

**The Business of Being Bafokeng: the Corporatization of a Tribal Authority in  
South Africa**

by

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**Introduction**

As I put the finishing touches on this essay, a World Cup soccer match was being played in the Royal Bafokeng Stadium, a short distance from my office. As helicopters circled, *vuvuzelas* blared, and crowds of foreign visitors swarmed around the village of Phokeng, the tensions between an ever more commercially successful “ethnic corporation” (Cook 2005) and a struggling community of previously disadvantaged people, had never been more stark.

Fertile ground for the inquiries of a linguistic and cultural anthropologist. I first visited the Bafokeng community as a graduate student in 1995, while doing fieldwork for my PhD project on urban varieties of Setswana. My exposure to the political and economic contours of the Bafokeng community was limited at that time; but in subsequent years, I became increasingly interested in the unique aspects of the setting, and developed a collaborative relationship with a number of community leaders, including Leruo Molotlegi, who became the *kgosi* (“king”) about three years after I finished my fieldwork. A more policy-oriented series of conversations followed Leruo’s ascension to the Bafokeng throne, and I was persuaded, after eight years as an academic anthropologist, to apply the tools of social theory to the Bafokeng context as a policy-maker. With a theoretical grounding in political economy, a comparative perspective on social change, and armed with the observational skills of an ethnographer, I have, since 2007, been actively engineering change, rather than simply trying to record and analyze it. Does the hiring of a white American anthropologist suggest a crack in the facade of Bafokeng, Inc. (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009)? The Comaroffs would say no, it’s exactly in the nature of the ethnic corporation to bring in hired guns to help incorporate the tribe, and to commodify its culture. Who better, in fact, than an anthropologist, they’d no doubt remark! To the extent that I write about these issues here, however, I do so in my personal capacity as an anthropologist of traditional governance and corporatization, from which vantage point, I am also sometimes a character in the stories I’m positioned to tell.

This essay seeks to explore the tensions and contradictions inherent in the Royal Bafokeng Nation’s status as both community and corporation. As one of South Africa’s approximately 750 “traditional communities,” the Royal Bafokeng Nation is

an interesting case of South African-style democracy, wherein a parliamentary democracy governed by a liberal Constitution nevertheless recognizes and protects indigenous forms of governance that support patriarchal rule and communal forms of land tenure. The Royal Bafokeng Nation is also—and on the other hand—one of South Africa’s largest community-based investment companies, which channels revenue derived from mineral deposits into a broad investment portfolio that in turn funds an aggressive social development program in twenty-nine rural villages. What tensions arise when an ethnically-based polity seeks to maximize its financial standing by becoming a player on the global commodities stage? What contradictions inhere in a communally-organized and administered “tribe” using the mechanisms of the market to secure a measure of autonomy from state structures? Does the “ethnic corporation” become more or less “traditional” as it starts to deploy the tools and techniques of corporate governance alongside patriarchal governance? These are some of the questions posed in this essay, as well as in the article by Jessica Cattelino in this volume. While the Bafokeng case and the Florida Seminoles represent some striking similarities, Cattelino’s essay explores the state/society divide, as it is both practiced and produced in the context of the Florida Seminoles’ global business interests. This analysis of the Royal Bafokeng Nation’s process of corporatization draws into focus the power of the current legislative environment to shape the business strategies of indigenous groups.

Covering an area of 1400 km<sup>2</sup> in South Africa’s North West Province, and home to approximately 300,000 people, the Bafokeng people date their arrival in the Rustenburg valley to around 1450 (Hall, Anderson, Boeyens, and Coetzee 2008; Huffman 2007; Mbenga and Manson 2010). While the community forms an integral

part of the state's system of provinces, districts, and municipalities, the Royal Bafokeng Nation is also governed by a *kgosi* (king), a hereditary role (usually the eldest son of the previous *kgosi*). Christianized since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, and having long-abandoned polygamy, the Bafokeng community has seen few serious succession disputes over the past five or six generations, with a direct father-son line leading back over the past 15 *dikgosi* (cf. Comaroff 1978). The present leader of the Bafokeng is Kgosi Leruo Molotlegi, a 42-year old architect/pilot who assumed the role of *kgosi* after his brother, Kgosi Lebone II died in 2000.

