



Introduction

In Lesotho,¹ commerce has a strong political dimension. To Basotho,² money and markets are a means of emancipation from authoritative rulers and exclusive formations. Along with technology, commerce facilitates a democratic aspiration for inclusion and social extension. Taking advantage of the two, Basotho have reached out, persistently and over time, to the world beyond their locality for economic advancement and political autonomy. Under conditions of poverty, repression and violence, a two-century-long Basotho struggle for economic independence lives on.

From the first to the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Basotho under Moshoeshe generated remarkable economic expansion at the leading edge of the Southern African region. They harnessed the potential of commerce and technology to establish a precarious independence under conditions of war, starvation and land loss. Escaping British rule in the Cape, Afrikaner groups occupied the interior of the region, conquering Basotho lands from the 1830s and 1840s. Until the 1860s, conflicts over land between the Basotho and Afrikaner groups were in full swing. They went to war over land three times: in 1858, 1865 and 1868, leading to British intervention. When the British annexed what was left of their territory in 1868, the Basotho had lost almost 80 per cent of it to the Afrikaners. The same year, diamonds were discovered in Kimberly, and gold in the Witwatersrand in 1886.

The British changed their approach. They now used political means and big capital to dismantle Basotho economic independence, so that the Basotho's only resource was to supply cheap labour for the mines in South Africa. Political aggression escalated throughout Southern Africa. The Basotho resisted this assault on their independence and went to war against the British in the Gun War of 1880–81. They emerged victorious but chose to align with the British for protection against the Afrikaners across the new border. The Basotho were sold out by the chiefs, who were roped into the colonial power matrix and were used in the colonial style to enforce 'indirect rule'. The system used taxes as one of the primary means to extract labour. In return for various benefits and privileges, the chiefs from then on primarily served colonial interests.

With the routinisation of labour migration, commerce – retail and wholesale – emerged as the pillar of the domestic economy; however, it was dominated by European traders who excluded both Basotho and, more recently, Indians. European traders combined with the colonial administration to use bureaucracy, legal apparatus and political influence to marginalise the two groups. The colonial system used rigid bureaucracy and big capital to dismantle Basotho precolonial economic formations.

In 1871, the colonial government passed the Mercantile Law. This was the first step towards formalising and regulating trade under colonial rule. The new laws were enforced in 1884, after the Gun War. This systematically undermined the independent trading formations and conditions that the Basotho had built for themselves after the Mfecane/Lifaqane wars – a series of regional cataclysms in the early 1800s. It now became compulsory to acquire a trading licence to open specific business premises. Their trading activities were informalised, vilified and criminalised. The colonial administration and British traders worked together to exclude others, and the Europeans' Basutoland Chamber of Commerce contributed significantly towards that end.

Against these restrictive measures, it took a protracted struggle for Basotho to gain access to local commerce. As a result, from the beginning of the twentieth century they formed political and business organisations to fight for inclusion and reformation of commerce. Their organisations were the Basutoland Progressive Association (1906), the League of Commoners (1919), the League of Justice (1925) and the Basotho Traders Association (1940c). With varying degrees of efficiency and ideology, they launched the twentieth-century liberation struggle. From the 1950s, political parties took over the independence movement.

To mask their repressive behaviour, the British administration and European traders held that politics had nothing to do with business, and often stigmatised the Basotho as 'a people with no business culture'. They were supposed to lack modern business acumen, an ethic of buying cheap and selling dear (*homo economicus*) and the spirit of entrepreneurship allegedly found in the West (Weber 1961; Schumpeter 1939). This attitude persists in modern Lesotho, with governments granting foreign traders privileges that they deny to their own citizens.

The period since 1966, when Lesotho gained independence from Britain, has matched that earlier phase of defeat without the buoyancy that preceded it in the nineteenth century. From 1966, Lesotho was ruled by the Basotho National Party. From 1970, the government turned to dictatorship, until it was overthrown by the military in 1986. In its own

way, the shift from military rule to democracy since 1993 has resembled colonisation. The British laid down a rigid administration to secure labour migration to the South African mines, as we have seen. Postcolonial governments have used a version of this system to suppress Basotho commerce while relying on foreign economic interests and feeding their own local elites. One aim of this book is to show the similarities and differences between colonial empire and neocolonialism.

