

**A rich nation of poor people.
Land and ethnicity in a village of the Royal Bafokeng Nation.**

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Africa's wealthiest tribe and the influx of non-members

Who are the Bafokeng? During my seven-month stay (December 2005 until June 2006) in one of the villages of the Royal Bafokeng Nation (hereafter Bafokeng) I have observed that people seldom talk about ethnicity but when they do they imagine boundaries with inclusionary or exclusionary intent. In some contexts people would argue that one is either born Mofokeng¹ or not. In other contexts the same people would accept that any one can become Mofokeng. The following example comes to mind. In April 2006 I attended a meeting at one of the prestigious high schools in the Bafokeng region where parents, teachers and learners were heatedly debating the causes of the learners' poor results in the first school quarter. During a tea break I overheard women discussing the proposal of Shimane Khumalo² to extend the school hours. Obviously disapproving his proposal one woman annoyingly clicked her tongue and remarked: 'He is a *letlaleanya*. He can't be serious'³. *Letlaleanya* (literally, 'he came with a baby') is a derogatory term used for a person not born from a Mofokeng father. A few weeks later the same woman boasted about the many talents that Bafokeng people display and when asked for examples she mentioned Shimane Khumalo as one of the best soccer players that *the Bafokeng* have ever had.

The exclusionary approach that the woman adopted in the first instance is premised on the assumption of an objectified collective to which some belong and others do not. By its logic, individuals are reckoned to be Bafokeng following calculations (concerning descent especially) that establish their proximity to this imagined collective's core. People can thus be regarded Bafokeng regardless of where they live or how they act. This reminds of the

¹ *Mofokeng*, meaning a Fokeng person, is the singular form of *Bafokeng*, Fokeng people.

² In order to protect informants' privacy pseudonyms are used throughout the text.

³ My translation from Setswana and English: *O letlaleanya. He can't be serious.*

approach during the colonial era when chiefdoms were made into tribes; the Bafokeng as a colonial tribe would have implied that descent or blood is the only determining factor in establishing membership.

In the second instance the woman's inclusionary approach is more in tune with the Bafokeng's past. This approach suggests that any person who respects the moral and political orders of the Royal Bafokeng Nation can be classified as a Mofokeng. Almost anyone can *be*, or more precisely can *become*, Mofokeng. As with other southern African chiefdoms membership of the Bafokeng has always been defined in terms of allegiance to the chief (nowadays called 'king') and not birth. It is thus possible for people not born Bafokeng to become subjects of its king by placing themselves voluntarily under his rule. Thus people that did not belong to specific descent groups *became* identifiable as Bafokeng not just by moving to the Bafokeng region or intermarrying with Bafokeng people, but by respecting the moral and political authority of its leaders. People employ the term *bafaladi*, from the verb *falala* which means to flee, scatter or migrate, to denote individuals or groups of people and their descendants who have been incorporated into the Bafokeng Nation (also see Schapera 1991:30).

The idea that exclusionary and inclusionary approaches often co-exist and are strategically used is not new – especially not in communities where identities are contested over scarce resources. The exclusionary approach usually dominates when the definition of boundaries becomes an issue. Given the peculiar circumstances of the Bafokeng, one would expect that the exclusionary approach would be more prominent in post-apartheid South Africa. The Bafokeng are often called 'Africa's wealthiest tribe' (see Graham 2003; Manson & Mbenga 2003) because of the royalty income that they receive from mines on their land – mainly platinum but also chrome and granite. The Bafokeng's wealth is staggering – in 2004 Impala Platinum and Anglo-American Platinum paid the Nation approximately \$65 million in royalties (Cook 2006). The Bafokeng's income is ever increasing as a result of their successful negotiations with the South African Government over the provisions of the Mineral Rights Bill (tabled in 1998), which sought to nationalize all mineral rights, based on the principle that '*the mineral resources are part of national patrimony which have to be developed for the benefit of all South Africans*'. The implication for the Bafokeng was that '*all the work of establishing ownership of our land, and consolidating the benefits to our people of our natural resources, stood to evaporate before our eyes*' (Molotlegi 2002:6). The

Bafokeng managed to reach a compromise solution with the Government whereby the Minister *'may direct that royalties continue to be paid to those who currently receive them, specially in cases where such royalties are used for promotion of rural economic development; so the Bafokeng and other communities who are involved in development are catered for'* (South Africa 2002).