Kgosi Leruo relies on a complex of traditional and corporate structures to lead and run the Bafokeng Nation. There are hereditary headmen (*dikgosana*) who attend to people's day-to-day matters in each of the 72 wards (*makgotla*) that make up the twenty-nine Bafokeng villages. These headmen are assisted by their wives (*bommadikgosana*) and by wardmen (*bannakgotla*). In line with the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act (No. 41 of 2003), the law governing how traditional authorities may operate, the Bafokeng Traditional Council is made up of eleven community members, five elected and six appointed by the *kgosi*. The Traditional Council and the Council of *Dikgosana* together make up the Bafokeng Supreme Council, chaired by the *Kgosi*, which debates and ratifies all major financial and policy matters for the Nation. The community's infrastructure and basic services are managed by the Royal Bafokeng Administration, effectively a local municipality. Royal Bafokeng Holdings, based in Johannesburg, manages the community's mineral assets and investment portfolio, and the Royal Bafokeng Institute serves as an education reform agency for the region. The professionals in the Office of *Kgosi*—Treasury, Governance, and Planning--manage the strategic alignment between the

various entities, and monitor and communicate the Nation's overall progress towards its stated goals to both internal and external audiences.

### **“The Richest Tribe in Africa”**

The governance structure of the Bafokeng Nation is not unusual in the communities recognized as “traditionally-governed” in South Africa. A patriarchal, hereditary system headed by a kgosi and divided up into wards is common to Tswana-speaking communities in both South Africa and Botswana (Schapera 1952, Schapera and Comaroff 1991). What sets the Bafokeng apart is the fact that they own their land, and have successfully exercised their rights to both its surface and underground assets. The Bafokeng have owned their land by title since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. They were thus able to maintain their geographic integrity despite incursions by waves of white settlers, the first and second Anglo-Boer wars, apartheid-era laws, an oppressive Bantustan regime (Bophuthatswana under Lucas Mangope), and corporate raids on their mineral resources.

The Founder of the modern Bafokeng Nation acquired his status not because he was the first Bafokeng kgosi (he wasn't), but because he focused his 57-year reign on securing the community's legal hold on its land. The present kgosi's great great great grandfather, Kgosi Mokgatle (1834-1891), realized that it was not enough for the Bafokeng to own their land in the traditional sense. In the face of increasing incursions by Afrikaner farmers starting in the 1840s, Mokgatle, with advice from Paul Kruger, later to become the first President of the Transvaal Republic, decided that the community must begin to buy the title deeds to their land if they were to avoid total dispossession (Coertze 1988). To raise the cash to purchase select tracts of

land, Mokgatle sent regiments of Bafokeng men to surrounding farms and the newly discovered diamond fields in Kimberly in the late 1860s and 1870s. A portion of the wages earned by these men was placed in a land acquisition fund (Bergh 2005). With the help of a German missionary (Christophe Penzhorn from the Hermannsburg Missionary Society—German Lutherans), who agreed to buy the land in his name (thereby skirting the laws that prevented blacks from owning land), Kgosi Mokgatle began a historic process of acquiring the ancestral lands of the Bafokeng.

This history of land acquisition by the Bafokeng highlights two things. First, the Bafokeng established themselves as a private, corporate land owner as early as the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Bergh points out that by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, almost 20% of the land owned by blacks in the Transvaal was owned by the Bafokeng (2005:115). Second, although there was subsequent contestation over who rightfully owned Bafokeng land, the public and well-documented process by which the Bafokeng legally obtained their land put them in a strong position to assert their status as a private landowner for generations to come.

Platinum was discovered on Bafokeng territory in 1924 (Mbenga and Manson 2010). As owners of the land, the Bafokeng began leasing parts of their territory to various companies, including Gencor, now known as Impala Platinum, the world's second largest platinum mining company. As early as 1953, the Secretary of Mines wrote that *“It would appear that the ownership of both the surface and mineral rights in respect of the land in question vests in the said Bafokeng Tribe and the land therefore ranks as private land for the purposes of the mineral laws”* (History of the Royal Bafokeng

[2003], emphasis added). The Bafokeng, in other words, were able to control their land and its resources as a private landowner under the prevailing Roman-Dutch code.

