

INAUGURAL LECTURE

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TOPIC:

THE PARTICIPATION OF THE BAKGATLA BA KGAFELA OF RUSTENBURG DISTRICT IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN (OR ANGLO-BOER) WAR OF 1899 – 1902.

Salutation:

The Campus Rector, Professor Mashudu Davhana-Maselesele; the Acting Campus Registrar; the Vice-Rector, Teaching, Learning & Quality Assurance; The Vice-Rector, Research & Planning; Faculty Deans; School Directors; Programme Coordinators; my fellow academic colleagues and all students. I would like to acknowledge and welcome the presence of all our guests from outside our Campus, notably Kgosi Nyalala John Molefe Pilane of the BaKgatla ba Kgafela, the subject of my lecture this evening. I also welcome my colleagues that I serve with on the North-West Provincial Heritage Resources Authority; last, but certainly not least, I extend my hearty welcome to my family and all of my friends who are in the audience.

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Prelude

My presentation this evening will not only strive to keep to the allocated time, but will also be only about my topic and the academic research related to it.

My lecture is based very largely upon my own work emanating initially from my doctoral research on the BaKgatla in the Pilanesberg in the early 1990s and, subsequently, my post-doctoral work. But, I have also utilised the academic works of other historians who specialise in the roles of African people in the South African War of 1899 to 1902. In the written version of my lecture, I have duly acknowledged their works.

The Campus Rector, Madame, members of every racial grouping in South Africa other than the two white sides, Boers and British, also participated in the South African War of 1899 to 1902, including the San communities, Basarwa. The same war is also known as the Anglo-Boer War. In my presentation I use the historical term 'Boer' much more than 'Afrikaner' because in the 19th century, it was the term the Boers called themselves and called each other, and which their neighbours also knew and called them by. The term 'Afrikaner' first came into use in the Cape Colony from the 1790s. 'Afrikaner' or 'Afrikanen' was used to refer to Europeans in the city of Cape Town who spoke Dutch or Afrikaans and the term 'Boeren' for those living in the countryside.¹ In the two Boer Republics, the Orange Free State and the South African Republic, the term 'Afrikaner' was beginning to gain ground only from the turn of the 19th century.

¹ H. Giliomee, *The Afrikaners, Biography of a People* (Tafelberg: Cape Town, 2003), p. 52.

We have just noted that members of every racial grouping in South Africa participated in that war. There are very many examples, but I cite here just a few. The role of the BaRolong bo Ratshidi in whose midst we live, right here in Mafikeng, was critical to the British victory in the famous Siege of Mafikeng, for example. The BaHurutshe of Kgosi Moiloa in Lehurutshe also took up arms and fought actively on the British side. The BaPedi and the Shangaan or VaTsonga societies in the former Eastern Transvaal, today Mpumalanga, played a pivotal role on the British side against the Boers. The Zulu communities of the Vryheid District that participated against the Boers, are yet another example. But the Boers too had some 9, 000 blacks, termed *agterreyers*, who fought on their side.² It is for that reason that some 25 years ago, many historians of what has traditionally been termed the ‘Anglo-Boer War,’ began to call it the South African War instead.

The war, which broke out on the 10th of October 1899 between the Boers and the British, following its declaration by President Paul Kruger of the South African Republic, was South Africa’s ‘Great War.’ It is one of the hinges upon which modern South Africa turns. Especially on the highveld, it swept aside a Boer ruling class and its states of the Transvaal (or South African Republic) and the Orange Free State. It transformed the human geography of the region and thrust entire communities into new political and economic relationships. When the war ended, the British set about transforming the social order and modernising the South African state. Its importance to the shaping of modern South Africa is, in fact, parallel to the American Civil War in the history of the United States of America. Out of the ashes of the South African War, was born the Union of South Africa in 1910 when, as Professor Shula Marks states, “whites on both sides joined hands to shore up white supremacy against the background of rumours of revolt by restive Africans.”³

From 1902 right up to the 1970s, historical writings on the misnamed “Anglo-Boer” War had perpetuated the myth that that war was a “white man’s war,” which did not involve Africans. Only comparatively recently, was this laid to rest when several historians, in particular Peter Warwick, Bill Nasson and Fred Morton, revealed the very active participation by black people in a wide range of roles in the war, including armed combat, on both the British and Boer sides.⁴ **(2 photos, African participation)** That was in the 1980s, but subsequent to which other historians, such as Jeremy Krikler, Jacob Mohlamme and Bernard Mbenga, have also added to the growing historiography on the South African War theme. All of these historians have shown that blacks were both “active shaping agents as well as victims” in the war.⁵ For anyone to say now, in 2014, that Africans played a wide range of roles, including armed combat, on both sides of the war, Boer and British, is stating the obvious.

² P. Labuschagne, *Ghostriders of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902): The Role and Contribution of Agterryers* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 1999), pp. 1, 5.

³ S. Marks, “War and Union, 1899 – 1910,” R. Ross, A. K. Mager and B. Nasson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of South Africa, Vol. 2, 1885 – 1994* (Cambridge: London, 2011), p. 157.

⁴ Warwick and S.B. Spies, *The South African War*, pp. 186-209; Warwick, *Black People and the South African War*, pp. 45-46, 48-49. See also H.T. Siwundlha, “White Ideologies and Non-European Participation in the Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902,” *Journal of Black Studies* (December 1984), pp. 223-234; R. F. Morton, “Linchwe I and the Kgatla Campaign in the South African War, 1899 – 1902,” *Journal of African History*, 26 (1985), pp. 169-191; B. Nasson, “Doing Down their own Masters: Africans, Boers and Treason in the Cape Colony, 1899-1902,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth Studies*, 12, 1 (1983).

⁵ This quotation is from W. Nasson, “Warriors without spears; Africans in the South African War, 189-1902,” *Social Dynamics*, 9, 1 (1983), p. 91. This presentation draws extensively upon the author’s earlier work, “The Role of the BaKgatla of the Pilanesberg in the South African War,” G. Cuthbertson, A. Grundlingh and M-L. Suttie (eds.), *Writing a Wider War: Rethinking Gender, Race and Identity in the South African War, 1899-1902* (Ohio University Press, Athens and David Philip Publishers, Cape Town, 2002), Chapter 5.

I need not raise here the reasons for that very violent conflict: they are discussed and debated in many books and academic articles ⁶ and fall outside the ambit of my lecture. But, to put it very simply, the basic causes of the war revolved around British envy and fear that the discovery of gold ores in very large quantities on the Rand in 1885 would make the Transvaal the leading power in southern Africa and thus overshadow the British, whose nation was, at the time, the greatest power in the world. While such explanations apply to the major combatants at national level, the Boers and the British, in the various regions where Africans became involved in the war, they did so because of their own local, specific reasons, some of them deep-seated historical grievances. The Campus Rector, Madame, in my lecture this evening, I explore and analyse the participation of the BaKgatla ba Kgafela in the South African War and its impact upon them.

Who are the BaKgatla ba Kgafela?

The BaKgatla-ba-Kgafela⁷ are a Setswana-speaking African society who live in the Pilanesberg region of Rustenburg District in today's North-West Province of South Africa. The term 'Pilanesberg' in Afrikaans literally means 'Pilane's mountain' and specifically refers to the circular ring of mountains behind today's Sun City. When the Voortrekkers arrived in the area during the early 1840s, the chief they found ruling the BaKgatla at the time was called Pilane, so they named the mountains and the region, 'Pilanesberg' i.e. Pilane's mountain. That term has stuck to this day. The BaKgatla have lived in this area since at least the 17th century A.D. By 1800 A.D, they had become the most dominant group in most of the triangle formed by the rivers Odi (Crocodile), Madikwe (Marico) and Kgetleng (Elands). Between 1820 and 1840, the BaKgatla, like the rest of Tswana groups in the Pilanesberg, were invaded by the Bafokeng of Kgosi Sebitloane, the Ndebele of Mzilikazi and lastly the Voortrekkers (later called the Boers, and later still the Afrikaners). Fokeng and Ndebele conquests were relatively short-lived as both groups eventually left the region and headed north where they founded new kingdoms.

