethnonyms used adjectivally (Sotho household); capitalisation of the root, not the prefix, for Nguni-derived ethnonyms (the amaZulu); and capitalisation of the prefix, not the root, for Sotho-Tswana-derived ethnonyms (the Basotho); see C. Hamilton, B. K. Mbenga, and R. Ross, (eds.), *Cambridge History of South Africa, Volume I: From Early Times to 1885* (Cambridge, 2010), *ix*.

4 S. C. Volz, 'European missionaries and Tswana identity in the 19th century', *Pula. Botswana Journal of African Studies*, 17:1 (2003), 3–19; Landau, *Popular Politics*, 232–8.

5 P. Sanders, *Throwing Down White Man: Cape Rule and Misrule in Colonial Lesotho, 1871–1884* (London, 2011), 16.

MORE THAN CATTLE RAIDING: CLIENTSHIP AND SLAVERY, LIFE AND DEATH

The established interpretive paradigm of *bohlanka* is based on the concept of clientship and dates back to the early twentieth century. Isaac Schapera was the first modern scholar to address this institution in his work and to connect it to clientship. According to him, Tswana *batlhanka* were 'servants drawn from the ordinary members of the tribe' who could also be 'common headmen' and were entrusted with the ruler's cattle in the smaller villages that composed the periphery of a 'Tswana chiefdom'.[6]

Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson considered loans in cattle — *mafisa* in Setswana and Sesotho — to be one of the distinctive elements of the precolonial societies of Southern Africa. In *The Oxford History of South Africa*, Wilson highlighted herding for a more powerful individual as the typical 'relation between groups', and argued that it was found across the Bantu/Khoe cultural divide. In her interpretation, this relationship constituted a form of clientship.[7] Clientship was one of the main features of Sotho society according to Leonard Thompson too, who referred to clients by the Sesotho word *bahlanka*.[8] Clientship and cattle loans were also fundamental in Elizabeth Eldredge's description of nineteenth-century Lesotho. However, she rightfully characterised the first ruler and founder, Moshoeshoe, as an able diplomat, a magnanimous patron, and a successful cattle-raider.[9] A similar approach was adopted by Norman Etherington, whereas John Wright, in the more recent *Cambridge History of South Africa*, reiterated the older view that the '*mafisa* system' was 'at the heart of the political and social system in his [Moshoeshoe's] kingdom'.[10]

Thomas Tlou was the author of one of the main attempts to update the clientship paradigm. In his 'Servility and Political Control', Tlou analysed *botlhanka* among the Batawana of northern Botswana as a form of clientship containing elements of coercion and exploitation that in some cases was explicitly connected to warfare. Significantly, the essay was a book chapter within Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff's *Slavery in Africa*. Ultimately, however, Tlou did not question the core identity of the institution, because in his view *botlhanka* had a clear continuity with clientship.[11] Other scholars

6 I. Schapera, *A Handbook of Tswana Law and Custom*, (Oxford, 2004 [orig. pub. 1938]), 32, 66–8, 246–55; I. Schapera, 'The political organization of the Ngwato of Bechuanaland Protectorate', in M. Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard (eds.), *African Political Systems* (Oxford, 1940), 58–60.

7 M. Wilson, 'The hunters and herders'; 'The Nguni people'; 'The Sotho, Venda, and Tsonga', in M. Wilson and L. Thompson (eds.), *A History of South Africa to 1870* (London, 1982 [orig. pub. 1969]), 63–4, 120–1, 155–6, 164–5.

8 L. Thompson, *Survival in Two Worlds: Moshoeshoe of Lesotho, 1796–1870* (Oxford, 1975), 12.

9 E. A. Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-century Lesotho* (Cambridge, 1993), 28–41, 195–6.

10 N. Etherington, *The Great Treks: The Transformations of Southern Africa, 1815–1854* (London, 2001), 92–93; J. Wright, 'Turbulent times: political transformations in the north and east, 1760s–1830s', in Hamilton, Mbenga, Ross, *Cambridge History of South Africa 1*, 246.

11 T. Tlou, 'Servility and political control: botlhanka among the BaTawana of northwestern Botswana, *ca.* 1750–1906', in S. Miers and I. Kopytoff (eds.), *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison, 1977), 367–90.

have also addressed the subject of the lowest stratum in Tswana society in their work, although without changing much of Tlou's analytical framework.[12]

This approach to '*botlhanka/bolata* studies' was radically criticised by Barry Morton in his essay 'Servitude, Slave Trading, and Slavery in the Kalahari', published in another collective book on slavery in 1994. Schapera, Wilson, and Tlou were criticised for having followed in their analyses the point of view of 'adult [Tswana] men with full legal rights', and not having fully exploited the available sources. By contrast, Barry Morton provided evidence of how the bond of *bohlanka* originated from and was maintained by acts of institutionalised violence, including flogging and mutilations. Through prolonged violence, *bahlanka* were kept in a state of permanent social 'childhood', leading Morton to redefine the institution as a form of slavery.[13] However, this new approach to *bohlanka* in the Kalahari did not produce a reassessment of the homonymous practice in the precolonial Highveld.

This was partially due to the specific understanding that scholars held of the local forms of violence. In Peter Sanders's succinct definition, warfare 'was usually no more than cattle-raiding' and 'casualties were light'.[14] This view evolved as a component of the lengthy academic debate on the *mfecane*. In his *Zulu Aftermath*, John Omer-Cooper challenged colonial negative myths and framed a Zulu-centric paradigm that analysed the rise of Shaka and the amaZulu within a sub-continental context of prolonged violence and of political and social change. A previously tranquil region, the Highveld was invaded by various communities coming from the coastal lowlands during in the 1820s.[15] This period, locally known as *lifaqane,* was indeed remembered as a moment of unprecedented strife by the inhabitants of the Highveld themselves, and historians considered it a turning point in the process of political change within the region.[16] The rise of precolonial states such as the Bapedi, the amaSwazi, and the Basotho was set in this context of critical turmoil, and was seen as a consequence of, or reaction to, the formation of the Zulu miltary state.[17] In particular, the figure of Moshoeshoe of Lesotho was deployed as a counterpart to Shaka: the peaceful methods and diplomacy of the former were contrasted with the military rule of the latter, traces of this tendency can still be found in recent works.[18]

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12 S. Miers, M. Crowder, 'The politics of slavery in Bechuanaland: power struggles and the plight of the Basarwa in the Bamangwato Reserve, 1926–1940', in S. Miers and R. Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Madison, 1988), 172–200; D. Wylie, *A Little God: The Twilight of Patriarchy in a Southern African Chiefdom* (Johannesburg, 1991), 84–91.

13 B. Morton, 'Servitude, slave trading, and slavery in the Kalahari', in E. A. Eldredge and F. Morton (eds.), *Slavery in South Africa: Captive Labor on the Dutch Frontier* (Boulder, CO, 1994), 215–50.

14 P. Sanders, *Moshoeshoe, Chief of the Sotho* (London, 1975), 11.

15 J. D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath: A Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Bantu Africa*, (London, 1966). A previous account of the *mfecane* as 'the crushing' is in E. A. Walker, *A History of Southern Africa* (London, 1962 [orig. pub. 1928]), 174–6. The development of the historiography on the *mfecane* was summarised in C. Saunders, 'Pre-Cobbing Mfecane historiography', in C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Mfecane Aftermath: Reconstructive Debates in Southern African History* (Johannesburg, 1995), 21–34.

16 D. F. Ellenberger and J. C. Macgregor, *History of the Basuto, Ancient and Modern*, Facsimile reprint of the 1912 edition, (Morija, Lesotho, 1997), 117–21.

17 P. Bonner, *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires: The Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-Century Swazi State* (Cambridge, 1982), 27–46; P. Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, the Boers and the British in the Nineteenth-century Transvaal*, (London, 1984), 19–30.