The President of Bophuthatswana (the Tswana “homeland” recognized by Pretoria in 1977), Lucas Mangope, saw the Bafokeng as his rivals and enemies, and presumed to negotiate mining contracts directly with Impala Platinum on behalf of the Bafokeng. This set in motion a protracted fight between the Bafokeng and the Bophuthatswana regime on the one hand, and the Bafokeng and Impala Platinum on the other. The case against Impala, which hinged crucially on the issue of ownership of the land, and the process by which any of it could be leased to an outside entity, was settled out of court in favor of the Bafokeng in 1999, nine years after it was initiated. This case was a landmark decision against a major mining company in South Africa, and earned the Bafokeng the nickname “The Tribe of Lawyers.”

In 1994, the homeland system went the way of apartheid, and the ANC-led government became the next in the long line of regimes to threaten Bafokeng control of their land and its resources. The new government’s Minerals and Petroleum Resources Development Act (No 28 of 2002) was an attempt to undo the country’s longstanding legal principle that vested mineral rights in the land owner. The Act, which came into force on May 1, 2004, seeks to expand opportunities for historically disadvantaged South Africans (HDSAs) to enter the minerals industry by implementing new mining rights. It also reiterates the South African Freedom Charter of 1950 in its preamble, stating “South Africa’s mineral and petroleum resources belong to the nation and that the State is the custodian thereof” (South African Government Gazette). But because the Bafokeng were already using royalties from

mining to uplift the surrounding community, the Bafokeng's lawyers argued successfully that their revenues should be exempt from nationalization for a period of five years, at which point the exemption could be reviewed. Another challenge came in the form of the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004, which sought to shift control of communally administered land from Tribal Councils to government-controlled Land Rights Boards. To the extent that the Act replaces traditional authorities and the customary laws and structures they use to administer land with more centralized and party-affiliated structures under the control of the central government, the Bafokeng opposed this legislation from the start. The Act was declared unconstitutional in mid-2010 (Cook 2004), and the administration of privately-owned, communally-administered land in the Bafokeng territory has been largely unaffected.

One provision of the Communal Land Rights Act was very much aligned to Bafokeng strategy, and despite the law having been repealed, the Bafokeng Administration continues to pursue this cause. According to the Act, communally held land is to be transferred into the name of the community that occupies it, effectively repealing the practice of registering communal land in the name of the government. The Minister's Trusteeship over land is an artifact of racist and segregationist policies, and is therefore anachronistic in contemporary South Africa. In the case of the Bafokeng, "the government officials in the Native Commissioner's office, the Secretary for Native Affairs, the Minister of Native Affairs and the Bafokeng all regarded the Bafokeng as the owner of the land," and, further, "there is no recorded instance where the government of the Republic of South Africa sought to deal with Bafokeng land contrary to the wishes of the Bafokeng" (History of the Royal Bafokeng, Their Acquisition of Land and the Law Related Hereto n.d.). The Bafokeng therefore

maintain that it doesn't take a genius (or a law) to effect the change in legal ownership from the state to the community. The Bafokeng Administration has therefore applied to have Ministerial consent removed from the administration of Bafokeng land, Some Bafokeng individuals have opposed the application, suggesting a preference for government oversight of the administration of the land (Bafokeng Land Buyers' Association). The outcome of the application is pending, at the date of writing.

What is clear is that the history of Bafokeng land ownership and the worldwide platinum boom of 1996-2008 is a very powerful combination.

### **Overview of the Bafokeng asset base**

Under the leadership of Kgosi Leruo, the Bafokeng Nation (through its Council and Kgotha-kgothe) established Royal Bafokeng Resources (2002) to manage the community's mining interests (platinum and chrome), and Royal Bafokeng Finance (2004) to development a non-mining investment portfolio. In 2006, the two companies were combined to form Royal Bafokeng Holdings (Pty) Limited, which manages the community's overall investment strategy and portfolio. RBH is mandated by the community (through their representatives in the Bafokeng Supreme Council) to invest the communal purse for maximum return and sustainability. In its first few years, RBH has been staggeringly successful. In 2005 the community's asset base was worth R8.8 billion; two years later, the value was R33.5 billion (approx. USD 4.15 billion). Most of this growth can be attributed to the decade-long "platinum boom" which saw the price of platinum rise from \$421/oz in 1996 to over \$2000/oz in 2008. Although the global economic recession that began in mid-2008 took a toll on

platinum (an important component in the manufacture of catalytic converters in cars), the RBH portfolio nevertheless outperformed most major stock indexes, and earned the community a 30% return on investment in its first three years.