Optimistic of economic opportunities that would come with national independence, Basotho traders resuscitated the Basotho Traders Association in 1968. They formed a bulk-buying co-operative (Thekommoho) a year later to counter the European traders' monopoly and exclusive banking conditions. Basotho economic success, however, threatened cordial relations between the National Party and European traders. The majority of Basotho traders were leaders and influential members of the major opposition party, the Basotho Congress Party.

In 1970, the National Party lost elections to the Congress Party. In reprisal, Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan declared a State of Emergency, suspended the constitution and violently harassed the opposition. He destroyed the co-operative and Basotho economic solidarity. Opposition members were imprisoned or exiled after a failed uprising in 1974; in exile, they formed the Lesotho Liberation Army to destabilise the civilian dictatorship in an attempt to overthrow it.

Leabua was finally toppled by the military in the mid-1980s. South Africa had closed its borders with Lesotho; by then, Lesotho and South Africa's relations had reached their lowest ebb. From the mid-1950s, South Africa had earmarked Lesotho as a country to meet its pressing water demands, particularly in the industrial and mining hub of the 'Pretoria-Witswaterands-Vereeniging Complex'. Into the mid-1980s, the two countries had persistently disagreed on various conditionalities of the project. Meanwhile, water demands continued to escalate.

In January 1986, South Africa closed its borders with Lesotho in reprisal. It used as pretext an allegation that its neighbour was harbouring the African National Congress's Umkhonto we Size combatants. Lesotho imports almost 90 per cent of its manufactured goods and fuel from South Africa. Soon, the country was not able to replenish its stocks. With pressure building, the military surrounded the government complex, drove the civil servants out and took the Prime Minister hostage. Thereafter, a delegation led by Major General Justin M. Lekhanya took it upon itself to pay Pretoria a visit. Their mission was to request that South Africa lift the blockade, but the latter refused. Upon their return, the delegation announced via the national radio station (Radio Lesotho) that they

had taken over government. The blockade was immediately lifted. Nine months later, Lesotho signed the water treaty and adopted the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programmes.

The military dictatorship had scant regard for human rights. Conflicts within the government persisted, giving the impression that dictatorship held back the country, and the international community and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) pushed for the restoration of constitutional rule. In the late 1980s, exiled opposition members returned, and after the 1993 elections, the Congress Party finally ascended to power. The role of the people was significant in this transition.

Between 1996 and 1998, the government built the 'Manthabiseng Convention Centre on the Main South 1 Road, in the outskirts of the capital, Maseru. In April 1999, the government officially opened the new building, which was built with assistance from the People's Republic of China. Before it was built, a buzzing bus stop with shops and informal traders populated the area. The Centre commemorates the death of 'Manthabiseng Senatsi, a 56-year-old Mosotho woman. On 20 May 1991, a security guard working for a South African-owned business, Harties, assaulted and killed her. The guard had accused her of shoplifting after a baby she had on her back picked up a T-shirt (Tangri 1993).

There is more to this incident. Looking closely at the actions of the security guard, it is impossible to miss the scary amount of arbitrary power that these guards possessed, and the superiority they felt in carrying out an unjustifiable punishment. It is not farfetched to liken him to a 'house negro',³ controlling the other slaves on a United States plantation. The security guard's actions were typical of the repressive power relations and despotic hierarchies that became normal in Basotho society following the imposition of colonial rule from the 1870s.

'Manthabiseng's death provoked violent attacks on foreign traders: especially Chinese and Indians, whom, people felt, the government was protecting at their expense. As we have seen, Europeans traders enjoyed such privileges. About 35 people were killed and 63 were badly injured; 77 enterprises were looted and damaged while 16 were burnt down. 13 of 60 foreign-owned businesses were shut down as their owners fled to South Africa, together with many expatriates (Tangri 1993). This remains the most violent episode against foreigners in Lesotho.