18 A. Atmore and P. Sanders, 'Sotho arms and ammunition in the nineteenth century', *The Journal of African History*, 12:4 (1971), 535–44; Sanders, *Moshoeshoe*, 11, 54–56; Thompson, *Survival*, 2, 196–8; Wilson,

The 'Zulu-centric' paradigm was radically challenged from the late 1980s by Julian Cobbing, who attempted to prove that the *mfecane* was a colonial myth framed to hide the destruction provoked by illegal slave-raiding from the Cape Colony and the Portuguese establishments of southern Mozambique.[19] Although his theory came under criticism, the resulting debate reshaped how precolonial Southern Africa was understood.[20] Most importantly, Norman Etherington acknowledged that the extent of destruction produced during the *mfecane/lifaqane* was likely to have been exaggerated, and proposed that large states already existed on the coast in the eighteenth century.[21]

Scholars now regard the same period as one which likewise fostered population growth, political centralisation, and instability in the interior.[22] Fred Morton has recently published the first systematic analysis of precolonial Tswana military institutions, proving that in the eighteenth century, initiation regiments — *mephato* — 'were created primarily for conducting war under the leadership of the *kgosi*', the political leader.[23] Some of his recent works focus on violence and militarism among the northern Batswana; however, there is still need for a general appraisal of precolonial warfare on the Highveld.[24]

The underestimation of violence in previous scholarship on the region had important consequences for the analysis of *bohlanka* and slavery. Monica Wilson stated in 1969 that 'what the Sotho [Sotho-Tswana] did not sell was men', but admitted that 'the only exceptions reported were *post* and probably *propter* the wars'. She did not elaborate further.[25] Thomas Tlou reported that 'prisoners of war were often made *batlhanka*', but commented that 'their numbers must have been small', and ultimately his essay was a critical response to the generic reference to *batlhanka* as slaves.[26] More recently, Nancy Jacobs

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'The Sotho, Venda, and Tsonga', 154; Wright, 'Turbulent times', 246; E. A. Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa: Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho, 1870–1960* (Madison, WI, 2007), 28–31.

19 J. Cobbing, 'The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo', *The Journal of African History*, 29:3 (1988), 487–519.

20 Hamilton, *The Mfecane Aftermath*; Wright, 'Turbulent times', 211–2; E. A. Eldredge, 'Sources of conflict in Southern Africa, c.1800–1830: The 'Mfecane' reconsidered', *The Journal of African History*, 33:1 (1992), 1–35; E. A. Eldredge, 'Delagoa Bay and the hinterland in the early nineteenth century: Politics, trade, slaves, and slave raiding', in Eldredge and F. Morton, *Slavery in South Africa*, 127–65.

21 Etherington, *Great Treks*, x–xxv; N. Etherington, 'Were there large states in the coastal regions of Southeast Africa before the rise of the Zulu kingdom?', *History in Africa*, 31 (2004), 157–83; N. Etherington, 'A tempest in a teapot? Nineteenth-century contest for land in South Africa's Caledon Valley and the invention of the Mfecane', *The Journal of African History*, 45:2 (2004), 203–19.

22 S. Hall, 'Archaeological indicators for stress in the western Transvaal region between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries', N. Parsons, 'Prelude to *Difaqane* in the interior of Southern Africa c.1600-c.1822', and A. Manson, 'Conflict in the western Highveld/southern Kalahari c.1750-1820', in Hamilton, *The Mfecane Aftermath*, 307–21, 323–49, 351–61; S. Hall, 'Farming communities of the second millennium: Internal frontiers, identity, continuity and change', and Wright, 'Turbulent times', in Hamilton, Mbenga, Ross, *Cambridge History of South Africa 1*, 148–54, 213; S. Hall, 'Identity and political centralisation in the Western regions of the Highveld, *c.*1779–*c.*1830. An archaeological perspective', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38:2 (2012), 301–18.

23 F. Morton, 'Mephato: the rise of the Tswana militia in the pre-colonial period', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38:2 (2012), 385–97.

24 F. Morton, 'The rise of a raiding state: Makaba II's Ngwaketse, *c.* 1780–1824', *New Contree*, 71 (2014), 25–40; F. Morton, 'To die for: inherited leadership (*bogosi*) among the Tswana before 1885', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 43:4 (2007), 699–714.

25 Wilson, 'The Sotho, Venda, and Tsonga', 148–149n12.

26 Tlou, 'Servility and political control', 382.

described *bahlanka* in the Thornveld as individuals 'usually taken as prisoners in raids' who 'lived as serfs', but focused on *balala*, 'the poor', as the largest inferior social group in Tswana society.[27] By contrast, Peter Delius called for greater analytical attention to war captivity in precolonial Southern Africa. In his words, 'South African history is littered with references to captives taken in battle', mainly African women and children, who constitute a veritable 'neglected stratum' in the historical representation of precolonial societies.[28]

This article demonstrates that the available sources — across different 'chiefdoms' — contain enough evidence to consider the taking of captives in battle a widespread phenomenon in the precolonial Highveld. Captured individuals, however, were not yet slaves, but rather prisoners, as both Claude Meillassoux and Orlando Patterson have stressed.[29]

This point leads to a brief discussion of the concept of slavery. Arguably the pre-eminent definition of slavery in Africa is the one formulated by Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff: slaves were 'nonpersons', institutionalised outsiders, non-kin, aliens who had to be 'rehumanized' and integrated into kin through what the two authors defined the 'slavery-to-kinship continuum'.[30] Without wishing to downplay the value of their analysis, this article does not employ their approach. This is partially due to its underlying assumptions: Miers and Kopytoff focused on the process of resocialisation, taking for granted that 'the newly acquired alien is already a mere object'. They chose not to elaborate on the 'psychological aspects' of enslavement.[31]

This article, by contrast, is centred on violence, dehumanisation, and enslavement — that is, on the phase that precedes the process analysed by Miers and Kopytoff. In this respect, the works of Claude Meillassoux and Orlando Patterson are more helpful, placing violence and the threat of violence at the centre of their analyses as well as connecting slavery with the concept of death. The former defined the slave as 'socially dead' and as 'a suspended dead person'.[32] More famously, the latter described slavery as 'social death', 'the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonored persons'.[33] This is the definition of slavery adopted here.[34] Consequently, *bohlanka* is analysed in the phase pertaining to capture, enslavement, and resistance. Elements of its institutional

27 Jacobs, *Enivronment*, 42.

28 P. Delius, 'Recapturing captives and conversations with 'cannibals': in pursuit of a neglected stratum in South African history', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36:1 (2010), 7–23.

29 C. Meillassoux, *Anthropologie de l'esclavage: le Ventre de fer et d'argent*, (Paris, 1986), 100–1; O. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*, (Cambridge, Massachussets, 1982), 106–22.

30 S. Miers and I. Kopytoff, 'African "slavery" as an institution of marginality', in Miers and Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa*, 3–81.

31 Miers and Kopytoff, 'African "slavery"', 15.

32 In the French original *'socialement mort'* and *'mort en sursis'*. Meillassoux, *Anthropologie de L'Esclavage*, 106–7.

33 Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 1–14.

34 See also F. Cooper, 'The problem of slavery in African studies', *The Journal of African History*, 20:1 (1979), 103–25, 118n61; R. L. Watson, 'Slavery as an institution: open and closed systems', in R. L. Watson (ed.), *Asian and African Systems of Slavery* (Oxford, 1980), 1–15; J. Glassman, 'The bondsman's new clothes: the contradictory consciousness of slave resistance on the Swahili coast', *The Journal of African History*, 32, 2 (1991), 277–312; A. Testart, 'L'esclavage comme institution', *L'Homme*, 145, De l'esclavage (Jan.-Mar., 1998), 31–69; P. E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2012 [orig. pub. 1983]), 1–15.

phase, that is of the role that *bohlanka* played in Highveld society and economy, are only touched on, and will be examined in more depth in a further contribution.

THE SOURCES: MOSHOESHOE'S *BATLAUKA* AND THE BONDSMEN CALLED *MUTJANKA*

Two main bodies of sources are concerned with *bohlanka* in the nineteenth-century Highveld: one describes the Batlhaping of the Thornveld and western Highveld region at the beginning of the century, and the other discusses Moshoeshoe's Basotho in the southern Highveld during the 1830s. As mentioned above, past analyses have treated these two bodies of sources separately. Indeed, their authors were quite different: in the first case, the sources were produced by colonial travellers who resided for some days or weeks among the observed community and then left; in the second case, they were produced by missionaries who had committed their lives to converting an African community and to some extent to preserving it from colonisation. This section reassesses both groups of sources starting with the latter, because it was included in the works of one of the most influential historians of Southern Africa, Leonard Thompson.

Eugène Casalis, Thomas Arbousset, and Constant Gosselin arrived in Lesotho in 1833 to establish the first mission station for the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society. They quickly became Moshoeshoe's advisers, his ambassadors to the Colony of Good Hope, and one of the instruments of his rule. Their role in advocating Sotho rights versus the colonists has been extensively studied, as was their influence in matters of foreign policy and internal politics.[35] However, they also strongly criticised some aspects of Sotho culture, such as polygamy and marriage accompanied by the exchange of cattle, or bridewealth.[36] *Bohlanka* was among their first targets, but it was dropped after the first decade of missionary activity.