The Voortrekkers, however, having conquered all of the African groups of the western Transvaal by the late 1830s ⁸ declared the entire Transvaal as theirs by right of conquest, and its African inhabitants their subjects. By the late 1840s, the entire western Transvaal in particular, which included the Pilanesberg, had been brought under Boer rule. As part of their subjection of African societies, the Boers appropriated African-occupied land and the Africans already living on it became their tenants under conditions decided by them, the new landowners. ⁹

In the governance of Africans in the Rustenburg District, the leading government official was Paul Kruger, a major landowner, as well as a political and military leader who, by the mid-1860s, had become a Commandant-General.¹⁰ On one of Kruger's properties, Moruleng (or Saulspoort), lived the

⁶ See, for example, the older explanations by J.S. Marais, *The Fall of Kruger's Republic* (Oxford University Press: London, 1961); T. Pakenham, *The Boer War* (Jonathan Ball: Johannesburg, 1979); P. Warwick, *Black People and The South African War, 1899 – 1902* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1983), Chapters One - Two. See also I. Smith, *The Origins of the South African War, 1899-1902* (Longman: London, 1996), pp. 70-97.

⁷ Hereafter, simply 'BaKgatla.'

⁸ The Voortrekkers were the pioneer Afrikaners who set out from the Cape Colony on the Great Trek from c.1834 to the 1840s. They founded, and settled in, the South African Republic (or the Transvaal) and the Orange Free State.

⁹ For details of how the Boers appropriated African-owned land in the western Transvaal, see, for example, Mbenga, "The BaKgatla-baga-Kgafela in the Pilanesberg," Chapter 5; B. Mbenga and A. Manson, *"People of the Dew": A History of the Bafokeng of the Rustenburg District of South Africa, From Early Times to 2000* (Jacana Press, Pretoria), forthcoming, Chapters 2 and 4.

¹⁰ S. J. P. Kruger, *The Memoirs of Paul Kruger: Four Times President of the South African President, Vol. I* (London: Fisher

largest concentration of the BaKgatla as tenants under their chief, Kgamanyane, **(photo, Kgamanyane)** who had come to power in 1848 or 1849. Among the hallmarks of Boer rule resented by the BaKgatla and other Africans in the district was the flogging of their chiefs by government officials if they were thought to have flouted instructions. The Africans also resented the compulsory rendering of unpaid labour on Boer farms and the extortion of some of their possessions. These pressures were becoming more onerous by the late 1860s.¹¹ In April 1870, because BaKgatla men refused to continue with the forced transportation of cartloads of large boulders of stone for the construction of a dam for a wheat irrigation project in Saulspoort, Kgosi Kgamanyane was publicly flogged by Paul Kruger Kruger himself.¹² This humiliating event was the deciding factor in Kgamanyane's decision to emigrate from the Transvaal.

Consequently, with about half of his people,¹³ Kgamanyane emigrated to the Mochudi area in the land of the Bakwena, who were then under Kgosi Sechele, in what was soon to become the British Bechuanaland Protectorate. When the Pretoria Convention was signed between Britain and the South African Republic in July 1881, an international border was fixed along the Madikwe River between the two territories. Thus the border between British Bechuanaland (today Botswana) and the Transvaal split the BaKgatla permanently into two segments, with their paramount chief located outside the Transvaal,¹⁴ a reality that has persisted to this day.

Today, the South African BaKgatla number about 350, 000 and live in 32 villages on land which they had to buy back from the Boers between 1880 and 1930 and to which they hold legal title. The BaKgatla's capital Moruleng or Saulspoort and is the most central of their villages. They are currently ruled by Kgosi Nyalala Molefe John Pilane, **(photo, Nyalala Pilane)** who is in our midst this evening. Apart from acting chieftainships in between, he is the third kgosi to rule the South African BaKgatla since the emigration of his great grandfather, Kgamanyane.

BaKgatla participation in the War

The Campus Rector, Madame, the decision about the involvement of the Pilanesberg BaKgatla in the war was made in Mochudi, the seat and source of their overall chiefly authority from, as we have just noted, 1870, by their paramount Kgosi Linchwe **(photo)** who had succeeded his father, Kgamanyane, in 1874. Due to the strong unity between the Kgatla segments on both sides of the border, any large-scale conflict facing one segment, involved the other one as well. The BaKgatla had kept their military regiments ever since the inter-ethnic conflict years of the 18th century. We should note too that since the BaKgatla's separation in 1870, every regiment in Mochudi had its counterpart (with exactly the same name) in Saulspoort, but the Mochudi one being the senior. There were, for example, two Makoba regiments, the Mochudi one under Ramono, and the Saulspoort one under Ditlhake.¹⁵

Unwin, 1902), 41.

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of these pressures on the BaKgatla, see F. Morton, "Fenders of space: Kgatla territorial expansion under Boer and British rule, 1840 – 1920," in P. Limb, N. Etherington, P. Midgley, (eds.), *Grappling with the Beast: Indigenous Southern African Responses to Colonialism, 1840–1930* (Leiden, 2010), 21 - 46.

¹² For details, see B. Mbenga, "The flogging of Chief Kgamanyane by Commandant Paul Kruger, Saulspoort, April 1870," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, No. 1, (March, 1997), 127 -- 139.

¹³ F. Morton, *When Rustling Became an Art ...* (David Philip, Claremont, 2009), pp. 100 – 101.

¹⁴ E. W. Smith, *Great Lion of Bechuanaland* (Independent Press: London, 1957), p. 298.

¹⁵ B. N. O. Pilane, interview.

On the eve of the war, the British and the Boers feared that disaffected African groups might use the war to advance their own agendas and possibly even attempt to overthrow white rule. That explains the elaborate preparations by both the Boers and the British to counter any possible African insurrection.¹⁶ This fear was not totally misplaced because many African groups, including the BaKgatla took the British side in the conviction that the British would be victorious. The obvious premise was that supporting the more likely victor would gain them considerable political and economic benefits after the war.¹⁷

A few months before the outbreak of the war, the policy of both the Boers and the British regarding African participation in the coming war was very clear: this was to be a white man's war. Blacks would be involved only in the menial tasks, such as fetching firewood, tending horses and cooking for the white soldiers. The actual armed combat would be confined to the two white sides only, Boer and British. Both sides, for example, considered it morally unacceptable and even repugnant, to involve blacks in combat in a war between two white societies. However, the practical realities of the war were such that the two white sides would both need African assistance. But a matter that concerned the British authorities was the loyalty of the BaKgatla Kgosi, Linchwe, because half of his followers lived under Boer rule in the Transvaal, while the other half was in British territory, Bechuanaland.¹⁸ Would the BaKgatla be on the British or the Boer side?

As the possibility of war became increasingly real, this doubt about Kgatla loyalty worried the British, a feeling that grew with their realisation that the BaKgatla were potentially their most dependable military allies, and whom they rated as "good fighters."¹⁹ It was for this reason that the British needed BaKgatla military assistance. Another reason was that the railway line which was so essential for the transportation of the (British) Rhodesian troops to the south passed through the very centre of Kgatla territory in Mochudi.

Initially, Linchwe gave a deliberately false impression of either neutrality or uncertainty, while buying time. That impression worried the British authorities and prompted Colonel R. S. Baden-Powell in Mafikeng to report that Linchwe was "wavering." While biding his time, and before openly declaring which side he supported, Linchwe gave the Boers in the nearby Derdepoort *laager* the false impression that he was on their side by, for example, sending them gifts of slaughter stock. Derdepoort was a small Boer settlement situated just on the inside of the Transvaal border, on a farm owned by one P. J. Hans Riekert, who was also Commandant of the Mounted Police, North-Western Border. Derdepoort was his work station.

The immediate factors that influenced Linchwe's decision to join the war, related to Boer acts of aggression in or close to Kgatla territory in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. These occurred very soon after the famous siege of Mafikeng from mid-October 1899, when Boer commandos moved into the British Bechuanaland Protectorate and began destroying the railway line which crucially linked British troops stationed in Rhodesia with those to the south. The towns of Lobatse and Gaborone in late 1899

¹⁶ Warwick, "Black people and the war," pp. 191-192. In the Reserves of the Eastern Cape which were predominantly black, for example, the British feared "a serious danger of general agitation and rising of the natives..." For details, see L.S. Amery, *The Times History of the War in South Africa, Vol. III* (Sampson Low: London, 1905), p. 96.

¹⁷ Warwick, "Black people and the war," p. 192.

¹⁸ Amery, *The Times History*, Vol. IV (1906), p. 200.