For the Bafokeng the recent growth in the mining sector spelt not only increased wealth but also increasing numbers of non-Bafokeng labourers and jobseekers that move into their territory. This phenomenon began on a large scale during the apartheid years when the government's and employers' preference for a temporary migrant labour force as well as a large number of unskilled labourers, necessitated recruitment to supplement the supply of local labour (see Adepoju 1988). For decades during the apartheid era labourers were recruited on two-year contracts by employment agencies in Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Malawi, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, and housed in single-sex hostels on mine premises. Mozambican men dominated the stock and flow of migrants into the Bafokeng region. Apart from the close proximity of Mozambique to South Africa, grinding poverty, years of civil conflicts, and the apartheid-era destabilisation campaign in that country rendered many destitute. As a result migration took various forms: at one end of the spectrum was the highly formalised and regulated contract labour system of the mines, while at the other end it involved informal, unregulated or clandestine movements across borders (see Crush 2000:13).

Since the abolition of apartheid most migrants have been granted permanent residence status or naturalisation; these included beneficiaries of amnesty rulings that granted citizenship to immigrants who had been in the country up to the onset of majority rule in 1994, irrespective of their initial immigration status – the so-called 'new South Africans' (see Crush & Williams 1999). In 1995 the Government offered permanent residence to mineworkers from other countries who had been working on the mines since 1986 and who had voted in the 1994 elections. With the dismantling of the forced labour migration system the mines in the Bafokeng area have also adopted a policy of compensating mineworkers who prefer to stay elsewhere and to have their families stay with them (the so-called 'sleep-out allowance'). Consequently families are increasingly moving with or subsequently joining migrant workers and they all settle in Bafokeng villages – especially those surrounding the mines: Kanana, Luka, Photsaneng and Robega.

The Bafokeng's response

How do the Bafokeng respond to the huge influx of non-Bafokeng people into their villages? Given their wealth one might expect them to define their boundaries clearly and police them. But they do not. The channels that have always been available for people to apply for membership of the Bafokeng remain wide open.

As in the past individuals or groups of people wishing to apply for membership of the Bafokeng have to do so by presenting themselves to the headman (*kgosana*) of a clan (*kutle*) of their choice. Applicants are requested to present a so-called 'transfer letter' from the chief (*kgosi*), headman (*kgosana*) or councilor in whose area they stayed before. In this letter the signatory is expected to comment on the behaviour of the particular applicant and his/her family members and to make a recommendation regarding their acceptance into the chiefdom. There is also the requirement of a written application in which the applicant explains his/her position and the reason for the application.

The content of the transfer letter and the application letter will then be discussed during an interview with the headman (*kgosana*) and his committee (*bannakgotla*). In the interview the reasons for settlement will be established as well as the personal particulars of the household members who are involved. The rights and responsibilities of a member will be made clear to the applicant and his/her relatives. These rights and responsibilities are exactly the same as for Bafokeng people by birth (*Bafokeng ka tsalo*). Apart from entitlement to a residential stand Bafokeng people also have access to all community services such as schools, clinics, courts and cemeteries and are eligible to apply for a bursary scheme for tertiary education and small business grants from the Royal Bafokeng Economic Board. These rights go with certain responsibilities. At the public level a Mofokeng is expected to attend the biannual general meeting (*kgothakgothe*) of the Royal Bafokeng Nation as well as other public events such as the King's annual visits to each of the 29 Bafokeng villages, generally known as *Dumela Phokeng* ('Good day Phokeng'). At village level a man between the age of 18 and 65 years is automatically a gravedigger or *phiri* (literally 'hyena') and has to fulfill the duties of this informal group. The gravediggers (*diphiri*) oversee all matters relating to burials and the upkeep of cemeteries in the local villages. They determine whether the deceased may be buried in a specific cemetery and members of the group also dig the grave. Men are also expected to assist with the cleaning of premises for special occasions such as funerals,