Leonard Thompson analysed the first reference to this institution in Lesotho. In 1835 Arbousset witnessed a public dispute between Moshoeshoe and the widow of one of his '*batlauka*', a *mohlanka*. She asked for her child to remain with her, but the ruler claimed that the child belonged to him, since he had paid bridewealth for the marriage in the stead of his late *mohlanka*. The dispute ended when Moshoeshoe beat the woman with a stick and tried to kill one of her relatives.[37] The occurrence offers valuable insight into the lesser-known image of Moshoeshoe as a ruler capable of brutality, but the narrative is anecdotal and offers little room for an analytical approach.

35 C.-H. Perrot, *Les Sotho et Les Missionnaires Européens Au 19e Siècle*, (Abidjan, 1970); Thompson, *Survival*, 70–104; Sanders, *Moshoeshoe*, 122–32; R. B. Beck, 'Monarchs and missionaries among the Tswana and Sotho', in R. Elphick and R. Davenport (eds.), *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social and Cultural History* (Oxford, 1997), 110–1.

36 E. Casalis, *Les Bassoutos, ou Vingt-trois Années de Séjour et d'Observations Au Sud de l'Afrique*, (Paris, 1859), 190–199; M. Epprecht, *'This Matter of Women is Getting Very Bad': Gender, Development and Politics in Colonial Lesotho* (Pietermaritzburg, 2000), 16–38.

37 Thompson, *Survival*, 95–9; Letter from T. Arbousset to Society, 5 December 1835, Morija, *Journal des Missions Évangéliques* (henceforth: *JME*), 11 (1836), 147–51.

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Thompson did not notice that Arbousset returned to the subject several months later, providing a focused explanation of *bohlanka* to his superiors. In his *'Note sur les Batlauka'* published in 1837, Arbousset wrote that 'among these peoples, the powerful has to make slaves, just like he has to make flatterers'. Moshoeshoe's '*batlauka*' were therefore the poor who had cried out to him *'U re tole'*, 'Collect us!'. They had become his 'semi-slaves' and received cattle in return for their subordination while forfeiting their children to him. After the bond was created voluntarily, Moshoeshoe made sure to keep them poor in order to enjoy their services, which included working his fields and herding his cattle. Indeed, faced with the prospect of 'freeing' his *bahlanka*, Moshoeshoe asked Arbousset rhetorically 'who will cultivate my fields?' and opposed the proposal of paying them a salary.[38]

The third and final reference to *bohlanka* comes from Arbousset's account of his travels across the Highveld, the *Relation*, published in 1842. This book included a description of Mohlomi, a famous late eighteenth-century Highveld ancestor who had grown rich and powerful thanks to his *'batlauka'* 'semi-slaves'. As before, they were characterised as widows, orphans, and poor young men for whom he had arranged marriages and paid bridewealth. However, while in the *'Note'* Arbousset reported that the *bahlanka* were 'disgusted' by Moshoeshoe and complained that he had turned their children into 'oxen', in the *Relation* the missionary reported that Mohlomi was remembered as 'the best king' that the Basotho had ever had.[39] Hidden in this shift lies a change in the perspective of the missionaries. They never mentioned *bohlanka* again and focused their criticism on polygamy, as Thompson noticed.[40]

It was mentioned that Thompson considered *bohlanka* a form of clientship based on cattle-loans. However, he also stated also that 'by no means all holders of *mafisa* [cattle-loans] were *bahlanka*'.[41] If receiving a cattle-loan was not the distinctive element of the institution under Moshoeshoe, what made an individual a *mohlanka*? Peter Sanders described Moshoeshoe's *bahlanka* as 'certain young men who [...] had been given to him as children by parents who had been too poor to bring them up themselves', and were given 'marriage cattle', following the example of Mohlomi.[42] The first written occurrence of the term comes from another portion of the Highveld and helps to resolve the matter.

In 1801 the Batlhaping, a community that inhabited the Highveld/Thornveld frontier zone north of the confluence of the Vaal and Orange rivers, welcomed to their town of Dithakong the first explorers coming from the Cape Colony. Led by commissioners Petrus Johannes Truter and William Somerville, the expedition remained among them for some time, attempting, without success, to barter cattle for the drought-struck

38 T. Arbousset, 'Note sur les Batlauka', 30 September 1836, Thaba Bosiu, *JME*, 12 (1837), 42–7.

39 T. Arbousset, *Relation d'un Voyage d'Exploration au Nord-Est de la Colonie Du Cap de Bonne Esperance, Entrepris dans le Mois de Mars, Avril et Mai 1836, par MM. T. Arbousset et F. Daumas, Missionnaires de la Société des Missions Évangéliques de Paris, Écrite par Thomas Arbousset, Avec Onze Dessins et une Carte* (Paris, 1842), 539–41.

40 Thompson, *Survival*, 98.

41 *Ibid.* 193.

42 Sanders, *Moshoeshoe*, 55–6.

Colony.[43] Some years later, in 1806, John Barrow, who did not participate in the expedition, attached a narrative from an unnamed member to his famous book *A Voyage to Cochinchina*.[44] Until the Van Riebeeck Society published William Somerville's diary in 1979, Barrow's book remained the main source on the Batlhaping, their society, culture, and history.[45]

This is of the utmost importance, because either Barrow or the unnamed author wrote that no African outside the Colony had 'the most distant idea of a state of slavery', that 'they have all been found in the full enjoyment of unbounded freedom', and that 'even in war the only booty is the cattle of the enemy'.[46] These statements were wrong. Petrus Borchardus Borcherds, a Cape-born settler and member of the expedition, wrote instead that 'they [the Batlhaping] are embittered and cruel to their prisoners-of-war, these either become ... [sic] or slaves, or are sentenced a cruel death'.[47]

Borcherds's description is backed by the travel account of a German naturalist, Hinrich Lichtenstein, who visited the Batlhaping in 1804–1805 and published his narrative in two volumes in 1812.[48] Most significantly, Lichtenstein's work contains the first written occurrence of the term *mohlanka*. In the town of Kuruman, where the Batlhaping lived, Lichtenstein was offered for purchase two children captured in war; their seller told him that 'they had fallen into his power, as infants, in a war some years before with the tribe of Chojaa, and as lawful booty were his slaves for ever; he had even full power over their lives'. Lichtenstein commented that 'These bondsmen are regarded, indeed, as a separate class of people, and are called Mutjanka [*motlhanka*]; no other servants are included under this appellation, only the prisoners of war.'[49]

In this specific case, the two children were Dihoja, hailing from a community in northern and central Free State Province with whom the Batlhaping had been fighting for decades.[50] However, Lichtenstein also mentioned among the 'serfs' of the Batlhaping 'people from different tribes, such as Wauketsi, Muhrulong, Tammacha etc. etc.', all of whom had been enemies of the Batlhaping in the past. In another publication, which remained unpublished in English until 1973, he criticised Truter and Barrow for having been superficial with

43 E. Bradlow, 'Historical introduction', in W. Somerville, *William Somerville's Narrative of His Journeys to the Eastern Cape Frontier and to Lattakoe, 1799–1802*, Cape Town, 1979, 13–22.

44 J. Barrow, *A Voyage to Cochinchina, in the Years 1792 and 1793: Containing a General View of the Valuable Productions and the Political Importance of This Flourishing Kingdom, and Also of Such European Settlements as Were Visited on the Voyage..., to Which is Annexed an Account of a Journey Made in the Years 1801 and 1802, to the Residence of the Chief of the Booshuana Nation* (London, 1806).

45 F. R. Bradlow, 'Bibliographical introduction', in Somerville, *Narrative*, 3–12.

46 Barrow, *A Voyage*, 405–6.

47 Somerville, *Narrative*, Appendix 1, Letter written by Petrus Borchardus Borcherds to his father Rev. Meent Borcherds [nd], 230.

48 H. Lichtenstein, *Travels in Southern Africa in the Years 1803, 1804, 1805 and 1806*, translated from the original German by A. Plumptre, Vol. 1 and 2 (London, 1812).