¹⁹ Ibid.

were also occupied by the Boers, who looted cattle from some of Kgosi Linchwe's people.²⁰ At the same time, this seizure of BaKgatla cattle also occurred in the Pilanesberg. Such incidents were promptly reported to Mochudi, with the message that "Linchwe must prepare for war because the Boers are coming to do the same thing there."²¹ Despite all signs of Boer aggression, however, Linchwe, was still very cautious and would not show support for either side.

The incident that finally decided Linchwe and his people was the "insult" which, as BaKgatla traditions widely assert, was publicly hurled at Linchwe by the Boer Commandant I have just mentioned, P. J. Hans Riekert. Riekert was riding through Mochudi at the head of a Boer commando *en route* to cut the railway line when the *kgosi* asked them not to disturb the women and children of the town. Riekert then "answered scornfully, picking up a stone from the *kgotla* [and saying:] 'Your chieftainship is no more than a piece of dust.'"²²

This incident helped to swing Linchwe more definitely towards the British, but he was militarily too weak to retaliate against the Boers at this stage. Therefore, until the British troop reinforcements arrived from Rhodesia, the BaKgatla, just like the British in the Protectorate, continued to be vulnerable to Boer attacks.²³ Meanwhile, the Transvaal government had declared war with the British on 11 October 1899 and Boer commandos in the Transvaal and the Orange Free State embarked on a pre-emptive campaign of military assaults against the comparatively few British troops in South Africa, aiming at an early Boer victory. As part of this campaign, the Boers besieged this town of Mafeking, as it was called then called.

The arrival of Rhodesian troops at Mahalapye in Bechuanaland in early November 1899 and the news that Chief Khama of the BaNgwato had just repulsed a Boer commando attack at Selika Kop gave Linchwe confidence to enter into the conflict. He requested W. H. Surmon, the Assistant Commissioner for the Southern District based at Gaborone for arms with which to fight the Boers. In response, at Mochudi railway station, the commander of the British troops, Lieutenant-Colonel G. L. Holdsworth arranged for the BaKgatla regiments to be part of, and led by, the British forces. In mid-November 1899, the BaKgatla began to prepare for war.

Three BaKgatla regiments, were under the command of Segale the late Kgosi Kgamanyane's son from his Second House and, therefore, Chief Linchwe's half-brother. Segale was assisted by his two brothers, Ramono and Modise, as commanders. Both the BaKgatla and British troops were under the overall command of Lt-Col. Holdsworth who began to prepare them for an immediate assault on the Boer laager at nearby Derdepoort. Official British policy was that the BaKgatla were to remain on their side of the border and not to fire unless they were fired upon first. Moreover, the BaKgatla were to be used by the British forces only as guides and carriers as per the policy between the two white sides.

We should note, however, that the limitation of the BaKgatla's role to only "guides and transport assistants" was omitted from the telegraphic instructions sent to Lt-Col. Holdsworth on 22 November

²⁰ Amery, *The Times History of the War in South Africa*, Vol. II (1902), p. 270. See also E. F. Knight, *South Africa After the War: A Narrative of Recent Travel* (Longman: London, 1903), p. 271.

²¹ R. Ramolope and S. Molope, joint interview by Bernard Mbenga, Saulspoort, 17 February 1994.

²² A. K. Pilane, "A note on episodes from the Boer war," *Botswana Notes and Records*, 5 (1973), p. 131. This Pilane, an amateur historian and a member of the BaKgatla royal family, was personally involved in the BaKgatla-Boer war, but has since passed away.

²³ Amery, *The Times History*, Vol. IV (1906), p. 204. About the comparatively strong military position of the Boers at the beginning of the war, see Amery, *The Times History*, Vol. II (1902), pp. 270-271

1899 by his superior, Colonel J. S. Nicholson, Commandant-General of Police at Bulawayo, in Southern Rhodesia, today Zimbabwe. The significance of this omission is that, as Botha has put it, Holdsworth could “make his own arrangements”²⁴, as to whether he would commit the BaKgatla troops in armed combat or not, a loophole which Holdsworth was later to exploit with serious consequences for both the Boers and the BaKgatla. Moreover, the condition that the BaKgatla “were not to fire unless ordered” in itself presupposed that if necessary, they could be used in an armed role. A further stipulation of the official instructions was that if the Boers invaded any of the British Bechuanaland Reserves, it was then the Reserve inhabitants’ duty “as loyal subjects of Her Majesty the Queen, to assist in repelling the invasion.”²⁵ It is significant to note that the limitation of the BaKgatla’s role to only “guides and transport assistants” was omitted from the telegraphic instructions sent to Lieutenant-Colonel Holdsworth on 22 November 1899 by his superior, Colonel J. S. Nicholson. That omission implied that Holdsworth might use his discretion whether to commit the BaKgatla troops in armed combat or not. Therefore, even though official British policy insisted on the exclusion of black people from armed combat, it nevertheless left a leeway, deliberate or not, for a BaKgatla armed role in the impending attack on Derdepoort.

The British-BaKgatla attack on Derdepoort caught its white residents unawares, with disastrous results for the defenders. The Boer miscalculation was due to the fact that most of their men who were either stationed elsewhere, were preparing for a British counter attack on Mafikeng or were preparing for the capture of Kimberley. It appears that the Boer defence of Derdepoort, in the event of a British attack, was not a priority for the Boer military authorities, General Cronje having misled President Kruger by telling him “that Derdepoort was a comparatively safe place...,”²⁶ and also suggesting that Boer military attention should be directed elsewhere instead.

The Derdepoort attack, 25 November 1899 and the Sidney Engers incident

The combined British-Kgatla force under the command of Lt-Col. Holdsworth and numbering about 120 men left Mochudi on foot for Derdepoort in the evening of 24 November 1899. The assault on Derdepoort began in the early hours of 25 November. Holdsworth ordered that once the force was in close proximity to the *laager*, the BaKgatla, and not the British troops, should climb up the *laager* because, as Jules Ellenberger, a British Assistant Commissioner in Bechuanaland and a participant in the war, recorded that: “he [Holdsworth] feared that our men’s heavy ammunition boots would betray us when climbing up to the laager and he decided that the bare-footed natives should do the climbing, Segale guiding us to a place from which we could see the laager and open fire on it...”²⁷ This decision meant that the BaKgatla were now very likely to have to fight, contrary to official British policy.

One Kgatla regiment under Ramono Pilane was ordered to climb and secure the ground leading up to the Boer laager across the Marico, thus, effectively crossing into SAR territory, contrary to “strict” official instructions. The rest of the BaKgatla were on the Protectorate side, while Holdsworth and his men were just inside the Transvaal, overlooking the Boer laager. All the troops then began firing when they saw smoke and the first shooting began just north of Holdsworth’s position. That was the sign for all on the British side to start firing. But there were two logistical problems. First, both the British and

²⁴ H. J. Botha, “*Die Moord op Derdepoort, 25 November 1899. Nie Blankes in Oorlogsdien*,” *Militaria*, 1 (1969), p. 59.

²⁵ J. Ellenberger, “Notes on the history of the BaKgatla,” cited in Schapera (ed.), *A Short History of the BaKgatla-baga-Kgafela of British Bechuanaland Protectorate* (School of African Studies: University of Cape Town, 1942), p. 46.

²⁶ L. Wulfsohn, *Rustenburg at War: The Story of its Citizens in the First and Second Anglo-Boer Wars* (L. M. Wulfsohn: Rustenburg, 1987), p. 48.

²⁷ J. Ellenberger, “The Bechuanaland Protectorate and the Boer War,” *Rhodesiana*, XI (1964), p. 5.

BaKgatla troops were so dangerously placed that when either of them fired at the laager, there was the danger that stray bullets might hit their own forces. Second, the British troops could not quickly cross the river because there was no accessible drift. Consequently, Lt-Col. Holdsworth decided to withdraw his troops – but only the British troops – and ordered their return to Mochudi.²⁸ Holdsworth later claimed that he had realised, belatedly, that he and his men were, in fact, in the South African Republic i.e. Transvaal territory, and that that was why he decided to withdraw all of his men.