That day, the school bus driver came rushing into our classroom to take us home. With my brother and sister, I attended the Seventh Day Adventist Primary School located about 800 m from the centre of the upheavals. We could hear glass smashing, stones banging and people

screaming as we navigated through the midst of the havoc. Hiding below the backseat, we were petrified. Basotho indiscriminately called the Indians, Chinese, and anyone like them ‘coolies’ and ‘mulattos’. We fell in this category, as we mixed Basotho and Portuguese ancestries.

After 1993, the Congress Party leader, Ntsu Mokhehle, ruled until 1998. His protégé, Pakalitha Mosisili, succeeded him, ruling for the next decade and a half under a new party, the Lesotho Congress for Democracy. To address the country’s economic challenges, the government relied on the newly introduced market policies. It adopted privatisation policies to pare back the role of the state in the economy. The ‘self-regulating market’ or ‘free market’ model of capitalism was thus given priority.

Accordingly, the government privatised various state-owned companies. In his popular economic plea, Prime Minister Mosisili persuaded Basotho to ‘... work together to create many Basotho millionaires because they [would] create jobs for other Basotho and help in curbing unemployment and poverty’.⁴ In its pursuits, the government prioritised the interests of elites and foreign investors. They neglected and marginalised the majority of the people in the economy. Mosisili’s reign became authoritarian, as well; he was dethroned through a coalition of three opposition parties in 2012, following the ‘Mother of All Protests’ in 2011 – the biggest solidarity movement in contemporary Lesotho.

Owing to authoritarianism, corruption and elitism, the Congress disintegrated from 1993 on the one hand, producing multiple offspring. On the other hand, waves of popular unrest characterised the 2000s, as people protested through their trade unions and associations. In the early 2010s, they formed the ‘Coalition of Concerned Citizens’, and in August 2011, they marched in defence of the social fabric in the context of ruinous market policies. The major opposition party at the time – the All-Basotho Convention – became the people’s viable option; however, it did not have a majority. As a result, it went into a coalition with two parties to govern: the Lesotho Congress for Democracy and the Basotho National Party. From June 2012, Thomas Thabane was the Prime Minister.

Amid this euphoria, I was immersed in my doctoral research in 2013. I was studying the history of Basotho in local commerce in the period between 1966 and 2012 – the postcolonial period – while based at the Lesotho Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI). The Chamber helped organise my ethnographic explorations. I travelled around the ten districts of the country, collecting oral histories of Basotho business owners. I continued to dig for the past in the archives. This was a continuation of my masters’ research on the emergence of colonial com-

merce and Basotho participation between the 1870s and 1970s (Maliehe 2011; 2015).

In one of my expeditions, I attended a ‘market expo’ in Maseru. The new government had organised this business promotion event on the football pitch of the Maseru Club, a few metres away from the Chamber headquarters. Negotiating my way through a buzzing crowd, I entered a section of the open fields, teeming with young Basotho entrepreneurs. Their commodities were neatly packed on tables; some hung on strings from their tiny stalls. They sold artistic African clothes, printed T-shirts and hats, hand-made jewellery and shoes, paintings, food and similar items. Navigating a maze of stands, my fascination temporarily trumped my curiosity as a researcher.

I submerged myself in conversations with old friends, acquaintances and strangers, using our mother tongue, Sesotho. Hope and despair melted together in smiles and melancholy when we spoke of the hardships of Basotho entrepreneurs under the present repressive conditions. After high school and college, many never obtained formal jobs in government, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or private corporations. The mines in South Africa were no longer hiring young men. Many still worked in South Africa as informal workers and traders or artisanal diamond and gold diggers in closed mining shafts.

Closer to the podium at the centre, bigger stalls were occupied by HIV/AIDS organisations and other NGOs, government departments, insurance companies, banks and mobile network operators. I met old friends from the National University of Lesotho – for a time the only university in the country. Some had become senior officials and middle managers. In smart-casual attire, they were flamboyantly dressed for an informal Friday event. Each had two mobile phones in their hands: a smartphone and a cheap basic phone. I was one of them.