49 Lichtenstein, *Travels*, II, 315–6, 331.

50 School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) Library, Microfilm, M 4916, Seetsele Modiri Molema, 'History of the Barolong', 47, and section on 'The Seleka branch of the Barolong', 1–4; J. Campbell, *Travels in South Africa Undertaken at the Request of the London Missionary Society, Being a Narrative of a Second Journey in the Interior of that Country* (London, 1822), I, 302, *Ibid.* II, 187.

regard to the subject and commented that *bahlanka* were present 'in every better-off Beetjuana family'.[51]

A few years later, in 1812, the English botanist William John Burchell had a similar experience among the Batlhaping. One evening he noticed 'a little child, apparently about five or six years old [...] on the point of being *starved to death*' who was waiting to receive some food from a group of Batlhaping. One of them misunderstood the reason for his interest and explained to Burchell 'that it was *a Bushman's child* and belonged to him; that in an attack upon a Bushman kraal, he had seized him, and carried him off as a *prisoner of war*; that he was therefore his by right; and that, if I wished to buy him, I would have him for a sheep!!'[52] Burchell later stated that the captives were only 'prisoners-of-war', not slaves, because 'they were not generally considered by their masters as common saleable property'. Yet he also reported that one Motlhaping 'confessed that when children fell into their hands, they were carried away, and brought up as servants; and that these were so far rated as their own property, that they were sometimes, though rarely, transferred to another master'.[53] Both Burchell and the missionary John Campbell, who visited the Batlhaping a few years later, mentioned *bahlanka* as the third, lower tier of Tswana society, below the *kgosi*, the ruler, and the *dikgosi*, or 'captains'.[54]

From this brief discussion it is possible to conclude that *bahlanka* were originally captives taken in war, and the category later included the poor who gave themselves up voluntarily; that *bohlanka* predated the large-scale wars of the *mfecane*/ *lifaqane*; that the victims were not adult at the moment of capture; and that both Sotho-Tswana-speakers and non-Bantu-speakers could become *bahlanka*. Elizabeth Eldredge analysed Lichtenstein's account and, despite admitting that his description fits with what scholars 'generally refer to as slavery elsewhere in Africa', she based her analysis on Tlou's approach and considered *batlhanka* 'dependents, not to be confused with slaves'. In addition, Eldredge proposed that 'harsher institutionalized forms of *botlhanka* appeared later in the nineteenth century' due to the expansion of 'the white frontier' from the 1840s.[55] Barry Morton pointed out a similar development in his essay on *bohlanka* in the Kalahari.[56]

Indeed, a small-scale trade in *bahlanka* developed after the contact with the Colony, as Eldredge suggested and as Lichtenstein described.[57] On the other hand, trade is only one form of enslavement: capture in war is generally recognised as the other main one.[58] There is no evidence that the concept of *bohlanka* was born from the contact with the Cape Colony. Based on captivity and not aimed at selling human beings as chattel, Highveld *bohlanka* was qualitatively different from Cape slavery, but was a form of slavery

51 H. Lichtenstein, *Foundation of the Cape. About the Bechuanas* (Cape Town, 1973), 75–76n91.
52 Emphasis in the original. W. J. Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* (London, 1822–1824), II, 472–3.
53 Burchell, *Travels*, II, 535–6.
54 *Ibid*. 347–8, see also 375–6; Campbell, *Travels: Second Journey*, II, 193, 214.
55 E. Eldredge, 'Slave raiding across the Cape frontier', in Eldredge, Morton, *Slavery in South Africa*, 104–5.
56 B. Morton, 'Servitude, slave trading, and slavery in the Kalahari', 222–39.
57 Lichtenstein, *Foundation of the Cape: About the Bechuanas*, 75–6.
58 Meillassoux, *Anthropologie de l'esclavage*, 143–7, 235–6; Patterson, *Slavery*, 106, 148–9; Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 3; Cooper, 'The problem of slavery', 105-107; F. Viti, *Schiavi, Servi e Dipendenti. Antropologia Delle Forme di Dipendenza Personale in Africa* (Milano, 2007), 37.

nevertheless, due to two important elements. First, its victims were 'suspended dead persons'. This emerges clearly from an episode narrated by Lichtenstein: a rich Motlhaping killed one of his *bahlanka* for ritual purposes, but this did not constitute murder and he was not criticised for it. Lichtenstein commented that 'the life of prisoners taken in war is at the absolute disposal of the conquerors and is considered as a present whenever spared'.[59] Clearly, the captor could decide to take that life at any time.

Second, *bahlanka* were kinless individuals either because the bonds with their families had been severed, because they could not produce their own kin, or both. As noted above, Moshoeshoe raised the children of his *bahlanka* as his own, barring them from social reproduction and appropriating their value as biological reproducers. This bears some resemblance to the treatment of the children of the *bahlanka* among the Batawana of Botswana, the case studied by Thomas Tlou: subordinate families were forced to 'give up their children' to 'district governors', who despatched a share of them to the 'king'.[60] Unfortunately, there are no other direct references to *bohlanka* in the nineteenth-century Highveld. On the other hand, there are a considerable number of sources reporting cases of captivity. The next section analyses how captivity and *bohlanka* intersected.

'YOU WILL TAKE THEM AS PRISONERS': WARFARE AND CAPTIVITY

In April 1835, Moshoeshoe left Lesotho with approximately 800 men, rallied the forces of his ally Moorosi of the Baphuthi, crossed the Maloti-Drakensberg mountains, and attacked the abaThembu whose villages were on the south-eastern side of the range. This campaign was remembered by past historians because it was the last time Moshoeshoe participated in a military operation in person, and because its results were bittersweet: a vast herd was captured, but the king's brother Makhabane was killed and many Basotho men fell.[61] Thomas Arbousset and Eugène Casalis were shocked:[62]

> We should not lie to ourselves: the actions of our chiefs against the Tamboukis, last April, were extremely cruel and hurtful. Against the customs of the Béchouanas and of the Cafres, they did not spare women nor children, they slaughtered all in their way, even the cattle that they were forced to leave behind, in their hurried escape.[63]

Which 'customs' were broken by Moshoeshoe in the above-mentioned occurrence? This section discusses captivity as an integral component of Highveld warfare. As analysed above, the first explicit references to captives date to the beginning of the nineteenth

59 Lichtenstein, *Travels*, II, 331.

60 Tlou, 'Servility and political control', 382.

61 Thompson, *Survival*, 83; Sanders, *Moshoeshoe*, 53–4. A *thoko*, or praise-poem, was composed to commemorate the events. M. Damane and P. Sanders (eds.), *Lithoko: Sotho Praise Poems* (Oxford, 1974), 71–2. The point of view of the abaThembu was captured in a manuscript held at the Cory Library of Grahamstown, Ms. 18534, E. G. Sihele, *Who Are the AbaThembu and Where Do They Come From?*, trans. into English by N. C. Tisani, 52–6.

62 Either Casalis, Arbousset, or the editors of the missionary periodical commented: 'The demon of battles has seized the soul of the king of the Bassoutos.' nd. *JME*, 11 (1836), 18.

63 Letter from Arbousset to Society, Morija, 3 December 1835, *JME*, 11 (1836), 140–2. The campaign was described also by Casalis and Gosselin. Letter from Casalis to Society, Motito, 20 May 1835, and Journal by Gosselin, 6 October 1834 to 30 May 1835, *JME*, 11 (1836), 23–5, 40.

century and firmly connect this institution with *bohlanka*. Later sources provide evidence on the diffusion of captivity, although often without the detail and insight of Lichtenstein and Burchell, and without employing the vernacular *bohlanka* to describe them. In the southern Highveld, Moshoeshoe had associated his name with the taking of captives before becoming the ruler of Lesotho, from around 1804, when he chose Letlama, 'the One who binds', as his initiation name. His personal regiment, the Matlama, maintained this connection: *motlamuoa* is the Sesotho for 'prisoner'.[64] In the early 1820s, Moshoeshoe's father Mokhachane was defeated by the Qhoai Bafokeng, who took him prisoner. Moshoeshoe ransomed him with thirty head of cattle.[65] In 1822, when Moshoeshoe was still a petty chief, he defeated a small independent community of Basia, 'utterly routed them', took their cattle, and 'many prisoners'. These included three Sia women, two of whom he kept for himself, giving the other to his brother Mohale.[66] On another occasion his village was attacked, and two of his wives were captured by the Bafokeng, but Moshoeshoe took them back.[67] In the same year his ally Lethole was captured by the Batlokoa, and Moshoeshoe ransomed him back as he had done with his father.[68]

One of the two Basia captured by Moshoeshoe already had a daughter, who was later given as a second wife to his second son, Molapo, becoming mother to the junior branch of the northern district, that of Joel Molapo. By the same token, the Mosia captive mother became one of Moshoeshoe's wives and gave birth to the princes Sofonia and Tsekelo, who were also juniors among Moshoeshoe's sons.[69] Captive females could therefore help to cement and to expand Moshoeshoe's family, which was in turn a true instrument of his rule, but captive origins seem to have played a role in determining social hierarchies among men of power in Lesotho.[70]

The year 1823 was the culmination of the *lifaqane* on the Highveld.[71] North of the Vaal River, several cases of children sold or offered for sale are attested among the Barolong, who were fighting various communities from the east and south, although these children are not referred to as captives, and only in some instances as orphans.[72] It is known,

64 Thompson, *Survival*, 6; A. Mabille, H. Dieterlen (eds.) and R. A. Paroz, *Southern Sotho-English Dictionary* (Morija, Lesotho, 2011), 402.