This British withdrawal from the battle scene now provided the BaKgatla the opportunity they wanted in order to begin settling their long-standing grievances against the Boers. In the ensuing fight, the BaKgatla suffered 14 dead and 16 wounded, while the Boers lost 20, including J. H. Barnard, a member of the first *Volksraad* for Rustenburg. The BaKgatla also captured 100 oxen, 30 horses and 18 Boer women and children.²⁹ In the Derdepoort attack, BaKgatla pressure must have been quite heavy because 15 of the Boer defenders deserted the laager and Commandant Kirsten himself admitted just after the war that the BaKgatla “shot wonderfully well, in the same manner as the Boers, and their aiming was excellent, infinitely better than the English.”³⁰

The combined British-BaKgatla attack on Derdepoort caught its white residents almost unawares due to the Boer military authorities’ ignorance of the military plans of their enemies and the scale of the threat they posed, which explains the disastrous results upon the Derdepoort defenders. The Boer miscalculation and lack of preparedness needs some explanation. Early in November 1899, the bulk of the Boer commandos in the Western Transvaal, some 7, 000 men under the command of the Generals Piet Cronje, J. H. de la Rey and J. P. Snyman were based at Ottoshoop, just east of here, Mafikeng. Their objectives were to capture Mafikeng and Kimberley, while a part of the Rustenburg commando camped near Lobatse in order to destroy the railway line there. But Derdepoort, meanwhile, had just a small force of only about 100 men in the laager under Commandant J. F. Kirsten, in addition to some 85 policemen under police commandant, Hans Riekert.³¹ So we can see that the defence of Derdepoort in the event of a British attack was not a priority for the Boer military authorities.

From the moment of the attack on Derdepoort onwards, the BaKgatla on their own initiative, began to extend the war far beyond Derdepoort. This led to the unfortunate murder of a German trader, called Sidney Engers, based in Sikwane village close to Derdepoort. Shortly after the attack on Derdepoort had started in the early hours of 25 November 1899, a small group of BaKgatla troops under a man named Mongale was instructed by Commander Ramono to take Engers prisoner, believing that he was in league with the Boers. Ramono’s instruction also stipulated that Engers “was to have been made a prisoner and not killed,”³² a point which clearly reveals the BaKgatla’s intentions. The Kgatla troops, however, did not take Engers prisoner but killed him instead.

From an investigation conducted by the British some eight months after the event, it emerged that the BaKgatla’s decision to kill Engers was made on the spur of the moment, prompted by his panicky reactions to them. When the BaKgatla fighters surrounded Engers’ shop in the early hours of 25

²⁸ R. F. Morton, “Linchwe I and the Kgatla Campaign in the South African War,” *Journal of African History*, No. 26 (1985), p. 179.

²⁹ Ibid. The captive Boer women and children were all repatriated back to the Transvaal at the end of November 1899. See Wulfsohn, *Rustenburg at War*, p. 51.

³⁰ W. van Everdingen, *De Oorlog in Zuid Afrika. Eerste Tydvak: 11 October 1899 – Maart 1900*, quoted in Schapera, *A Short History*, p. 41.

³¹ Wulfsohn, *Rustenburg at War*, p. 49.

³² Botswana National Archives (hereafter, BNA) RC 5/4, Affidavit of R. Pilane to Ellenberger, 2 August 1901.

November and asked him to come out because “the chief wanted to see him,” he was, quite understandably, suspicious and incredulous. Realising that his shop was surrounded by a party of armed blacks, Engers, fearing for his life, panicked and allegedly attempted to summon assistance from a number of Boers stationed across the Marico river.”³³ According to the BaKgatla, Engers “made for the door ... [and], thinking he was armed, as we were, he was shot down.”³⁴ Another eye-witness, Engers’ Coloured housekeeper, Liz de Villiers, he had in fact been stabbed twice in the shoulder before he was shot. The BaKgatla, now numbering some fifty men, looted the shop, destroyed Engers’ papers and stole about £700.³⁵ Looting and stealing, therefore, may have been one of that BaKgatla’s group’s original intentions in that incident. But, clearly, Engers was not a threat to the BaKgatla fighters’ lives; nor was it their policy to kill defenceless, unarmed civilians. Engers was killed because, apart from genuinely suspecting that he was armed and intended to kill them, he was also friendly to the Boer community, a fact that was well known to the BaKgatla border communities of Sikwane, Mathubudukwane and even Mochudi. Even more serious to the BaKgatla, from their point of view, was their claim that just before the outbreak of the war, Engers had been spying on both British and Kgatla troop movements on behalf of the Boers. In the oral evidence by one of the BaKgatla commanders, Segale Kgamanyane, to an investigative commission after the war had ended, he said: “Engers was friendly with the Boers and giving them information of the British forces’ movements. Mr Surmon said he should made a prisoner and brought to Mochudi.”³⁶ Thus the killing of Engers was probably unintended, despite the fact that he was friendly with the Boers. Whatever the case, though, this was an unfortunate incident and Engers, despite his affiliation with the Boer community, was a victim of the generalized conflict.

European reactions of outrage to the Derdepoort episode were almost immediate. The Consul-General for Germany based in Cape Town, T. H. Focke, for example, protested about the event to the British High Commissioner and Governor of the Cape Colony, Sir Alfred Milner, and demanded a full investigation of the matter.³⁷ Among the Boer communities in the western Transvaal, there were rumours about BaKgatla murders of Boers and destruction of their properties.³⁸ Highly sensational stories of BaKgatla atrocities were published both locally and abroad. One pro-Boer source, for example, recorded that “a German trader was disembowelled ...,”³⁹ while another source, reported that of the Boer women and children taken captive by the BaKgatla, “some were murdered.”⁴⁰ A German periodical reported that British and BaKgatla soldiers took turns in raping Boer women while being taken to Mochudi.⁴¹

These impressions of alleged BaKgatla brutality were to linger for many, many years, long after the war. Thus, in a popular account of the experiences of white Rustenburgers in both the First and the Second Anglo-Boer wars, the late amateur historian, Lionel Wulfsohn, himself a Rustenburger,

³³ BNA RC 5/4, Affidavit of Mongale to Ellenberger, 2 August 1901.

³⁴ BNA RC 5/4, Affidavit of Mongale, 2 August 1901.

³⁵ BNA RC 5/4, Affidavit of Lizzie De Villiers to Charles Bell, Resident Magistrate, Mafeking, 11 July 1900. In the same file, see also the affidavits of Segale, Ramono, Seroke, Thaperi and Seabatho (all of Mochudi) in which they admitted that they had stolen and shared the money.

³⁶ BNA RC 5/4, Affidavit of Segale to Captain J. Griffith, Gaborone, 3 August 1901.

³⁷ BNA RC 5/4, T. H. Focke to Sir A. Milner, 12 February 1900.

³⁸ See, for example, Wulfsohn, *Rustenburg at War*, pp. 51 – 52.

³⁹ M. Davitt, *The Boer Fight for Freedom* (Funk and Wagnalls: London, 1902), p. 174.

⁴⁰ W. Fouche, *Pieter Stofberg: Zyn Leven, Arbeid en Afsterven*, cited in Schapera, *A Short History*, p. 43. The quotation belongs to the Rev. P. B. J. Stofberg, a DRC missionary based in Mochudi at the beginning of the war.

⁴¹ Cited in Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899 – 1902* (Cambridge University Press: London, 1983), p. 41.

recorded, as recently as 1987, that at Derdepoort, the BaKgatla “attacked civilians, women and children, looting, plundering and burning homes and shops and generally running wild,” while the Boer women and children whom the BaKgatla took to Mochudi “walked the whole of the 25th and 26th without being offered food or water by their escort.”⁴²

These reports, however, were generally exaggerated and contradicted by a number of sources. The Assistant Commissioner at Gaborone, W. H. Surmon, for example, reported that “not one of them [i.e. the Boer captives] ever mentioned to me that they had in any way been ill-treated by the Bakhatla beyond being required to walk from Sekwani to Mochudi.”⁴³ The Engers’ house-keeper, de Villiers, who was also taken as a prisoner of war together with the Boer women and children, refuted the allegations of BaKgatla brutality, asserting that: “We were all together and I saw no outrage or violence of any kind committed on the Dutch women. They were insulted in no way by anyone, to my knowledge[,] as we were together the whole time.”⁴⁴ We should consider De Villiers a credible witness because, with her employer and only source of livelihood gone, she had nothing to lose by telling the truth. Moreover, she gave her testimony in Mafikeng, geographically far removed from Derdepoort and, therefore, from any possible factors that could influence her testimony. However, I am not exonerating the BaKgatla from all blame. They did, for example, destroy Boer property in Derdepoort by setting fire to a number of buildings, including Commandant Rieker’s house.