With my scholarship at the University of Pretoria’s Human Economy Programme, my income could be matched only by a husband and wife’s combined salaries working in Lesotho’s civil service. My monthly rent in Pretoria would have supported an urban household in Lesotho. I was one of few Basotho who broke into prestigious fellowships abroad. I could return to a university teaching position at home or seek greener pastures further afield. The entrepreneurs I met that day from around the country managed precarity only by meeting the stringent conditions of the banks. Good behaviour and prudent economic decisions kept them afloat. Informal saving clubs (*stokvels*) are in many ways more reliable.

I moved closer to the centre of the exhibition. Here, the crowd was being entertained by local poets, comedians, ‘house-music’ DJs and

players on a podium decorated with flyers and towering speakers. Young photographers competed to capture things, moments and people. Official reports of the event had to match the colour of social media updates. Soliciting views, local reporters took chosen participants to quieter corners of the fields.

Now that I was closer to the platform, my attention was captured by the Master of Ceremonies, who called to the stage an enthusiastic group of Vodacom staff. Their leader took the microphone and spoke of a new mobile money: M-Pesa. I felt that I was studying the past, so I made little of it then. I soon went back to Pretoria, returning in 2015 upon my completion. After returning to Pretoria, as a member of the Chamber and former business owner, I stayed in contact with Lesotho's business community.

Before long the landscape had changed significantly. Mobile money transformed Southern Africa's local economies, blending various actors – big and small – in a new financial ecosystem. I now studied the emergence of mobile money in Lesotho and South Africa; my ethnographic site was the informal township of Diepsloot, north of Johannesburg. In 2017, the United Nations Development Programme and Central Bank of Lesotho commissioned me to explore mobile technologies and financial innovations among poor and rural communities in Lesotho.

A sense that the country was finally on a new development path was quickly shrouded by political conflicts and instability. In the five years following 2012, Lesotho held three snap elections, amid widespread violence, political instability, mismanagement of national resources and economic stagnation. Between 2012 and 2015, three parties formed government; seven between 2015 and 2017; and four up to 2020. The coalition government led by Thabane served for two years, from 2012 to 2014. In attempts to undermine the opposition, Prime Minister Thabane embarked on a massive anti-corruption campaign, which threatened various key figures from the previous government. In reprisal and for their own preservation, the opposition parties destabilised the government, until Thabane and his associates were exiled to South Africa in 2014. In 2015, elections were held in their absence. A new coalition government of seven political parties, led by the Democratic Congress, was formed.

The cabinet was increased from thirteen to twenty-three members to accommodate party elites. Conflicts persisted. Following the murder of the military commander, Lieutenant-General Maaparankoe Mahao, South Africa and subsequently the Southern African Development Community (SADC) intervened at the invitation of the government. (In many respects, South Africa and the SADC's interventions resembled mid-

nineteenth-century British mediation). Thereafter, in 2017, Lesotho held its third election in five years. Exiled party leaders returned. Prime Minister Thabane regained his position as ruler in partnership with three other parties.

As before, the people had placed their hopes in the leadership of the Prime Minister. He had emerged as the ‘liberator’ of the people against Congress despotism. To the people’s disappointment, he swung in the opposite direction. First, he delayed implementing security reforms and other recommendations of the SADC. Second, he turned against the mandate of ending corruption, working for the people and reviving the economy. Like his predecessors, he misused his power and squandered national resources among close associates.

Lastly and most controversially, the Prime Minister, in his eighties, married a third wife in her early forties. The First Lady – ‘the Grace Mugabe of Lesotho’ – was criticised for meddling heavily in party and government affairs, causing a division in the former and instigating the dismissal of some cabinet members. Between January and February 2020, the two were in front of the Magistrate Court, answering charges related to the assassination of the Prime Minister’s second wife (being a contender for the position of First Lady, she was gunned to death a day before Thabane’s inauguration in June 2017). Apprehensive of another spree of violence, South Africa intervened yet again, with its Minister of Finance, Tito Mboweni, subsequently making the historically controversial call that Lesotho must become part of South Africa (Burke 2020).