65 Damane, Sanders, *Lithoko*, 64–5.

66 Ellenberger and Macgregor, *History of the Basuto,* 129; J. C. Macgregor, *Basuto Traditions. Being a Record of the Traditional History of the More Important Tribes Which Form the Basuto Nation of To-Day up to the Time of Their Being Absorbed, Compiled from Native Sources* (Cape Town, 1905), 18.

67 Ellenberger and Macgregor, *History of the Basuto,* 123. Mentioned with other cases in Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom*, 134.

68 Macgregor, *Basuto Traditions*, 25.

69 Ellenberger and Macgregor, *History of the Basuto,* 129.

70 Slave descent is, at least in theory, compatible with a position of power. Patterson, *Slavery*, 314–7; Watson, 'Slavery as an institution', 6; P. Valsecchi, 'Il *big man* è uno schiavo. Status personale e potere nella Costa d'Oro tra Sei e Ottocento', in P. G. Solinas, *La Dipendenza. Antropologia delle Relazioni di Dominio* (Lecce, Italy, 2004), 15–40.

71 M. Kinsman, '"Hungry wolves": The impact of violence on Rolong life, 1823–1836', in Hamilton, *The Mfecane Aftermath*, 363–93; Etherington, *Great Treks*, 133–7.

72 Wits Historical Papers, Johannesburg, A 567, Symons Collection, Item 5, Letter, Mrs. Hodgson to her sisters, Banks of the Modder River, 7 May 1825, photocopy; T. L. Hodgson, *The Journals of the Rev. T. L. Hodgson, Missionary to the Seleka-Rolong and the Griquas, 1821–1831* (Johannesburg, 1977), 150–1, 173; S. Broadbent, *A Narrative of the First Introduction of Christianity Amongst the Barolong Tribe of*

however, that the Batlhaping took at least 87 women as prisoners at the battle of Dithakong, fought in 1823, because the missionary Robert Moffat freed and redistributed them to the Griqua, among whom the London Missionary Society had a stronger footing.[73] The following year, 1824, the Barolong defeated the Bataung of Moletsane and captured his main wife Mamoretlo 'and other women'.[74]

Other occurrences of captivity took place in Lesotho throughout the 1820s. In 1824 Moshoeshoe's brother Mohale subjugated the Baphuthi of Moorosi and kidnapped all the boys. They were returned only after Moshoeshoe was recognised as sovereign, but maintained a long-distance bond with their captors until a ransom of a sheep each was paid, in some cases twenty years later.[75] In 1829 Moshoeshoe led a campaign against the amaXhosa across the Maloti-Drakensberg, raided various villages, and took cattle, women, and children.[76] On this occasion, the neighbouring Batlokoa of Sekonyela tried to capture Moshoeshoe's wives and other Basotho women and children by raiding his capital while he was away, but they were repulsed by the youngest regiment, who had just come out of initiation.[77]

The ruler of the Basotho was said to have forcibly taken two San women as wives in around 1833, in compensation for the robberies commited by their father.[78] The only major occurrence in the 1830–40s, a more peaceful period, took place in 1836, arguably as a side effect of the 1835 Sixth Frontier War between the amaXhosa and the Cape Colony. An independent community of amaXhosa under a member of the royal family, Myaluza, crossed the Maloti-Drakensberg towards the Highveld and settled too near to Moshoeshoe.[79] After they had killed some Basotho and blocked the trade route between Lesotho and the nearest colonial settlement at Colesberg, they were attacked at dawn. The men were killed and the women and children were brought to Thaba Bosiu, the capital, as 'captives of the king of the Basotho', together with the cattle. Since it was said that between a hundred and a hundred and fifty men managed to survive the battle, it is possible that the captives numbered a few hundred.[80] The following year, in 1837, Sekonyela

Bechuanas, South Africa. With a Brief Summary of the Subsequent History of the Wesleyan Missions to the Same People (London, 1865), 97–8, 107–8.

73 Melvill's narrative in G. Thompson, *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa: Comprising a View of the Present State of the Colony, with Observations on the Progress and Prospects of the British Emigrants* (London, 1827), I, 309–11.

74 Macgregor, *Basuto Traditions*, 64.

75 Ellenberger and Macgregor, *History of the Basuto*, 163–4.

76 M. Damane, P. Sanders, 'The Story of the Sotho – Part 2, by Tlali Moshoeshoe', Edited and translated with an introduction and notes, in *Mohlomi. Journal of Southern African Historical Studies*, 6 (1990), 139–64, 146. According to the Mosotho historian Azariel Sekese, however, the campaign was led against the abaThembu, as it would be later in 1835. See A. T. Elias, *A. M. Sekese's 29 Articles on the History of the Batlokoa Serially Published in the Leselinyana la Lesotho During 1892–1921,* translated from Sesotho into English, B.A. Long Essay, National University of Lesotho (Roma, Lesotho, 1987), 19–20.

77 Ellenberger and Macgregor, *History of the Basuto*, 194–5.

78 *Ibid.* 235.

79 J. B. Peires, *The House of Phalo: A History of the Xhosa People in the Days of Their Independence* (Johannesburg, 2003 [orig. pub. 1981]), 132–4.

80 Letter from François Daumas to Society, Bersheeba, 5 December 1836, *JME*, 12 (1837), 134–6; SOAS Library, Mf 6181, David-Frédéric Ellenberger, *Histoire des BaSotho, anciens et modèrnes (archives de la 'malle Ellenberger' II)*, microfiches of notes and notebooks of the French original, IDC, Leiden, 1993,

of the Batlokoa took prisoner one of his own subordinate leaders, Tsehlo, accusing him of having helped the Boers of Piet Retief, and released him after a 'heavy ransom' was paid.[81]

In 1848 the governor of the Cape Colony Sir Harry Smith proclaimed the Orange River Sovereignty over the southern Highveld, starting a new period of violence that led to the final confrontation between Moshoeshoe and Sekonyela. In 1851 another of Moshoeshoe's brothers, Posholi, who ruled the southern districts of Lesotho but was considered independent at that time, attacked the villages of the abaThembu who had settled on his lands, emboldened by the support of the British resident, Henry Douglas Warden. On this occasion he kept the women for his men, while selling the children to Boer settlers in exchange for horses.[82] In the same year, and outside Lesotho, Letlala of the Makholokhoe, an independent ruler of the Maloti region, treacherously killed the people of his rival agnate lineage while escorting them through his lands at Witzie's Hoek, in modern Free State. This was allegedly done because their leader had a role in the killing of his father, but the women and children were spared 'as booty'.[83]

The case involving the highest number of captives took place in 1853. In the aftermath of Moshoeshoe's final victory over the rival community of the Batlokoa, all the women and children, out of a total population of about 14,000, were brought to his capital. This followed Moshoeshoe's orders before the battle: 'The women and the children will be respected as if they were mine ["*les femmes et les enfants seront respectés comme les miens propres*"]; you will take them as prisoners.'[84] Moshoeshoe eventually gave them back to their respective husbands and fathers without ransom and in exchange for their subjugation, but it is not clear what status the captives had after this event; moreover, Sekonyela denounced Moshoeshoe for keeping two of his wives and two of his dead brother's wives for himself.[85] Regarding this specific source, it is interesting to note that Leonard Thompson mentioned the rest of the document, but — for reasons that remain unexplained — did not quote the lines in which Moshoeshoe gave the order to take prisoners.[86] On the

'*Chapitre VII [7]. a. Monyaloza, ses acts et sa fin; b. Expedition de Moshesh et de Moroka contre les AmaXosa et les Korannas du Riet River*', 37–40.