The Aftermath of the Derdepoort Attack

The Boers felt very aggrieved and alarmed by what had happened at Derdepoort. On 26 November 1899, one of the survivors in the Derdepoort attack cycled to Rustenburg and alerted the Boer military authorities. The response was one of panic followed by a desire to exact reprisals. A large contingent of troops was dispatched to Derdepoort from Rustenburg and Crocodile Pools, while many others were mobilised from the districts of the Heks and Kgetleng Rivers, Waterberg, Mafikeng and even Johannesburg. By the beginning of December 1899, the combined number of Boer troops at Derdepoort had been beefed up to well over 400.⁴⁵

Fuelled by fear and panic, it was believed by the Boers that the BaKgatla were planning a massive invasion of not only the tiny white administrative post at Saulspoort, but even Rustenburg itself. Consequently, Commandant J. F. Kirsten sent an urgent message to the *landdrost* of Rustenburg Mr. J. C. Brink, requesting him to call out the entire district Commando in defence of the town, and the Rustenburg gaol was converted into a fort. Farmers in the district formed themselves into *laagers* and many moved into Rustenburg with their whole families and herds of cattle, for protection.”⁴⁶ The Boers into action to exact. On 22 December 1899 in a major engagement close to the border, the BaKgatla succumbed to the Boers’ cannons and maxim guns and sustained 150 dead, while the Boers reportedly lost only four.⁴⁷ In order to punish the BaKgatla and ensure that they would not pose any more danger, the Boer commandos razed the BaKgatla border villages of Mathubudukwane,

⁴² Wulfsohn, *Rustenburg at War*, p. 50.

⁴³ (Secretary for Native Affairs files, hereafter ‘SNA’) 59 NA 2111/02, quoted in R. Williams, Resident Commissioner, Mafeking, to Sir G. Lagden, Johannesburg, 23 May 1902.

⁴⁴ BNA RC 5/4, affidavit of de Villiers to C. Bell, Resident Magistrate, Mafeking, 11 July 1900.

⁴⁵ For details, see J. H. Breytenbach, “*Ongepubliseerde manuskrip*,” typescript in Phuthadikobo Museum, Mochudi (April 1985), pp. 29-30, 34-35.

⁴⁶ Wulfsohn, *Rustenburg at War*, pp. 51-52; F. Pretorius, *The Anglo-Boer War, 1899-1902* (South African Scientific Publications: Pretoria, 1999), p. 76.

⁴⁷ Everdingen, quoted in Schapera, *A Short History*, p. 42.

Malolwane, and Sikwane. They even threatened to attack Mochudi itself. Sikwane village in particular was “thoroughly ravaged” by the Boers in case it would be used as a base against them because it was the closest to Derdepoort. The Boers took as booty three horses, several wagons, ploughs, pots and other small items and burnt a large quantity of ammunition.⁴⁸ They would have continued the offensive, but fear of the vulnerability of their unprotected farms back in the Transvaal, prompted them to discontinue the attack early in 1900.⁴⁹ The Boer actions, however, instead of achieving their intended objectives, made the BaKgatla even more determined to fight back.

The BaKgatla’s Escalation of the War in the Pilanesberg

The BaKgatla took the razing of their border villages as a sign that a state of war existed. They now considered the war against the Boers to be completely theirs and began unilaterally to escalate it throughout the Pilanesberg. In January 1900, following Segale Kgamanyane’s request to the British military authorities in Mafikeng, the BaKgatla received 100 more Martini-Henry rifles, in addition to the ones they had obtained for the Derdepoort attack. The British allowed the Bechuanaland Protectorate BaKgatla to enter the Transvaal with these weapons, a sure sign that the BaKgatla’s escalation of the conflict with the Boers had a tacit British approval.

On 16 February 1900, Linchwe mobilised two Kgatla regiments, the Makoba and the Mojanko, under Ramono and Motshwane, respectively. At Kayaseput (also called Kaye), half-way between Derdepoort and the Dwarsberg mountains, the two regiments waited in an elaborately planned ambush for a large convoy of Boer troop reinforcements and supply wagons from Rustenburg, bound for Derdepoort. In the ensuing attack, “many Boers” were killed, and their wagons and supplies captured. The news of this incident was so unsettling that a Boer commando at nearby Sepitse abandoned their *laager* when they heard about it.⁵⁰ This famous incident in BaKgatla history has vividly lived on in popular memory, especially among the older generation of BaKgatla, and is graphically depicted in a praise-poem dedicated to the bravery of Ramono, one of the Kgatla commanders in that incident.⁵¹ Soon after the Kayaseput ambush, Commandant P. Steenkamp and some of the Rustenburg commando went to Derdepoort and escorted back the remaining Boers. As a direct result of that ambush, Derdepoort was abandoned and remained unoccupied for the remainder of the war.

Campus Rector, Madame, the Derdepoort and Kayaseput encounters produced two results. Firstly, they boosted BaKgatla morale and gave them the confidence to pursue the war more vigorously, as further military engagements were to show. The BaKgatla also proved to themselves that the Boers who had defeated them in the past were not invincible after all. Indeed, in this regard, the Boer withdrawal from Derdepoort was highly symbolic. Secondly, the Boer military threat in the western Transvaal-Bechuanaland border area was reduced considerably as a direct result of Derdepoort, because the Boers “now concentrated their attacks south of Gaborone towards Mafeking,” thus, enabling the British to re-occupy Gaborone, which the Boers had earlier forced them to abandon in October 1899.⁵²

Soon after the Kayaseput episode, Linchwe sent the Mojanko regiment under Modise to assist the BaKgatla in Saulspoort. In a major engagement at Moreteletse in Mabeskraal, the BaKgatla captured

⁴⁸ Breytenbach, “*Ongepubliseerde Manuskrip*,” p. 38.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Schapera, *A Short History*, pp. 42 – 43.

⁵⁰ I. Schapera (ed.), *Ditirafalo tsa Merafe ya Batswana* (Lovedale Press: Alice, 1940), p. 182.

⁵¹ I. Schapera, *Praise-Poems of Tswana Chiefs* (Oxford University Press: London, 1965), pp. 98, 101.

⁵² See J. S. Mohlamme, “The role of black people in the Boer Republics during and in the aftermath of the South African War of 1899 - 1902,” Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison (1985), pp. 40-41.

300 Boer trek oxen and two wagons. However, in that encounter, Tlatsi, who was Linchwe's *Ntona* (confidential assistant), was killed in action.⁵³ With a new supply of 250 Martini-Henry rifles from the British authorities in the middle of 1900, the BaKgatla were clearly on the war-path. In July 1901, Linchwe obtained permission from the Assistant Commissioner at Gaborone "to protect his people at Saulspoort who were in danger of attack," but was told "not to attack outside his own country [i.e. Mochudi in Bechuanaland]," but that message further added that "there is no reason why he should not send some of his men to assist Saulspoort."⁵⁴ Following this, Linchwe was twice supplied with an unspecified number of rifles and ammunition by the British military authorities. This assistance clearly shows the extent of British reliance on the BaKgatla. By this stage of the war, the British had made it quite clear that they needed the BaKgatla's assistance and openly approved of their military role in the Transvaal.