The country’s political and economic conditions continue to deteriorate. Lesotho still depends on external forces beyond its control – the Southern African Customs Union (SACU), foreign aid, South Africa and foreign direct investment. As demonstrated by the ‘market expo’ episode discussed above, a new economy is emerging, and there are historical antecedents for it; this is not the first time that the Basotho have used technology, money and markets to shape their own future. The main aim of this book is to revisit the economic history of the Basotho in order to draw lessons from their past. In a world where only ‘expert knowledge’ yielded by economics already rules supreme, we cannot ignore the roles of the people and their history in making and remaking their economic lives.

It has become commonplace to ascribe African underdevelopment to postcolonial failure to make a decisive break with imperialism. But monolithic fatalism of this kind misses much from economic history that might support a different view of what is now possible for countries like Lesotho. A more promising economic future can be envisaged,

drawing on a more nuanced vision of history. I argue in this book that the Basotho have repeatedly asserted their own economic agency in the last two centuries.

We need to understand the dialectical relationship between this small part of the Southern African region and the changing nature of the global forces confronting it. In Lesotho's case, South Africa is key. The inverse is also true: without Lesotho, South Africa could neither meet its labour demands in the mines before, nor its desperate water needs today. The Basotho's ability to negotiate unrestricted movement between these two territories shaped their variable fortunes, between general success (in the precolonial period, 1820s–70s), limited resistance to repression (in the colonial period, 1870–1960s) and general failure (in the postcolonial period, since 1966). A comparative analysis of these three phases frames the organisation of this book.

With differing means and degrees of efficiency, the Basotho have had to defend themselves against unfavourable local and regional conditions across time. Unlike many African communities in the region, however, they maintained their sovereignty at first, against heavy odds. Transcending differences in race, ideology and religion, they formed alliances based on mutual interests. Throughout their economic history, Basotho struggles for economic independence have had money and markets at their centre. The Basotho attempted to harness the emancipatory potential of both. Commerce always had a strong political dimension; it reinforced an economic interdependence that instilled in Lesotho and South Africa recognition that they needed each other. Both countries benefited from this reciprocal relationship.

In many respects, both the Basotho's loss of their lands and colonialism later in the nineteenth century were instrumental in the destruction of this relationship. On the one hand, the Afrikaners conquered about 80 per cent of the Basotho's productive lands. Lesotho remained, but as a tiny mountainous shell of its former, larger, more agriculturally productive self. In the context of increasing population, the ramifications were dire. On the other hand, the British used political means and big capital to dismantle Basotho economic independence from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. European traders (and now Chinese traders) dominated local commerce to the exclusion of the Basotho, who had to fight for inclusion and reformation of commerce.

The twentieth-century mining complex has now collapsed. Conditions are desperate. Despite inherent hierarchies, the primary mission for the Basotho now is to rediscover a more equal relationship with South

Africa. As in the nineteenth century, technology now provides a global dimension to the development problem and offers new possibilities for economic revival. These possibilities must of course be inclusive and prioritise the people. Not uniquely in the region, the Basotho have still not achieved a society based even remotely on social justice.

The means of building something like this is economic democracy. Technology, markets and money are intrinsic to such a project, even if they have often been engines of inequality. The human economy approach is one way of putting local people first in the global context of general human interests (Hart et al. 2010; Hart and Sharp 2014; Hart 2015, 2017). Against tremendous odds over two centuries, the Basotho have struggled for a fair share of their country's commerce. This political struggle provides a thread that links the country's present dilemmas to its past and future. For this reason, this book looks back to the times and spaces in which the Basotho have brought about economic success, in order to rethink how a future may be built to bring about a more just Lesotho for all of its residents.