81 Macgregor, *Basuto Traditions*, 30.

82 J. M. Orpen, *History of the Basutus of South Africa* (Cape Town, 1857), 92–3; G. M. Theal (ed.), *Basutoland Records, Volume 1, 1833–1852*, (Cape Town, 1883), 'Minutes of a Meeting held at Winburg on the 7th February 1852 between Her Majesty's Assistant Commissioners, the Chief Molitsane, Paulus Moperi, and Molapo and David, sons of Moshesh', 535–549. Also mentioned in Eldredge, 'Slave raiding across the Cape frontier', 120–1.

83 Western Cape Provincial Archives, Cape Town, (WCPA), A 302, 8: Joseph Millerd Orpen Papers, Historical Notes on Natives. Typescript of memorandum by Joseph Millerd Orpen, nd. [*c.*1900–10], on various subjects, 36 pp., first page missing; the reference is on page 10. Also referred to as Letlatsa. Orpen had met Letlatsa and recorded his version of the story when he was a colonial magistrate in Harrismith. On Orpen, see R. King, '"A loyal liking for fair play": Joseph Millerd Orpen and knowledge production in the Cape Colony', *South African Historical Journal*, 68:4 (2015), 410–32.

84 Letter from Arbousset to Society, Morija, 8 November 1853, *JME*, 29 (1854), 165.

85 Anonymous, 'Account of Sikonyela', *Friend of the Sovereignty*, 10 December 1853, also published in Theal, *Basutoland Records, Volume 2*, 82–5. This was reported also by Casalis, letter to Society, Thaba Bosiu, 4 November 1853, *JME*, 29 (1854), 41–2.

86 In addition, Thompson did not make any reference to the attack on the amaXhosa in 1836. Thompson, *Survival*, 82–3, 165–6.

same occasion the Basotho also freed 'some women and fifty-nine children, who were in the hands of the enemy', having been taken prisoner by the Batlokoa during the war.[87]

The widespread use of captivity has also been documented in the less accessible parts of the Drakensberg. During the 1850s the Baphuthi of Moorosi, by then an ally of Moshoeshoe, repeatedly raided the San of the mountains, killing the men and giving the women and girls as wives 'to [Phuthi] men [...] who had most distinguished themselves in war', so that 'the tribe was considerably strengthened', as a long-time British Resident in the neighbouring colonial district of Herschel later reported.[88] Marshall Clarke, who led an exploratory tour of the mountain range in the 1880s, wrote that Moorosi had 'married in a left-handed way some of their women', so that the 'Bushmen' acknowledged 'a sort of fealty' to him.[89]

The last two known cases are similar to those mentioned above. In 1861 the Basotho again crossed the Maloti-Drakensberg, this time to attack the amaMpondomise, and one of Moshoeshoe's sons, Masopha, was praised for having brought back 'a Thembu maiden' who was also referred to as 'uninitiated girl, the Thembu's cow'.[90] Finally, at the outbreak of the second Basotho-Boer war in 1865, the regiments of Masopha attacked the Griqua village of Platberg, on the Free State side of the border, and killed all the men. It is reported that 'out of fifty-seven only three escaped, their property together with all the grown-up girls being driven off as booty to Basutoland'.[91]

In his book *Les Bassoutos*, the missionary Casalis explained that the prisoners of war enjoyed 'some civil rights' but remained under the authority of their captor and were barred from returning to their home country, 'until they are ransomed'.[92] Likewise, the missionary François Daumas commented on the battle between Moshoeshoe and Sekonyela in 1853 that 'native customs give the right to ask for a number of heads of cattle' as ransom for prisoners.[93] However, ransom was not the only possible outcome: some were not ransomed, and others were killed.

Analysing the body of evidence listed above, a clear pattern emerges regarding gender and age. In most of the cases the prisoners were women and children, in a manner akin to African forms of slavery.[94] The same pattern was typical of captivity in the broader

87 Letter from Arbousset to Society, Morija, 12 January 1849, *JME*, 24 (1849), 191–4; Letter from Arbousset to Society, Morija, 8 November 1853, *JME*, 29 (1854), 170.

88 WCPA, A 302, 8: Joseph Millerd Orpen Papers, Historical Notes on Natives, 'Reminiscences of H. Stevens Resident of Herschel District of 36 years standing', 2. This could explain why Moorosi was reported to be in the 1870s the 'nominal chief' of the San of the Upper Orange valley; see J. Wright John, A. Mazel (eds.), *Tracks in a Mountain Range: Exploring the History of the uKhahlamba-Drakensberg* (Johannesburg, 2007), 94–5; P. Vinnicombe, *People of the Eland: Rock Paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a Reflection of their Life and Thought* (Pietermaritzburg, 1976), 87–103.

89 Marshall Clarke, Unexplored Basuto Land, *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society and Monthly Record of Geography*, 10:8 (1888), 519–25, 524. One of the Mosotho informants of Victor Ellenberger recalled that the 'Bushmen' 'married with the Ba'phouti'. V. Ellenberger, *La Fin Tragique des Bushmen* (Paris, 1953), 258.

90 Damane, Sanders, *Lithoko*, 130–1.

91 G. Lagden, *The Basutos: The Mountaineers & Their Country, Being a Narrative of Events Relating to the Tribe From Its Formation Early In the Nineteenth Century To the Present Day* (London 1909), II, 355–6.

92 Casalis, *Les Bassoutos*, 235.

93 Letter from Daumas to Society, Mekuatleng, January 1854, *JME*, 29 (1854), 175.

94 Meillassoux, *Anthropologie de l'Esclavage*, 110–4; C. C. Robertson and M. A. Klein (eds.), *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Portsmouth, 1997), 3–28.

Southern African context.[95] This was also the practice under the system of *inboekstelsel*, the labour illegally acquired by the colonial farmers of the frontier, both through raiding in person and by African middlemen, as it was practiced first against the Khoe and San of the northern frontier, and then against the Bantu-speakers of the Highveld and Lowveld.[96]

The only men who were captured in Highveld warfare were men of power and leaders of enemy communities, while commoners were always killed. Although the Xhosa leader Myaluza was killed in 1836 'in the public square', enemy leaders were generally ransomed for large numbers of cattle.[97] In addition, it can be argued that capturing an enemy ruler was a relevant step in one's own political career; it was said that Moletsane of the Bataung 'became a chief' after he had captured the leader of an enemy community and 'his chief men'.[98] Conversely, being captured may have diminished one's rank, and this would explain why Moshoeshoe *de facto* succeeded his father a long time before the latter died, and more or less in the period after the elder man had been ransomed. Orlando Patterson elaborated on a similar connection between enslavement and dishonour.[99]

Imposing a collective ransom on a whole enemy community had a political meaning too, but in this case the sources are less detailed. Moshoeshoe employed this tactic with the Baphuthi in 1824 and with the Batlokoa in 1853: in both cases the male relatives of the victims had to travel to his capital to obtain the release of the captives. Rulers had to pay a tribute to Moshoeshoe, whereas ransom for commoners could be paid many years later. This might explain why the missionaries believed that no ransom was paid in 1853. The Baphuthi and the Batlokoa symbolically subjugated themselves to the ruler of the Basotho, who consequently expanded his authority over their home territories.

Such varied records suggest that Moshoeshoe did not break any customs when his men killed the women and children of the abaThembu indiscriminately in 1835, contrary to what the missionaries said. He was practicing the most destructive level of Highveld warfare; the aim was not to humiliate an enemy leader, nor to subjugate an entire community, nor to expand his borders. Rather, his aim was to erase the enemy communities living on the other side of the Maloti-Drakensberg. Moshoeshoe himself explained to the missionaries that he took vengeance on the abaThembu because they had similarly destroyed Sotho villages four years before.[100]

However, the same objective could be reached by slightly less destructive means, by making the ransoming of prisoners impossible. Taking women and children captives *and* killing

95 Delius, 'Recapturing captives', 8.

96 R. C.-H. Shell, *Children of Bondage: A Social History of the Slave Society at the Cape of Good Hope 1652–1838* (Hannover, 2001), 28–34; F. Morton, 'Slavery in South Africa', in Eldredge, Morton, *Slavery in South Africa*, 251–69; N. Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier: Colonist and Khoisan on the Cape's Northern Frontier in the 18th Century* (Cape Town, 2005), 141–2; W. Dooling, 'Reconstructing the household: the northern Cape Colony before and after the South African war', *The Journal of African History*, 50:3 (2009), 399–416; Bonner, *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires*, 69–71; P. Delius, S. Trapido, 'Inboekselings and Oorlams: the creation and transformation of a servile class', *Journal of South African Studies*, 8:2 (1982), 214–42. These similarities with *inboekstelsel*, however, cannot be properly analysed here.