Operating south of the Kgetleng River, as far as Rustenburg, the BaKgatla were so militarily effective that, in the words of the Sub-Native Commissioner (SNC) at Saulspoort, F. Edmeston, "the Military Authorities were relieved of all anxiety as to this district, which was held by these [BaKgatla] people, as far north as Palla [Pella]."⁵⁵ The triumphant BaKgatla now had occupation of all the land between the Crocodile and Elands Rivers, which became a no-go zone for the Boers.⁵⁶ It was for this reason that the historian Jeremy Krikler has, quite aptly, described the BaKgatla as the "scourge of the Transvaal" during the war.⁵⁷ But we should note too that, apart from their fighting role, the BaKgatla also served as scouts, guides and wagon drivers and gave the British forces intelligence reports about Boer troop movements.⁵⁸

During the war in the Pilanesberg the BaKgatla looted Boer cattle on an enormous scale. As the Native Commissioner (NC) in Rustenburg reported at the end of the war, "99% of the cattle looted from the Boers" was by the BaKgatla, most of it "at the instigation and with the cognizance of the [British] military authorities."⁵⁹ There were very few instances of other ethnic groups in the Pilanesberg looting Boer cattle. But this was to be expected as the BaKgatla were the Boers' only adversaries in this area during the War. However, it should also be noted that BaKgatla's looting of Boer cattle was, in all likelihood, beyond the control of the British authorities. The looted cattle were carted off to the safety of Mochudi because, as one Mokgatla source put it, once they were there, "it was the end of them, whatever the Boers did, they could never get them back."⁶⁰

During the war, as the historian, Fred Morton, has recorded, Kgosi Linchwe distributed some of the looted Boer cattle among the heroes of the war, while some were slaughtered to feed his troops. After the war, some of this cattle was given to the sons of those who had died in the course of fighting, to ward headmen and to the poor. The Pilanesberg BaKgatla who had brought the looted cattle over to Mochudi, also returned with rewards of cattle.⁶¹ Linchwe did this to ensure loyalty. But Linchwe remained with plenty more cattle for himself as well.

⁵³ SNA 116 NA 672/03, SNC to NC, 27 April 1903, p. 2; Schapera, *Ditirafalo*, p. 182; *A Short History*, p. 20.

⁵⁴ SNA 59 NA 211/02, cited in R. Williams to G. Lagden, 23 May 1902.

⁵⁵ SNA 116 NA 672/03, SNC, the Pilanesberg, to NC, Rustenburg, 27 April 1903, p. 2.

⁵⁶ SNA 106 NA 491/03, NC to SNA, 18 February 1903, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁷ J. Krikler, "Agrarian class struggle and the South African war," *Social History*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (May 1989), p. 163.

⁵⁸ SNA 71, NA 2482/02, SNC to NC, 7 November 1903.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁶⁰ Central Archives Depot (hereafter, 'CAD'), Van Warmelo Boxes K32/13, S.292(24), J. Masiangoako, "Military system and war," p. 2.

⁶¹ For details, see Morton, " 'Babolayeng BagaKgafela!' The Kgatla Campaign in the South African War, 1899 – 1902,"

The BaKgatla not only looted the Boers' cattle but also those of other Batswana groups in the Pilanesberg, who were considered fair game. For example, they raided stock worth £828 from the Baphalane, as the Baphalane themselves reported to the Native Commissioner at the end of November 1902.⁶² In November 1902, the NC also reported that the BaKgatla had "looted stock from most of the natives residing within reach of Saulspoor"; he had received "numerous complaints" from "various tribes" in the district (of the Pilanesberg) whose cattle had been "raided or stolen from them by the Bakhatla (Lintsue's people) during the war" and, to ensure the cattle's safe-keeping, "99% of it" was taken away to the Protectorate.⁶³ The BaKgatla rationalised these as punitive actions against people they considered to be collaborators with the Boers. If chief Linchwe's report of 14 February 1902 to the Resident Commissioner in Mafeking is to be believed, some African groups "on the Marico and thereabouts are helping the Boers and are supplying them with information."⁶⁴ Moreover, during the war, as the collective BaKgatla leadership itself countered, Boer forces gave their cattle to some "friendly" Batswana groups in the Pilanesberg for safe-keeping, in particular to the BaFokeng of Kgosi Mokgatle, the BaKwena of Kgosi Lerotoli and the Baphalane of Kgosi Ramokoka while they (the Boers) were away fighting. These groups, the BaKgatla further alleged, "were in the Boers' favour by feeding them and were principally used as their faithful scouts."⁶⁵ These Kgatla allegations were correct, providing them with a convenient motive for attack, from which they took full advantage.

The BaKgatla's looting of the properties of the Boers and their collaborators was accompanied by a general lawlessness and the wanton destruction of whatever they could not take away. While British military operations tended to be confined to the major settlements, along the railway lines and the main roads, the BaKgatla kept to the countryside, looting and destroying Boer property, harassing and generally causing mayhem. Consequently, practically all of the Boers in the Pilanesberg fled to Rustenburg for safety. The extent of BaKgatla destruction of Boer property in the Pilanesberg was in fact much greater than has hitherto been acknowledged in any of the current historiography on the war in the western Transvaal, even in the works of Morton and Krikler.⁶⁶ Travelling through the Pilanesberg immediately after the war, in 1903, a British journalist called E. F. Knight, conveyed the situation graphically: "The Dutch population had to fly, and not a Boer, man, woman or child, was left in the land."⁶⁷ Knight came across numerous cases of the destruction of Boer property by, according to him, the BaKgatla. Throughout the region north of the Elands or Kgetleng river, "every Boer homestead had been razed to the ground."⁶⁸

The BaKgatla looting and destruction of Boer property was part of their much bigger objective of taking over Boer farms and, therefore, re-occupying their ancestral lands which they had lost to the Voortrekkers some sixty years earlier. As soon as the Boers had abandoned their farms and fled, the

paper to the Department of History Seminar, University of Botswana, Gaborone, (20 March 1984), p. 27.

⁶² SNA 71 NA 2482/02, NC to SNA, 11 December 1902.

⁶³ SNA 71 NA 2482/02, NC to SNA, 6 November 1902. In the same file, see also Telegram, SNA to NC, 23 May 1903; NC to SNA, 10 November 1903.

⁶⁴ SNA 17 NA 396/02, Cited in R. Williams, R. C., Mafeking, to G.Y. Lagden, CNA, 14 February 1902.

⁶⁵ SNA 116 NA 672/03, Petition by R. Pilane and others to Sir A. Lawley, 9 February 1903, pp. 3-4. See also Mohlamme, "The role of black people," pp. 149-150.

⁶⁶ See, for example, Morton, "Linchwe I," pp. 179-191; Krikler, "Agrarian struggle," pp. 158-176.

⁶⁷ Knight, *South Africa After the War: A Narrative of Recent Travel* (Longman: London, 1903), p. 272.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 264.

BaKgatla took them over, “as theirs by right of conquest”⁶⁹ – and they were convinced that this would be a permanent feature of their lives.

The Campus Rector, Madame, an impression should not be created that there was no counter-reaction from the Boers, because there was! The period from August to December 1901, which saw an escalation of BaKgatla activity was also the period when Boer retaliatory raids were at their highest. In a major battle on 12 December 1901, for example, a Boer commando under Commandant J. C. G. Kemp attacked Saulspoort itself and continued raiding northwards up to the Bierkraal River. In the process, some 30 BaKgatla herdsmen under one Kgaboesele attacked the commando on its way out until the herdsmen ran out of ammunition. Kgaboesele and five others were killed, while the rest were wounded. Apart from the dead and wounded, this engagement was very significant because it “cost the tribe some 6 000 to 7 000 head of cattle, without mentioning small stock...”⁷⁰ While this Kgatla claim of losing 6 – 7, 000 head of cattle may have been exaggerated, it nevertheless points to the severity of the Boer assault. This incident clearly shows that the BaKgatla could not take the Boer forces for granted.

At the end of the war, the Sub-Native Commissioner for the Pilansberg reported that there had been “summary executions” as well as “numberless cases of cruelty by Boers [which] took place in public at Saulspoort, amongst which the flogging to death of an invalid, Mogasoe Segogoane is the worst case.”⁷¹ The Boers also flogged anyone they suspected of giving information to the British, while “men and women were wantonly shot down when ploughing their lands in the Pilandsberg (*sic*).”⁷² So, clearly, it was tit-for-tat between Boer and Kgatla. These actions strike some resonance with the study of the South African War in parts of the then Cape Colony by the historian Bill Nasson about which he wrote that: “... a war between British imperialism and Boer republicanism turned with abrupt and explosive force into a desperate, undeclared civil war between rural whites and rural blacks.”⁷³

Soon after Commandant Kemp’s attack, the scales were now tipped in favour of the BaKgatla when they received a new batch of rifles and ammunition from the British General Kitchener. This was followed by two pitched battles with Boer commandos at Draaiberg and Janskop, after which the BaKgatla were in effective control over most of the Western Transvaal until the Boer surrender to British forces on 31 May 1902.