weddings, coming of age parties, and celebrations following confirmation (*tlhomamiso*) or graduation. In preparation of these occasions women also have their duties. The older women (above the age of 40 years) are expected to assist with the preparation of meals while the younger ones (between the age of 18 and 40 years) have to bake ‘scones’ (*diphaphatha*) and wash the dishes. All Bafokeng people are expected to attend the meetings of their particular clan (normally every first Sunday of a month). If a person continuously shirks his/her responsibilities he/she will be fined (in 2006 the average fine was R500; in olden days men received corporal punishment) and non-payment of the fine will result in refusal from others to reciprocate at the time of these special occasions in his/her family.

Applicants also have to adhere to the laws of the village (*melao ya motse*). Informants who had become Bafokeng remembered that these included ‘making no noise at night; stop drinking by 21:00pm; marry only one wife; learn Setswana; build Tswana houses – not traditional ones; wear western clothes – not traditional clothes; go to church regularly; and in olden days, assist with a working party (*lepasha*)’. They also remembered being told that they find themselves in Bafokeng country and that they should abandon their previous ways and adopt Bafokeng culture: ‘You go in under the headman. Leave your home things behind. You go into the Fokeng ways’⁴. Applicants will be warned that they will undergo a surveillance period. If they do wrong they will be called in and warned but they will receive only one warning – thereafter they will be chased out of the Bafokeng area. The metaphor that is usually employed in these warnings is that they are ‘being put under the armpit’. If they do not stick to the rules, the arm will be lifted and they will fall out: ‘We put you under the armpit. Behave yourself properly’⁵.

Once the headman (*kgosana*) and his committee have clarified the conditions under which an applicant and his/her family will be accepted, applicants’ cases have to be put before the Supreme Council. The latter consists of the hereditary headmen (*dikgosana*) of the 72 different clans (*dikutle*) as well as councilors who are elected democratically by the different clans for five-year-terms. If the applicant is deemed acceptable, then the applicant pays the token fee (nowadays four cows or R4 000) and receives a letter certifying that he/she is now a member of the Bafokeng.

⁴ My translation from Setswana: *O tsena mo kgosaneng. O lahla segae. O tsena mo Sefokeng.*

⁵ My translation from Setswana: *Re go tsentse mo legwafeng. O itshwara sentle.*

But how is it possible that the Bafokeng still allow non-Bafokeng people to become members of their Nation? Why do they not close the above channels to obtain membership now that they accumulate such wealth? The answer is straightforward: non-Bafokeng people do not seem to be interested in applying for membership of the Bafokeng. They enjoy virtually all the benefits that Bafokeng people have. They have access to the same community services such as schools and clinics. They may not be eligible to apply for the Bafokeng bursary scheme for tertiary education or for small business grants from the Royal Bafokeng Economic Board but they do not mind. They do not contemplate their futures along these lines. They are also not allowed to bury their dead in the Bafokeng cemeteries but most indicated that they in any case prefer to be buried 'back home'. In a few instances children who died young were buried in a cemetery of the Rustenburg Municipality 10km south of Kanana in order to save costs.

If there is no scramble to become Bafokeng, what is happening instead? Non-Bafokeng people settle in Bafokeng villages either as tenants, locally known as *bahiri* (from the Afrikaans term *huur* which means 'to rent'), or as 'illegal squatters', called *baipei* (from the English term 'pay' to denote non-payment of rent). The latter are seen as people who have managed to erect shacks or build houses on stands without the permission of a headman (*kgosana*).