97 SOAS Library, Mf 6181, Ellenberger, *Histoire des BaSotho*, 39–40.

98 Macgregor, *Basuto Traditions*, 60.

99 Patterson, *Slavery*, 9–14, 77–101.

100 Letter from Arbousset to Society, Morija, 3 December 1835, *JME*, 11 (1836), 140–2.

the men had the obvious objective of destroying an entire community too, as the Basotho did with the attack on the amaXhosa of Myaluza on the Caledon, in 1836. The next section addresses a case study that sheds light on what became of these unredeemable prisoners.

'HAVE YOU EVER CAPTURED ANYTHING FOR YOUR PARENTS?' THE RAID OF 1871

In 1871, Molapo, the second son of Moshoeshoe and the local ruler of the northern district of Leribe, sent his sons Jonathan and Joel on an expedition against a band of San who had stolen some horses from a cattle-post in the foothills of the Maloti.[101] As in the incidents mentioned above, the Basotho killed the San men and took some women and children as prisoners. As a result, the raiding activities in the Maloti-Drakensberg ceased, and the surviving San dispersed into the neighbouring regions. In the early 1880s various wealthy Basotho were given permission by the ruler of Lesotho to settle there and the valleys were peopled with villages.[102] The campaign was therefore a prelude to territorial expansion and almost certainly was not undertaken with the intention of capturing prisoners. However, captivity was so engrained in Highveld warfare that it would be naïve to think that taking prisoners was not considered a likely by-product by the participants in the raid, especially since there is evidence that the destruction of the San community was decided in advance.

As was customary, the exploits of the two princes were recorded in a series of praise-poems which provide a view on captivity as a part of Sotho-Tswana culture which was not mediated by European observers.[103] It is not necessary to fully subscribe to the view of Guma — who wrote that praise-poems were 'based on actual deeds or actions' and constituted 'an authentic record of past events in the history of the individual and his tribe'— to recognise that scholars should not neglect these under-exploited sources, and remember that they do, after all, contain fragments of history.[104] The partial reliability of the praise-poems on the 1871 expedition emerges when comparing them with the other main source, the interviews made by the missionary and historian Victor Ellenberger in the villages of Molapo some decades later. Small details such as the name of one of the San prisoners, the San boy Phafoli, occur in both sets of sources.[105]

101 V. Ellenberger, *La fin*, 243–49; Vinnicombe, *People of the Eland*, 87–103; Wright, Mazel, *Tracks in a Mountain Range*, 94–5; P. Vinnicombe, 'Basotho oral knowledge: The last Bushman inhabitant of the Mashai district, Lesotho', in P. Mitchell and B. Smiths (eds.), *The Eland's People: New Perspectives in the Rock Art of the Maloti-Drakensberg Bushmen*, (Johannesburg, 2010), 165–91; P. Mitchell, 'Making history at Sehonghong: Soai and the last Bushman occupants of his shelter', *Southern African Humanities*, 22 (2010), 149–70.

102 Gill, *A Short History of Lesotho* (Morja, Lesotho, 1993) 132–3; Eldredge, *A South African Kingdom*, 62–3; Vinnicombe, 'Basotho oral knowledge', 184n17.

103 Damane and Sanders, *Lithoko*, 59–61.

104 S. M. Guma, *The Form, Content and Technique of Traditional Literature in Southern Sotho* (Pretoria, 1967), 151–2; Damane and Sanders, *Lithoko*, 59; Sanders, *Throwing Down White Man*, 6–7; R. Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Cambridge, 2012 [orig. pub. 1970]), 111–43; D. P. Kunene, *Heroic Poetry of the Basotho* (Oxford, 1971); J. Iliffe, *Honour in African History* (Cambridge, 2005), 140–60.

105 V. Ellenberger, *La Fin*, 255–7.

Joel Molapo and his men are credited with the killing of Soai, the leader of the San.[106] Joel's poem praises him for the success of the expedition and also reveals that he 'took up the people in the *hoek*', that 'he's found people for himself', and that he had refused to redistribute the 'cattle' among his men. The verb employed in the Sesotho original for 'to take up', *ho thola*, is the same of the subjugation formula that created voluntary *bohlanka* according to the 1836 'Note' by Arbousset mentioned above.[107] It can also be translated as 'to take as a servant'.[108] This detail connects captivity with *bohlanka* and has the potential of redefining some of the above-mentioned cases with slavery, as in the descriptions by Lichtenstein and Burchell.

The praise-poems of Jonathan Molapo are longer and richer and therefore only two sections are analysed here. The following excerpts describe the arrival of the San captives at Molapo's main village in northern Lesotho.[109]

***Thoko* II of Jonathan**	***Thoko* III of Jonathan**
They jostled each other as they entered the kraal,	Crocodile, give medicines, servant of Josefa,
Afraid of the one with dark eyes, the chief;	Give medicines to the Bushmen, that they shouldn't breed
The cattle are afraid of the women's din.	That the Bushmen stay barren, every single one,
The women are amazed at the difference of the females,	That the Glarers take them to marry them,
And the Agitator, the Rescuer, also asked:	Those who like to marry polygamously.
'Buffaloes, you've captured a crooked stick:	Tell me, cow from among those of Soai's,
As soon as it arrived it slipped off to the Maloti.	If you're pregnant, if you're full with a calf in your stomach,
Shouldn't you have killed it in the open country	That the Glarers may deal with you gently,
That the crows of the Maloti should be sated?'	That the calf shouldn't kick you in the stomach, my favourite.
The hyaenas give thanks for their meat, Chief.	Cow of the family of Qhoasi, of the Bush woman,
Bushmen, you've seen, the Glarers have ascended:	Of the Bushmen, give me that arrow of mine!
In future you'll be lacking your wives,	[...]
The Glarers will have taken and married them.	As for the cow, 'MaMosa queried it,
Have you ever captured anything for your parents?	It was queried by the Agitator, the Father of Little Vultures,
I've captured for 'MaMosa a little Bush woman,	Who said: 'Show me the cow of the Buffaloes' spearshaft!
Phafoli has come here to work:	The Buffaloes are coming with a cow that's deformed,
He'd captured pregnant women, Seoehla!	They've captured a stick that's crooked, have the Buffaloes.
	Shouldn't you have killed it in the open country
	And shared it out among the crows of the Maloti?'

The first element to point out is the different approach to the fate of the surviving captives. While Joel Molapo chose to keep all the San for himself, Jonathan Molapo was at the centre of a stronger web of obligations. To begin with, he gave permission to his men, the 'Glarers' and 'Buffaloes' regiments, to take wives from among the San women captured on the Maloti. As a side note, it is highly relevant that this act was conceptualised as part of the total annihilation of the San community. The men were either killed and were

106 Mitchell, 'Making history at Sehonghong', 156.
107 Damane and Sanders, *Lithoko*, 197, 208; Z. D. Mangoaela, *Lithoko Tsa Marena a Basotho*, (Morija, Lesotho, 2011 [orig. pub. 1921]), 123, 129.
108 Mabille, Dieterlen, Paroz, *Southern Sotho-English Dictionary*, 393.
109 Damane and Sanders, *Lithoko*, 182–6; Mangoaela, *Lithoko*, 114–7.

meat for the hyaenas, or were left barren, without their own wives. The surviving San, it is sung, 'shouldn't breed'. At the same time, however, Jonathan was required by his father, Molapo 'the Agitator'/'the Rescuer', and his mother, 'MaMosa, to give them the share they deserved according to their superior rank. The poet asks rhetorically: 'Have you ever captured anything for your parents?'