From the foregoing, it is clear that up to that point, the BaKgatla had considerable success in achieving some of their objectives of the war: First, they had driven practically all of the Boers in the Pilanesberg off their farms and occupied them. Although this turned out to be only short-term, it was, nevertheless symbolic of the BaKgatla’s strong desire to re-occupy what they considered to be their ancestral lands. Second, they had succeeded in looting numerous herds of Boer cattle which, unlike the temporary occupation of Boer farms, became a much more permanent and useful community resource.

A number of factors contributed to the BaKgatla’s success. First, up to at least March 1900, the Boer forces were preoccupied with the sieges of major towns, such as Mafikeng, right here, and engaging in fierce, resource-sapping battles with British forces, while those in the extreme Western Transvaal and

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 272.

⁷⁰ SNA 116 NA 672/03, SNC to NC, 27 April 1903, p. 3.

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 2.

⁷² Knight, *South Africa After the War*, p. 270.

⁷³ B. Nasson, *Abraham Essau’s War: A Black South African War in the Cape, 1899 – 1902*(Cambridge University Press: London, 1991), p. 120.

the Northern Cape concentrated on destroying the railway line. This, therefore, left very large areas like the Pilanesberg undefended and open to BaKgatla attacks.⁷⁴ Second, the BaKgatla's high fighting morale was sustained by the strong belief that they would forever re-possess their ancestral lands from the Boers. This belief was so strong that, as the Sub-Native Commissioner for the Pilanesberg, F. Edmeston, recorded, it "served to keep every available man in the [battle] field ..." ⁷⁵ Third, BaKgatla military success is also explained by the unity of purpose and resoluteness with which they fought against the Boers. This fundamental factor, which was strengthened by access to British arms, was built over very many decades, necessitated by external threats from other African groups and the Boers. Fourth, a prominent Afrikaner historian, Albert Grundlingh, has recorded that Boer commandos were poorly motivated and "would not have hesitated to surrender their arms at the earliest opportunity." The Boer lack of rigid discipline while on commando meant that a burgher could go back home to check on his family and property whenever he wished to. Boer defeatism and low morale worsened from February 1900 when General Piet Cronje surrendered to General Lord Roberts and worsened further with the British occupation of Bloemfontein in March 1900.⁷⁶ All of this, undoubtedly, facilitated BaKgatla war activity and success in the Pilanesberg.

What were the Results of the War?

As we have just noted, the BaKgatla gained enormously from the looted Boer cattle, which far more than compensated for the cattle they themselves had lost to the Boers. Cattle were the all-important resource that the BaKgatla paramount chief, Linchwe, used not only to boost his status and prestige, but also to buy his people in the Pilanesberg much-needed additional land. With the Boer defeat, Africans in the Transvaal generally believed that the Boer farms they had occupied during the war "would be confiscated and given to the natives," but the British authorities "lost no time in dispelling this delusion in their minds..." ⁷⁷ In June 1903, for example, the Commissioner for Native Affairs labelled the very idea of Africans possessing Boer farms as "misguided" and called for a reversion to the pre-war *status quo*.⁷⁸ Since one of the BaKgatla war objectives was to regain possession of land they had formerly occupied, they were greatly disappointed when, following British victory, they were ordered to vacate the Boer farms. The SNA was aware of this Kgatla despair when he wrote that:

... the Natives are greatly disappointed at not being made grants of land in consideration of the services they rendered to our troops during the late war; they fully expected that the farms would be taken from the Boers and given to them. They anticipated the [Boer] farmers being dispossessed of all title to land. ⁷⁹

Although there are no statistics of BaKgatla war losses, they lost a significant number of men and women, throughout the combat. Morton suggests, quite correctly, that the BaKgatla "probably suffered a higher casualty rate, because the Boer was more experienced with the rifle and therefore a better

⁷⁴ For details, see Amery, *The Times History*, Vol. IV, pp. 205 – 206; L. Creswicke, *South Africa and the Transvaal War*, Vol. IV (T. C. and E. C. Jack: Edinburgh, 1906), pp. 206 – 212.

⁷⁵ SNA 116 NA 672/03, SNC to NC, 27 April 1903, p. 3.

⁷⁶ L. Grundlingh, "Collaborators in Boer society," Warwick and Spies (eds.), *The South African War: The Anglo-Boer War* (Longman: London, 1980), p. 260.

⁷⁷ SNA 6 NA 519/02, *Native Affairs Department, Annual Report for the Year Ended 30 June 1906*, p. A.1.

⁷⁸ Transvaalse Koloniale Publikasies (hereafter, 'TKP') Vol. 239, *Annual Report by the Commissioner for Native Affairs, Transvaal, for the Year Ended 30 June 1903*, pp. A.1 – 2.

⁷⁹ TKP Vol. 239, *Annual Report by the Commissioner for Native Affairs, Transvaal, 30 June 1903*, Annexure "D," p. B. 27.

shot.”⁸⁰ Morton has estimated the number of BaKgatla men killed in action at some 200, not to mention the very many men who survived the war permanently disfigured in one way or another. In addition, the insecurity of war conditions and the absence of men on military action would have prevented normal agricultural activities from taking place. As BaKgatla food production got disrupted by the war, the impact of famine was considerable. In the late 1920s, a MoKgatla survivor put it starkly when he said: “All that they [i.e. BaKgatla in the Pilanesberg] knew was famine. It was famine that scattered them hither and thither and not war.”⁸¹ This indicates that the war period affected not just the men, but women and children as well. With many men deployed in the field, BaKgatla women also assumed additional duties in and around Saulspoort.

As a direct result of the war, relations between the Boers and Africans were transformed, at least in the short-term. The historian, Jeremy Krikler, has recounted how many farm workers all over the Transvaal deserted their Boer masters during the war, never to return to them.⁸² Krikler asserts that many farm workers all over the Transvaal deserted their Boer masters during the war, never to return to them.⁸³ Even more striking was the changed nature of African attitudes to the Boers and other whites in general. Due to the war, the Africans had become, as the Boers and the British administrators put it, “disrespectful” to white people.⁸⁴ The new African attitudes were unmistakable and were reflected in the report of the Chief Native Commissioner for June 1903 in which he recorded that, due to the war, black people had developed “a spirit of independence and apparent aggressiveness which was a new and regrettable feature in relations between black and white.”⁸⁵ These attitudes were even more pronounced among the BaKgatla, who had played such a major role in the Boer defeat and, as Krikler has correctly stated, the struggles of the BaKgatla “were probably the most effective and militant of all those waged by rural working people during the South African War.”⁸⁶

The BaKgatla clearly saw their war role as having placed them on a different, special level and therefore expected to be treated as such, a feeling that was regarded in some British quarters as a form of conceit.⁸⁷ Many BaKgatla showed their displeasure by refusing to work on white farms or for the incoming British administration. Sometime towards the end of 1902, when the Native Commissioner instructed the Sub-Native Commissioner at Saulspoort to obtain labourers to work on a public road, the Acting Chief, Dithlake, who was instructed to find the labour, regretted that he could not. The reason, he explained to the Native Commissioner, was that because of the recent war, “we can’t compel anybody to go to work. Only I will try to tell them all about your sayings (*sic*). So I say anybody will do his will.”⁸⁸ The general African refusal to work for their former masters also had to do with the very meagre wages they used to receive before the war, which the Boer farmers wanted to continue with. During war, they had got used to receiving comparatively very high wages from the British military authorities for the various jobs they performed. This had, as Knight put it, “spoiled them,”

⁸⁰ Morton, “Linchwe I,” p. 188.

⁸¹ CAD, S.292(24) K32/13, Tsoabi, “Shields,” cited in J. Masiangoako, “Military system and war,” p. 6. It is likely that Tsoabi had witnessed the war. See also Morton, “Linchwe I,” p. 186.

⁸² For details, see Krikler, “Revolution from above,” pp. 40, 42.

⁸³ For details, see Krikler, “Revolution from above,” pp. 37-39. Quotation from p. 39.

⁸⁴ SNA 169 NA 2059/03, NC to SNA, 18 September 1903, p. 35.

⁸⁵ TKP Vol. 239, *Annual Report by the Commissioner for Native Affairs, Transvaal, for the year ended 30 June 1903*, p. A.1.

⁸⁶ Krikler, “Revolution from above,” p. 53.

⁸⁷ Knight, *South Africa After the War*, p. 273.