Organisation of the Book

Part I chronicles the rise and fall of the precolonial Basotho nation (1820s–70s), encompassing Chapters 1 and 2. Part II explores the rise of colonial commerce and the economic dimensions of the liberation struggles (1870s–1966). It has three Chapters: 3, 4 and 5. Part III deals with the period since 1966. With five Chapters (6, 7, 8, 9 and the Conclusion), it is roughly equal in size to the first two parts. Part III is largely an account of the postcolonial counter-revolution against the movement for independence.

Chapter 1 shows that ordinary Basotho allied with Christian missionaries in adopting new agricultural technologies to trade in regional markets. Others worked in the colonies to build their wealth in a domestic economy dominated by the chiefs. These two streams introduced to the Basotho and the region the transformative power of horses and guns. As a result, the Basotho became significant actors in the making of a new regional economy by the mid-nineteenth century.

We see in Chapter 2 that the rise and expansion of Basotho economic power was halted by the Afrikaners' conquest of the most fertile of Lesotho's lands. This led to British intervention and annexation in 1868. On the heels of the discovery of minerals in South Africa, the British came to view Lesotho as a labour reserve. As with other communities in the

region, the British resorted to political aggression. The colonial administration used rigid bureaucracy and big capital to dismantle Basotho economic independence and to meet increasing labour demands in the mines. From this point on, Lesotho was integrated into the new mining complex as an unequal actor.

Chapter 3 (1870–1930s) explores the emergence of colonial commerce, retail and wholesale. It demonstrates how commerce replaced pre-colonial trading formations to become the main pillar of the local economy, which was dominated by European traders. The Europeans monopolised commerce at the exclusion of both the Basotho and Indian traders. Working closely with the colonial government, they protected only their interests. Their association, the Chamber of Commerce, was indispensable to their pursuits. Through political means and manipulation of colonial legislature, they controlled trade throughout the country.

Against these restrictive measures, it took a protracted struggle for Basotho to gain a foothold in local commerce. Chapter 4 (1900s–66) explores the challenges faced by, and survival strategies of, the first generation of Basotho commercial entrepreneurs. It demonstrates how partnerships amongst themselves and with Europeans and Indians formed part of their attempts to address their problems of access to credit and stock. Further, the chapter examines their breakthrough in the mid-1950s and the rise of the co-operative movement in commerce.

In Chapter 5 (still in the period 1900s–1966) I describe the antithesis to colonial empire, the twentieth-century liberation struggle. I focus here on Basotho political efforts aimed at the reformation of colonial commerce. Through their political and business organisations, the Basotho fought for inclusion in commerce as the struggle for self-rule intensified in the 1950s and 1960s. I argue here that these organisations articulated the political and economic hardships and aspirations of the Basotho. They collaborated with other African communities in South Africa; the Progressive Association focused on the Indigenous urban middle classes, while the League of Commoners and the League of Justice connected the urban areas to the rural masses. From the 1950s, political parties took over the movement, leading to national independence in 1966.

Chapter 6 explores Lesotho's experimentations with the state model for developing the national economy after 1966. Choosing to work with European traders rather than their own people, the government suppressed Basotho entrepreneurial initiatives. As previously discussed, the majority of Basotho traders were leaders and members of the major opposition party, the Basotho Congress Party. When the Congress Party was outlawed in the 1970s following Prime Minister Leabua Jonathan's

coup, these entrepreneurs were in a precarious position. After the coup, the ruling National Party used development to expand despotism. The real casualty of this political crackdown was Basotho economic solidarity and democracy.

In Chapter 7, we examine the struggles of the Lesotho state in the 1980s, with the military toppling the civilian dictatorship. This government subsequently adopted the IMF and World Bank Structural Adjustment Programmes. These policies helped bring about flows of international capital for the construction of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project meant to supply water to South Africa. This was Lesotho's cue for a neoliberal turn that remains with us. The chapter demonstrates how South Africa took advantage of Lesotho's dependency to strong-arm it into signing the water treaty, and argues that the new market policies promoted elitism, patronage politics and corruption. Democracy and people's economic advancement initiatives were the victims, and the policies aggravated poverty and inequality.