Although the Bafokeng leadership would regard both categories as illegal local Bafokeng people are aiding and abetting the tenants and squatters. The following examples are taken from one of the Bafokeng villages, Kanana, where I stayed as a participant observer. Kanana is situated 15km northeast of the Bafokeng capital of Phokeng and has a population of approximately 25 000 people. Village matters are mainly dealt with by the Kanana Village Committee that consists of the headmen (*dikgosana*) of the six clans (*dikutle*) that are represented in Kanana and their respective committees of four or five members (approximately 30 people in total). The Committee meets every Monday morning to discuss matters such as problems with existing services and infrastructure or the planning of new projects. Most of the time, however, the Committee has to deal with legal matters. Kanana has six schools, several crèches, a clinic, a post office, and ten general dealer shops in its twelve different 'sections' (there is no Setswana equivalent for this term). Many residents have a water tap in their yards (installed since 1998) and use a coupon system to buy electricity (networks were installed in 1999).

Tenants (*bahiri*) in Kanana

Tenancy is an option for prospective settlers in Kanana. Although some may rent a room in the house of a Bafokeng family the typical pattern is to rent a one- or two-bedroom building or shack in the backyard of a Bafokeng family. The monthly rent varies between R120 and R250 excluding water and electricity. Water is purchased from the owner or a neighbour at 50c per 25 litres and tenants buy their own electricity coupons (most rooms are fitted with metre boxes).

Bafokeng families seldom have only one tenant. Most have two or three and some have as many as fifteen tenants. The structures in which such large numbers of tenants are housed are usually visible from the street. They appear like train cars with a series of numbered doors about three metres apart indicating the different tenants' rooms. These structures are not necessarily permanently occupied. Some of the Mozambican mineworkers stay in the mine hostels and only rent a room or backyard dwelling in Kanana for their wives to visit them. At times when their wives or girlfriends have to be in Mozambique the rooms are used as storerooms for furniture, electrical appliances, clothing, bedding, and other items bought in South Africa. These are normally transported to Mozambique during the Christmas holiday.

The tenants (*bahiri*) come from every corner of South Africa and they socialize with the Bafokeng on the streets, at church or in the shebeens – sometimes with dramatic consequences. In one instance a 23-year-old isiSwati-speaking girl, born from parents who had applied for membership of the Bafokeng when she was ten years of age, decided to go to Malawi by train with her brother-in-law who was a tenant in Kanana. She married a police officer in Blantyre and had two children with him. At the age of 45 after a 22-year sojourn in Malawi, she returned home by aeroplane. Today she boasts about the fact that '*I have done the flying machine*'; she still reads her Chechewa Bible and wears her traditional Malawi clothes to the local Dutch Reformed Church. Sometimes she cooks Malawian food: '*morning porridge with rice and peanuts, fish, and cassava*' (the latter she buys in Johannesburg) and she says with satisfaction: '*Ke Mofokeng*', 'I am a Mofokeng'.

Squatters (*baipei*) in Kanana

Many Bafokeng residents in Kanana pointed out that they experienced a huge influx of non-Bafokeng people into their community since the change in the South African Government in 1994. Those who find the fact of a large number of non-Bafokeng people in their community objectionable (mainly elderly people who yearn for ‘yesterday’) blame the then newly inaugurated president, Nelson Mandela, for the situation. A typical statement was ‘Mandela simply opened up’⁶. Others also said that Mozambicans are allowed to move freely because ‘*they are our in-laws now that Madiba (former president Nelson Mandela) has married Graca (the late Samorra Machel’s first wife)*’. Most people, including the headmen, believe that many of the newcomers simply came at night and erected shacks without permission from any of the headmen and without the required payment for the stand; they are thus known as *baipei* – ‘those who did not pay’. One of the headmen explained: ‘They simply come at night. You will hear a hammer and in the morning you will find many new houses. And these people are rough. We are afraid of them. We cannot chase them out. When they arrive, they have arrived’⁷. Many Bafokeng people continue to buy into the narrative of illegal squatters simply erecting houses at night because it is a practice well reported on in the South African media⁸ and people recently saw it happening in vacant spaces in the neighbouring town of Rustenburg.