This introduces a brief reflection on the figurative language of the praise-poems. Men were often referred to with praise-names drawn from the names of wild animals, some quality of which they might possess: strength, swiftness, and the like.[110] In some cases, the praise-name coincided with the *seboko*, or totem, like here with *Koena* 'crocodile', the *seboko* of the ruling family of Lesotho. Men were also cattle or, arguably, bulls, that is, leaders of the herd.[111] Women were referred to as cattle too, but this term is often translated into English as 'cows'. It was already mentioned that the Mpondomise girl captured by Masopha in 1861 was called a 'Thembu's cow'.[112] A praise-poem of an early nineteenth-century Kgatla ruler, north of the Magaliesberg, referred to the women captured in war as 'hornless cattle'.[113] Indeed, it is possible that the 'cattle' not redistributed by Joel in 1871 were actually the San *bahlanka* he had taken during the raid, the people he had 'found for himself'.

In Jonathan's poem, the 'cattle' that enter the kraal while the Basotho women cry and chant are surely the San brought down from the mountains. The 'cow' queried by Jonathan's mother 'MaMosa was therefore a San woman; she was actually asking her husband Molapo to marry the captive, and to provide her with a new *lefielo* or 'broom', as the junior wives of a polygamist were also called.[114] Years later, following the death of Molapo, she was still seen 'entertaining a crowd of servants' and 'marrying' girls to herself while giving them to her male subjects, in order to give birth to more 'servants'.[115] The poem contains another reference to polygamy. Jonathan did not simply tell his men to 'marry' the San prisoners; rather, he told them to *ho nyala sethepu*, or 'to marry a second wife', taken from amongst the 'cattle'.[116] If the bovine metaphor covered both the captors and the captured, simply calling the San prisoners 'cattle' was not a form

110 Kunene, *Heroic Poetry of the Basotho*, 131–5; Damane and Sanders, *Lithoko*, 39–43.

111 Damane and Sanders, *Lithoko*, 68n2.

112 *Ibid.* 130–1.

113 I. Schapera, *Praise-Poems of Tswana Chiefs* (Oxford, 1965), 50.

114 Royal Geographical Society Archives, London, Ronald Stretton Webb Papers, Box 15, 'Bakubung Lihoja. English Version of Fred Serame Ramakabane's original Sotho mss. Done by Abraham Aaron Moletsane in 1960…1961', 145–6; F. Porte, 'Les Réminescences d'un Missionnaire du Basutoland (suite), *Missions de la Congrègation des Oblats de Marie Immaculée*, 34, 135 (Septembre 1896), 269–357, 311–3; M. A. A. Moletsane, *An Account of the Autobiographical Memoir* (Paarl, South Africa 1967) 2; Epprecht, *This Matter of Women*, 19, 23; Mabille, Dieterlen, Paroz, *Southern Sotho-English Dictionary*, 60, 304, 328.

115 'A queen, after she became a widow, usually entertains a crowd of female servants; she marries her servants, she would tell you every day: *Ke nyetse mometsana* ("I've just married a girl"), that is to say that she has just acquired a girl.' Porte, 'Les Réminescences', 311. This nameless description was very likely based on 'MaMosa, because the missionary Porte worked mainly in Molapo's district of Leribe. This practice is also described by Perrot, *Les Sotho et les Missionnaires Européens*, 109–10.

116 Mangoaela, *Lithoko*, 116. Unfortunately, the connection between *bohlanka*, polygamy, and marriage cannot be properly examined in this paper, and will be analysed in another work.

of dehumanisation. Indeed, they were referred to as deformed cows and crooked sticks. Why?

'YOU'VE CAPTURED A CROOKED STICK': ENSLAVEMENT AND RESISTANCE

Filemone Raleboho Matlenane, one of the Basotho from Leribe interviewed by Victor Ellenberger, confirmed parts of the events described in the poems above, and stated that eight San were brought to Molapo's village as prisoners. They were four women and four children, and their names are given as: 'Malesokana, one of the women, who was the grandmother of Qeea, a girl, and Phafoli, a boy who also figures in the poem; Qhokhooea and Tsoara, who were brother and sister. The three other women are not named. They possibly all belonged to the group remembered by another informant, Elizabetha Mohanoe, as the 'Baroa [Bushmen, San] of Jonathan', who were treated 'cruelly' by the son of Molapo.[117] According to Filemone, 'Molapo, the father of Jonathan, decided to place them separately in abodes very distant from one another; some were put in his village, others somewhere else, at Séra's place, in Litlhoatsanèng or in Maïseng, where Josefa Molapo I had lived'.[118] This was evidently done to further break their bonds and to reduce the likelihood of escape — another form of desocialisation that added to the killing of their families and worsened their process of natal alienation.

Filemone also told Ellenberger that the surviving San children 'domesticated themselves' and became like the Basotho.[119] Intriguingly, the concept of 'domestication' was employed by Wayne Dooling to express a stage in the creation of a colonial servile class in the northern frontier, while Meillassoux defined 'resocialisation' and 'recivilisation' in a similar way.[120] The idea of 'domesticating' prisoners also clearly fits the bovine metaphor of praise-poems; cows can be domesticated, after all.

However, not all the San prisoners accepted this fate. Notwithstanding the precautions, the four women in the immediate possession of Molapo escaped one night, leaving the children behind.

> They were now fleeing! They managed to reach the village of Môfonèsô near Malaoanèng, at Séètsa's place (twelve to fifteen kilometres). It is there that they were reached by those who pursued them. Their escape was cut off, they were ordered to come back, but they refused and a terrible fight was started against them. They were so tenacious that the Bassoutos killed one of them. The other three were brought to Léribè, where one fell sick and died shortly afterwards.[121]

After some time, the remaining two finally managed to escape, and disappeared into the Maloti mountains. Their rebellious behaviour explains why Molapo grimly called them crooked sticks and deformed cows and regretted not having killed them on the mountains

117 V. Ellenberger, *La Fin*, 258.
118 *Ibid.* 255–7.
119 The French original is *'s'apprivoisèrent'*. V. Ellenberger, *La Fin*, 257.
120 Dooling, 'Reconstructing the household', 407; Meillassoux, *Anthropologie de l'Esclavage*, 109.
121 V. Ellenberger, *La Fin*, 256. Author's translation from the original French.

to feed the crows. Indeed, the outcome of the expedition, in terms of human prey, was far from satisfactory in his eyes. Among the children, Tsoara died at a young age, while the other three 'grew up and lived like Basotho, eating their food and talking their language'. Phafoli and 'Qhokhooea became Jonathan's herders and reached adulthood, possibly meaning that they underwent the initiation rites, but both died in probable poverty before they could marry.

By contrast, Jonathan later gave Qeea as wife to Nosi, one of his subjects who lived in his stronghold of Tsikoane.[122] She was the only one of the six female prisoners in this small sample to become the wife of a Mosotho. In theory, this could mean that she, at least, was resocialised. A final element, however, raises once more the issue of the connections between captivity, slavery, and *bohlanka*. Filemone told Ellenberger that 'the children, if she [Qeea] had some from that man, would have belonged to Jonathan'.[123] Socially sterile for her own good, she was therefore a *mohlanka*, but unlike the description of Moshoeshoe's *bahlanka* made by Arbousset in 1837, she clearly did not choose to become so.

CONCLUSION: NATAL ALIENATION, SUSPENDED DEATH, AND SLAVERY

The analysis of *bohlanka* in the precolonial Highveld is complicated by the fragmentary nature of the sources, the bias of their authors, and the different sensibilities embedded in previous academic paradigms. This article has gathered the available evidence and examined it as a single analytical unit, despite its internal variations, and the results of the research support the choice of this comprehensive method. To return to Leonard Thompson's doubts, it is possible to say that the connection between *bohlanka* and cattle-loans or *mafisa* was not plain and simple. Individuals who are recognisable as *bahlanka* had either received a cattle-loan that served as bridewealth, like the widow beaten by Moshoeshoe; had asked to be 'taken up' because of their destitution; had been 'taken up' in war, like the *bahlanka* in Arbousset's 'Note' and the San captives of 1871; or had been given as a captive *in substitution* of bridewealth, like Jonathan's subject Nosi who received the San girl Qeea as wife.

In other words, not all cattle-loans created *bohlanka*, only those to a destitute individual, or those that were employed as bridewealth, and not all marriages created *bohlanka*, only those with a captive being loaned by a more powerful man. Similarly, not all prisoners of war became *bahlanka*, only those whose families had been killed or made unable to ransom them. Capturing the life of another individual was therefore the leading principle of an institution that was the nexus between various forms and degrees of personal dependence. Generating natally alienated and generally dishonoured individuals, the institution of *bohlanka* can properly be defined as slavery.

122 *Ibid.*
123 *Ibid.*

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