⁸⁸ SNA 62 NA 2160/02, Dithlake to SNC, n.d., 1902, p. 18.

which was why the Boer farmers had “considerable difficulty in obtaining labour.”⁸⁹ Moreover, as Krikler states, after the war, unlike before, farm labourers now had the choice to return to their pre-war landlord, work for a different one, or negotiate favourable terms of tenancy.”⁹⁰

The British authorities, however, took steps to ensure a speedy and safe return to the pre-war *status quo*. The major means of restoring pre-war relations of power was through the creation of a South African Constabulary (SAC) in June 1910. This was a military force of 7,500 white men, mostly from Canada, Australia and Britain. Commanded by Major-General R. S. Baden-Powell, it was “a rural police force,” with a network of police posts throughout the Orange Free State and the Transvaal, including the Pilanesberg. As Albert Grundlingh has shown, the SAC’s major purpose was to deal with the threat of African rebellion and insubordination in the two Boer colonies. It was used to round up and coerce black workers to return them to their pre-war employers, protect the Boers and their property and, as Grundlingh has recorded, to “promote their [i.e. Boer] material interest in the immediate post-war period.”⁹¹ In the bushveld region generally, the SAC played a crucial role in providing physical and psychological security to the very few courageous Boer farmers who did return at the end of the war. When Knight travelled through the Pilanesberg at this time, he noted that each of the few Boer homesteads in the area was “under the shadow of a Constabulary station,”⁹² obviously for protection from a possible BaKgatla attack.

Apart from using the SAC, another important means of restoring racial inequalities was to disarm the African population. Africans throughout the western Transvaal were required to surrender their firearms soon after the end of the war, as demanded by the British authorities. After the war, Martini-Henry rifles were a very common feature in Mochudi. A British visitor to Mochudi just after the war, for example, recorded, with some exaggeration, that “every man” he met in Mochudi carried a Martini-Henry carbine.⁹³ The threat to disarm Africans was, however, not carried through, presumably because of their military role on the British side during the war.

The major preoccupation of SNCs throughout Rustenburg and the Pilanesberg immediately after the war was the handling of African claims of compensation for war losses.⁹⁴ On 21 July 1902, the government decided to compensate both Africans and Boers for their war losses.⁹⁵ The Boers’ compensation claims were massive, compared to those of all the Pilanesberg Africans put together. In the entire Western Division, the Pilanesberg’s Boer compensation claims amounted to far much more than the combined Boer claims from Lichtenburg, Rustenburg and the Marico – it was the second highest only after that of Potchefstroom.⁹⁶ This clearly points to the enormously heavy losses sustained by the Boer farmers of the Pilanesberg during the war. In addition to this, the Boer farmers were supplied with livestock, rations, building materials and agricultural implements.⁹⁷ This was an

⁸⁹ Knight, *South Africa After the War*, p. 88.

⁹⁰ For details, see Krikler, “Revolution from above,” pp. 66 – 72.

⁹¹ A. Grundlingh, “Protectors and friends of the people? The South African Constabulary in the Transvaal and Orange River Colony, 1900 – 1908,” D. M. Anderson and D. Killingray (eds.), *Policing the Empire: Government, Authority and Control, 1830 – 1980* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1991), p. 175.

⁹² See Knight, *South Africa After the War*, pp. 263, 273, 274 – 275.

⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 269.

⁹⁴ SNA 106 NA 491/03, NC to SNA, 18 February 1903, p. 7.

⁹⁵ SNA 71 NA 2482, NC to SNA, 1 December 1902.

⁹⁶ TKP VOL. 239, *Annual Report by the Commissioner for Native Affairs, Transvaal, for the year ended 30 June 1904*, p. B.31.

⁹⁷ Krikler, “Revolution from above,” pp. 93 – 94.

important aspect of the process of reconstruction embarked upon by Alfred Milner's British Administration from the end of the war.⁹⁸

But the really contentious matter was the Boer demand that blacks generally must return the looted Boer cattle after the war. The British authorities feared that, if carried out, it might provoke armed conflict by the BaKgatla once again. The issue was, therefore, left in abeyance,⁹⁹ because the BaKgatla also demanded that their cattle looted by the Boers be returned to them. The matter was finally put to rest by the High Commissioner's decision that because of the BaKgatla's military role during the war and because the British had not rewarded them for it, it would be "an ungenerous act to take from them the comparatively small share of plunder with which they have recouped themselves for losses sustained at the hands of the Boers."¹⁰⁰

Conclusion

The Campus Rector, Madame, in conclusion, to the BaKgatla, the war was economically very significant because the BaKgatla had looted an enormous number of Boer cattle, which more than compensated for their loss of cattle during the cattle disease of rinderpest before the war. After the war, this cattle became extremely important as a capital resource for buying the badly needed additional land for the BaKgatla in the Pilanesberg. Politically, Linchwe gained enormous prestige among the BaKgatla on both sides of the border. That was why he was able to install his young brother, Ramono, as chief in Saulspoort in 1902, despite British official resistance to the move. The same looted cattle also contributed to a general BaKgatla prosperity that lasted for almost two decades, from the end of the war. The journalist, Knight, who visited the area in 1903, observed the following about the BaKgatla heartland, Saulspoort: "Many of the leading men live in well-built houses of red brick. Signs of considerable prosperity and a relatively civilised condition are everywhere apparent."¹⁰¹

The BaKgatla failed to attain the important objective of repossessing their ancestral lands in the Pilanesberg. At the end of the war, they still had the same four properties as at the beginning: Saulspoort, Modderkuil, Kruidfontein and Holfontein. Of course, they did 'possess' the abandoned Boer farms for the short duration of the war. The new British administration, however, ensured that the pre-war political and social relations prevailed once again, and the BaKgatla became greatly disillusioned. Their hopes of regaining the land which they had lost to the Voortrekkers, were shattered. Their disillusionment was shared by many other African groups, such as the Barolong of Mafikeng district and the Bapedi of the eastern Transvaal who had also fought on the British side against the Boers for similar reasons. However, although after the war the BaKgatla were forced to vacate the Boer farms, many Boers never reoccupied them, until after the First World War, and most of them generally kept out of the area. Consequently, for some 11 years from the end of the BaKgatla -- Boer war, there was ample grazing land for BaKgatla cattle on the unoccupied Boer farms.¹⁰²

After the war and the defeat of the Boer republics, Africans, most of whom had backed the British, hoped that with British government control over the Transvaal and the Orange River Colony, there

⁹⁸ For details of Milner's reconstruction programme in the Transvaal, see D. J. N. Denoon, *Grand Illusion: The Failure of Imperial Policy in the Transvaal Colony During the Period of Reconstruction, 1900 - 1905* (Longman: London, 1973).

⁹⁹ For details of the restitution of Boer cattle, see Krikler, "Revolution from above," pp. 60 - 65.

¹⁰⁰ SNA 71 NA 2482

¹⁰¹ Knight, *South Africa After the War*, p. 267.

¹⁰² Morton, "Linchwe I," p. 188.

would be new opportunities to improve their status. This, however, was not to be. The terms of the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging,¹⁰³ which were very generous to the defeated Boers, had, in fact, been drafted by the British authorities a year before the agreement was signed in April 1903. Among the peace terms, which Lord Kitchener had sent to General Louis Botha, was one that stated that blacks “were not to have the franchise”, but only so-called “the protection of the law”. In his response, General Botha insisted on “total independence” for the Boers.¹⁰⁴ When white representatives of the Cape Colony, Natal and the two Boer Republics met in Durban in October 1908 to discuss a South Africa-wide constitution, their unanimous agreement was to exclude black people from the franchise. Indeed, when the new Union of South Africa came into being in 1910 as one single nation, Africans were excluded from a common citizenship. For the black intelligentsia, such as Sol Plaatje and many others, this direct result of the war was particularly bitter and it was this bitterness that propelled them into forming the South African National Native Congress in 1912. For the Afrikaners, their objective of “total independence” only for themselves, was soon to be fully realised. But for the African majority, the same ‘total independence’ was denied to them for almost a century, until April 1994.

Above all, Madame Campus Rector, my lecture has demonstrated that the war in the Pilanesberg, as in the rest of South Africa, was not merely a white man’s war, but a truly *South African* War.

¹⁰³ For details of the developments that led to this peace treaty and the treaty itself, see J. D. Kestell and D. E. Van Velden, *The Peace Negotiations in South Africa ...* (Fisher Unwin: London, 1912).

¹⁰⁴ Doyle, *The Great Boer War*, p. 601.

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