But there are also Bafokeng residents who blame corruption on the part of the committee members of the different clans (*bannakgotla*) for the settlement of the squatters. The permission of the headman (*kgosana*) of a clan (*kutle*) is required in all applications for membership and the subsequent allocation of stands to successful applicants. But some believe that the absence of the headmen (three of the six do not reside in Kanana) results in people approaching the committee members instead. The latter then accept bribes, in the

⁶ My translation from the Afrikaans: ‘*Mandela het net oopgemaak.*’

⁷ My translation from Afrikaans: *Hulle kom sommer in die nag. Jy sal net die hamer hoor en in die oggend klomp nuwe huise sien. En daardie mense is rof. Ons is bang vir hulle. Ons kan hulle nie wegjaag nie. As hulle kom, hulle het gekom.*

⁸ An example comes from a television programme on SABC 2 with the Afrikaans name *Andries plak*, literally meaning Andries squats (to denote the illegal occupation of land). It tells the story of an Afrikaans-speaking man in his fifties, Andries, who had lost his farm due to the Government’s land redistribution programme and decided to settle on vacant land in one of Johannesburg’s affluent, white English suburbs. Obviously upset by the sudden appearance of a shack in their neighbourhood, the residents allege that the land that Andries occupies falls in a bird sanctuary and that he is disturbing the habitat of a rare butterfly species. Moreover, they point out that white people should not be squatters – only black people are allowed to occupy land illegally.

form of money, liquor, and sexual favours, in exchange for the stands. My own investigation into the matter confirmed some of these allegations but also told another story.

The majority of ‘squatters’ settled in the section of Mperetlhane. On the face of it Mperetlhane does not appear any different from most of the other sections in Kanana. A tarred road connects the section with the main road between Rustenburg and Northam and gravel roads run between the households. Passing through the area one notices signs of a typical rural village: cattle and goats grazing by the road side, donkey carts transporting firewood or water, and some ploughed fields separating different homesteads. It was in one of these ‘fields’, at the most western end of Kanana, that I first met the ‘little headman’⁹.

Born from Bafokeng parents in Kanana in 1947, the ‘little headman’ – a title he bestows on himself to indicate that he fulfils functions similar to those of the hereditary headmen – spent most of his childhood years herding his father’s cattle. But he managed to complete Standard 4 (the first six years of schooling) at the local middle school, St Michaels. His first permanent employment occurred in 1973 when he got a job at the abattoir in Rustenburg. He worked there for ten years before he decided to become an electrician. He learnt the basic skills from a friend and then became self-employed. At the same time he was successful with his application for a disability grant – his right leg is deformed since birth and he walks with a limp. Every month he uses his disability grant to cover basic household expenses. In 1997 he moved from another stand in Kanana to the stand he currently occupies with his wife, two adult daughters and four grandchildren. This stand is part of a 35 morgen¹⁰ piece of land that he claims to be the agricultural land that was allocated to his deceased father. As the last-born child he inherited the land when his older brothers passed away. Of his eight siblings only two sisters, one younger and one older than him, are still alive. They too reside in Kanana.

The ‘little headman’s’ house, a three-bedroom shack, is surrounded by nearly one hundred similar looking shacks. The owners of these shacks are mainly of Mozambican origin with a small number of non-Bafokeng South Africans (from areas such as Bushbuckridge, Warrenton, Kroondal, and Lichtenburg) in between. They have all paid for their stands and have built their own houses, using corrugated iron (known as *masinka*, from the Afrikaans term *sinke* for corrugated iron sheets) or concrete slabs (known as *stopnonsense* because they

⁹ My translation from Afrikaans: *klein kaptein*

¹⁰ Seventy acres or almost 12 hectares.

act as a solid barrier between neighbours thus preventing conflict). The ‘little headman’ told me that he himself gave these individuals or families permission to occupy the ‘stands’ (they have not been demarcated officially) and that they had all paid him ‘some money’ for a stand. When asked for a better indication of their payment, the ‘little headman’ said that the first arrivals in 1997 paid R250 but that he charges R350 today. The shack dwellers themselves gave much higher figures, ranging from R400 to as much as R2500. The ‘little headman’ contends that the initial once-off payment for a stand is the only money he receives because he does not charge a monthly rental fee for a stand. He explained himself as follows:

‘I cannot charge rent. They (the shack dwellers) will kill me. They will count themselves and see how much money I have. They are many. It will be a lot of money. No, I cannot. They will kill me. They will poison me. I don’t eat at funerals. I don’t want to lie beneath the ground yet. (A few seconds’ silence before he continues). To be a little headman is not porridge and meat’¹¹ – meaning it is not easy.