Chapter 8 examines the rise of Basotho economic solidarity in defence of the social fabric, in a historic context of global neoliberal exclusion, patronage politics and economic stagnation. The chapter argues that through the 'Coalition of Concerned Citizens' solidarity movement, Basotho fought collectively for the democratisation of the economy. In this ongoing struggle, Basotho are demanding that the government make provision for their free movement across the border, and calling on the government to renew the agenda for the return of the 'Conquered Territories' from South Africa. In this way, Basotho have demonstrated awareness that their economic survival has always depended on how they navigated between Lesotho and South Africa.

If the Basotho had one hope for economic improvement after the collapse of the mining economy, it was in local commerce. The transition to democracy in 1993 and the coming to power of the Congress Party brought about a sense of optimism that Basotho-run businesses would finally have a chance to flourish. Chapter 9 chronicles the rise of Chinese traders in Lesotho, and how they quickly transformed rural Lesotho's trading economy, pushing out many Basotho traders. In a context of diminishing economic opportunities, Basotho reactions varied in political intensity and pragmatism. As before, they became politically expressive while they sought to reignite the co-operative movement to counter the Chinese monopoly.

It was in this context that mobile money developed. Mobile money widened Basotho business activities, enabling Basotho to act as agents in the new financial ecosystem. This chapter documents these two major

developments in local commerce. Its main observation is that while we cannot predict the future, what is currently happening in Lesotho has its historical antecedents, which demonstrate that Basotho are capable of using technology and commerce to advance their economic interests in a competitive context.

In the conclusion, I reprise the main argument of the book. Summarising key features of the country's three epochs, I reflect on the relationship between commerce and politics. Across these phases, I demonstrate that commerce offered Basotho the means of emancipation from repressive rulers and formations. Under conditions of poverty, repression and violence, a two-century long Basotho struggle for economic independence continues. Reflecting on this economic history, I observe that the Basotho's economic pursuits and political autonomy are connected to how they forged a relationship of interdependence with South Africa in particular, despite inherent hierarchies.

In this chapter, I also reflect on how a human economy approach shaped my periodisation and interpretation of Basotho economic history. I place Basotho economic pursuits and interests at the centre of competing regional and global forces which date to the early nineteenth century, particularly after the Mfecane and Napoleonic Wars, when the British took over the Cape from Dutch. I demonstrate Basotho abilities to forge partnerships with those that supported their democratic aspirations, and I argue that this history has important lessons for the current Basotho generation with regards to shaping their economic future.

Furthermore, I align this narrative with the renewed interest in African economic history. In an intellectual landscape in which cliometrics – the reduction of economic history to econometrics – has powerful adherents, I argue that the refusal to acknowledge the politics in economics serves only ruling interests.

NOTES

1. The name Lesotho was made official in 1966 to refer to the territory known as Basutoland in the colonial era. In this study, Lesotho is used to refer to the territory throughout the precolonial and colonial periods, and I sometimes use the names interchangeably. Basutoland also appears in quotations, and I use it as a descriptive term for laws, institutions and so on.
2. In colonial orthography, 'Mosotho' (plural, 'Basotho') was spelled 'Musoto' (plural, 'Basuto'), and 'Lesotho' was 'Lesuto', though it was officially 'Basutoland'. Their dominant language, 'Sesotho', was written as 'Sesuto'. Minority African languages included Mphuthi, Xhosa and Ndebele.

3. The African American and Muslim activist Malcom X popularised the contrast between a 'field negro' and a 'house negro' in his famous 1963 speech, 'Message to the Grass Roots'. He advanced that a 'field negro' was subjected to harsh conditions outside while the 'house negro' enjoyed a comparatively better life in the master's house. That life, however, was subject to the conditions that they sustained existing power structures and reinforced exploitative relations in everyday life.
4. 'Mosisili's Rich Dream', *Lesotho Times*, 13 January 2010. Retrieved 11 August 2020 from <http://lestimes.com/mosisilis-rich-dream/>.

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