Although RBH owns stock in approximately twenty companies at the time of writing, about 85% of its dividends come from Impala Platinum. The other 15% comes from smaller dividend streams and interest on R5 billion in cash holdings. This cash is both an asset and a liability. While dividends are not taxed in South Africa, interest earned on cash in the bank is. Given its levels of cash under management, RBH would have faced a 40% tax on its interest income (or approximately R220 million of the R550 million it earned in 2008) if it were not deemed a *universitas persona*, a not-for-profit organization that operates in the interest of, and benefit to, the community. The South African Revenue Service, under the direction of the South African Treasury, has long sought to redefine the Royal Bafokeng Nation as a corporation, rather than a *universitas persona*, on the grounds that it is a for-profit undertaking. The Bafokeng Nation's response is that the developmental arms of the Nation, principally the Royal Bafokeng Administration and Royal Bafokeng Institute, effectively reduce the burden on the state to provide basic services and infrastructure to the Bafokeng people, and since the state doesn't tax itself, it must not tax the Royal Bafokeng Nation. The alternative, as Bafokeng Treasury Executive Thabo Mokgatlha puts it, is for the community to be re-classified as a corporation, pay the tax on the interest income, and use the remainder of its assets in any way it chooses.

*It is in this context that a philosophical debate is being arranged with National Treasury and SARS to persuade them to change the VAT legislation to accommodate communities that perform functions which would otherwise be performed by*

*Government particularly because they would be funding their budgets. (From the Treasury Dept. report to the Bafokeng community at Kgotha-kgothe, March 2008)*

This debate is one of the reasons why Royal Bafokeng Holdings converted its royalty agreement with Impala Platinum into shares in 2007. Subsequent to the “shares-for-royalties swap” with Impala, the Royal Bafokeng Nation now only receives royalties from the Bafokeng Rasimone Platinum Mine, a 50/50 joint venture between the Bafokeng Nation and Anglo Platinum (Amplats). If challenged by the state again, the Bafokeng lawyers and accountants say they will argue that the living standards of community members will decrease if the royalties are expropriated by the state, constituting a breach of the Constitution’s expression of the “real rights” of individuals living under the protection of the state. In this negotiation over taxes, the Royal Bafokeng Nation explicitly positions itself as a community, and a not-for-profit enterprise assisting the state with its responsibilities, whereas the state would earn more tax revenue if it could convincingly argue that the RBN is a private company.

### **RBH and BEE: Big Deal?**

In the current investment environment in South Africa, the RBN’s status as a community investor, and in particular a “black” community investor, is again highly salient. BEE—Black Economic Empowerment—refers to a set of regulations in South Africa that determines how companies operating in specific sectors (mining, telecommunications, construction, etc.) must transform their shareholder base and governance structures to include more “previously disadvantaged” (understood to include black, “Coloured” and Indian) people. State-awarded tenders are only open to

those companies that comply with their sector's "transformation charters" by selling shares to black investors or broad-based investment groups (such as Royal Bafokeng Holdings) and appointing black managers and directors. Large corporations in South Africa have thus, since 2005, been seeking "empowerment partners" to meet their targets. Many of these partners have been members of the small black elite who were already well connected politically, and were able to amass huge personal fortunes through these new laws. Vocal critics of the policies have thus pushed through reforms to the original laws, in an effort to pioneer more broadly based empowerment practices (Hamann 2004, Rajak 2006, 2008, 2009).