The ‘little headman’ is not only ‘a landlord’; he also extends a number of favours to ‘his people’. One of his most important, and profitable, functions is to confirm people’s residence in Kanana. The ‘little headman’ asks R50 to sign documents confirming residence. People have to write such letters themselves and he merely signs them. With the letters mineworkers can obtain a sleep-out allowance (nearly R1 000 per month); and all can open bank and other accounts. The ‘little headman’ also receives money for settling family disputes. In his own words: ‘The biggest fights around here are about women. Nowadays men prefer ‘*vat en sitte*’ (literally ‘take and sit-withs’, i.e co-habit) to wives. This only means trouble’¹². Depending on the nature and duration of the cases he charges between R200 and R500 to act as arbiter.

The relationship between the ‘little headman’ and his clients is not a one-way affair, with the clients being passive recipients of his favours. Most clients do not only promise him loyalty and support but actively fulfill that promise. While I was visiting the ‘little headman’, I often witnessed people giving him liquor (especially *Tentacao* whiskey from Mozambique), cigarettes and airtime vouchers for his cellular phone, and at times also vegetables and meat. By doing so they not only obey a fundamental rule of the patronage system, i.e. that of

¹¹ My translation from Afrikaans and two words in Setswana: Ek kan nie huur vra nie. Hulle sal my doodmaak. Hulle sal tel hoeveel is hulle en dan sien hoeveel geld het ek. Hulle is mos baie. Dit sal baie geld wees. Nee, ek kan nie. Hulle sal my doodmaak. Hulle sal my gif gee. Ek eet nie op begrafnis nie. Ek wil nie nou al onder die grond lê nie. Om klein kaptein te wees ga se (negative form in Setswana) pap en vleis.

¹² My translation from Afrikaans: *Die grootste fights hier is oor vrouens. Deesdae wil mans mos ‘vat en sitte’ hê eerder as vrouens. Dit beteken net moeilikheid.*

constantly stimulating loyalty channels, but they also create good will, and add to the ‘little headman’s’ name and fame.

Africa’s wealthiest tribe revisited

Why do the Bafokeng allow large numbers of non-Bafokeng people to settle in their villages?

The Bafokeng leadership seem to be aware of the increase of non-Bafokeng people in their midst. The king himself, *kgosi* Leruo Molotlegi, had already in 2004 at one of the Bafokeng’s bi-annual general assembly meetings (*dikgothakgothe*) indicated that land allocation does not follow the right channels:

‘I have always cautioned against the uncontrolled use of land and I have publicly highlighted the possibility of land running out at some point. That reality is now facing us, evidenced by requests we have received from numerous *dikgoro* (clans) for additional land for expansion. New areas are opened and within a short space of time they are full. This calls for serious investigation. The question is: Is the population growing so fast, or are we allocating land to people who are not Bafokeng, or are we allocating sites that are too big, or are some Bafokeng being allocated multiple sites? (Molotlegi 2004).

The above statement clearly points to an exclusionary policy regarding non-Bafokeng people. Understandingly the Bafokeng leadership do not want Bafokeng people to take in tenants or to allow squatters to occupy stands or vacant land. These practices lead to swamping of infrastructure and services. But the Bafokeng leadership turn a blind eye to this situation. How is this possible? In my own opinion they do not have many other options. If they did start distributing their wealth among their Bafokeng members it would invoke huge protests – not only from the tenants and ‘squatters’ but also from Bafokeng people. How would they be able to justify an exclusionary approach? Would they not, as suggested by some of my informants, be condemned for creating a Bafokeng *volkstaat*?

For their part the tenants and ‘squatters’ prefer to stay in the Bafokeng villages. Apart from the incentive created by the mines with the so-called ‘sleep-out allowance’, mineworkers mentioned that they feel at home in the Bafokeng villages. Most of them have a long history of association with the local Bafokeng people – not only in the mines but also in the villages.

Before settling in Kanana, most informants had spent their leisure time there with Bafokeng friends whom they had met in the mines or on the streets. Thus they are not newcomers to the Bafokeng villages. Some claimed that they had already become Bafokeng even though they had not applied for membership. The tenants and ‘squatters’ who are not mineworkers said they prefer the Bafokeng villages to the neighbouring municipal areas of Boitekong and Freedom Park. They deemed the latter unsafe and unpleasant due to an increase in prostitution and drug abuse. The traditional authority system of headmen in the Bafokeng villages made them feel safe and the quasi-rural atmosphere appealed to many.

As for the ordinary Bafokeng people, the majority know that their king and his management team do not want them to take in tenants or to sell stands to non-Bafokeng people and they understand their reasons. But many said they have no real alternative. They have to use their land as a resource to generate an income. How can this be? Are they not living with their ‘platinum king in the land of plenty’ (Xundu 2003)?

The media often creates the impression that the Bafokeng’s royalty income means benefits to all. But there is no hand-out of their money; no instant millionaires are being created. Instead the Bafokeng leadership have opted for the creation of communal benefits. With the revenue from platinum production, the Royal Bafokeng Administration has developed various forms of infrastructure. Among these are healthcare facilities, sewage disposal systems, road and bridge building, and extensions of the electricity and water supply. Perhaps the best examples are the state-of-the-art Sports Complex (an official venue of the 2010 FIFA World Cup) and the Bafokeng Civic Centre, a modern building set on the hillside with spectacular views of the area’s landscape. They have also established Royal Bafokeng Holdings, an investment company responsible for growing and diversifying their assets. In September 2006 the royalty agreement with Impala Platinum was converted into a shareholding agreement; the Royal Bafokeng Nation is now the single largest shareholder in Implats. Royal Bafokeng Holdings also owns a 50 percent stake in the Bafokeng Rasimone Platinum Mine, a joint venture with Anglo Platinum. In addition to their mining holdings, Royal Bafokeng Holdings at the end of 2006 also held shares in twelve different South African companies. These assets were reportedly worth approximately R20 billion (\$3 billion).

Many ordinary Bafokeng people do not understand the leadership’s emphasis on investments in order to maximise their profits and to achieve the goal of the so-called ‘Vision 2020’

initiative, 'to be a self-sufficient community by the second decade of the 21st century'. The majority just know very well that the windfall is not trickling down. In the words of a Mofokeng woman in her thirties: 'We are a rich nation of poor people'. And with an unemployment rate near 50 percent, it is understandable that many Bafokeng people argue that as long as the Nation's wealth is not distributed among its people, people have the right to take in tenants (*bahiri*) or to 'farm with people' like the 'little headman' does. In fact, they have very few other options. The question is whether the situation will ever change for ordinary Bafokeng people. Will 'Africa's wealthiest tribe' ever really exist or will the Bafokeng entity remain a notional one?

Conclusion

The Bafokeng case is a prime example of the predicaments that people are faced with when minimal states allow situations in which the by chance distribution of resources benefits only a selected few. However, the position that the Bafokeng find themselves in is very different from that of other chiefdoms or so-called 'indigenous peoples' in South Africa. The Bafokeng do not have to 'invent' histories for themselves. Their genealogy is traceable to the 1100s. Part of the general southward movement of Batswana people, the Bafokeng settled in an area which included the whole of the present municipal area of Rustenburg, Kroondal and Marikana, well before 1700 (see Mokgatle 1971:4-5). Since the late 19th century they have owned their land by title and as a private owner of land have withstood onslaughts on their land and later their mineral resources by 19th century white settlers, the apartheid laws, a Bantustan regime, and corporate companies (see Manson & Mbenga 2003; Bergh 2005). They have also established themselves as a key player in legislative battles affecting indigenous communities (see Cook 2004). The stakes seem to be very high. But since ordinary Bafokeng peoples' expectations are very low the possibility exists that a small elite within the Royal Bafokeng Nation may be acquiring a billion dollar multinational company far removed from its real stakeholders.

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