In contrast to these few wealthy individuals, RBH is a black-owned investor whose vision is to become the world's leading *community-based* investment company. Niall Carroll, the CEO of RBH, calls this vision "social capitalism:" using the mechanisms of the free market to benefit the collective. Thabo Mokgatlha remarks that corporate South Africa is, by and large, very conservative, and prefers "traditional investors" to broad-based investment groups like RBH. Individual investors can be wined and dined and invited for a round of golf to discuss corporate strategies. Group investors are seen as unpredictable and harder to influence. RBH has a distinct advantage over other BEE empowerment partners, however: it pays cash. Where other investment groups rely on loans and other forms of leveraged funds that can be complicated and time consuming, RBH has sufficient cash on hand to vie for major investment deals in the telecommunications, financial services, and energy sectors. Most of the big empowerment deals in the mining sector have been completed, according to Mokgatlha, so RBH is looking elsewhere, including offshore, for its next big deal.

Mokgatlha explains that there is another downside to the success of RBH. Many in the corporate world feel that the Royal Bafokeng Nation is “over-empowered.” In other words, RBH is being lumped together with Patrice Motsepe (the first African to make the Forbes 100 list) and Tokyo Sexwale (sometimes called the South African Donald Trump), who have grown their wealth by becoming empowerment partners to mainly white South African companies. The difference is that RBH is not run on behalf of a small group of individual investors, but rather under the guidance of 300,000 shareholders. This is what is meant by “broad-based” investment, the assumption being that all 300,000 people benefit from the dividends from these investments.

To what extent is this actually the case, and what are the implications for RBH’s status as a preferred BEE partner if the benefits to the community are actually more of a drip than a flow? This is a persistent theme in policy debates within and around the Royal Bafokeng Nation. To date, the benefits of being “the richest tribe in Africa” have been communal and infrastructural rather than individual and financial: electrified homes with clean water, better schools and clinics, more paved roads and community halls, etc. At *kgotha-kgothe* and other public gatherings, people’s sense of frustration at not having more direct access to the communal purse is evident. From the perspective of the more communally-minded, the Kgosi is responsible for the well-being of the Nation, and the Nation is suffering; something must be done. This idea resonates with the political economies of pre-capitalist societies where the chief/leader was expected to maintain a surplus of grain/herds of cattle, in the event of a shortage among the people. Through patron/client relations, and networks of sub-chiefs (*dikgosana*), the surplus could (and should) be distributed as necessary to

prevent starvation in years of poor rainfall or disease. In the current context, the implication is clear: it is unacceptable to many that the RBN's investment portfolio is valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars, whereas unemployment is conservatively estimated at 40% and most Bafokeng households subsist on approximately \$100/month (Thompson 2008).

How does the Kgosi and his administration respond to these allegations? By espousing "Vision 2020," the overarching vision of the Royal Bafokeng Nation, that strives to create an "enabling environment" (read: education, good security, availability of jobs) so that members of the Royal Bafokeng Nation can prosper as individuals by the second decade of the twenty-first century. Dependency on a paternalistic regime, in other words, is no longer a necessary part of the plan. Achieving such a goal is a long-term process, however, with few successful models or precedents in Africa. The internal discourses of communalism, paternalism, and kinship-based favoritism are on a collision course with a newer rhetoric of individual empowerment, entrepreneurship, and meritocracy. And of course the criteria for membership in the Nation itself becomes more and more salient as the benefits of membership become more pronounced. As the Comaroffs argue in *Ethnicity, Inc.* (2009), "inclusion and exclusion" is a key dimension to ethnically-defined enterprise. But the direction of this trend is not a foregone conclusion in the Bafokeng Nation. While the Comaroffs argue (correctly, in my view) that "the more that ethnically defined populations move toward the model of the profit seeking corporation, the more their terms of membership tend to become an object of concern, regulation, and contestation" (2009: 65), it does not automatically follow that the Bafokeng powers-that-be will privilege "biology and birthright, genetics and consanguinity, over social

and cultural criteria of belonging.” A recent case suggests another possibility. As the Royal Bafokeng Institute brings a higher level of academic opportunity and extracurricular options to the forty-five schools on Bafokeng land, the benefits accrue not only to the ethnic Bafokeng children enrolled in these schools, but also to the non-Bafokeng (who outnumber Bafokeng in some schools). When Bafokeng families whose children attend schools outside the Bafokeng territory (mostly middle-class families who can afford the higher fees at the former “model C” schools) recently threatened to disrupt programs unless their children were included, the response from the Bafokeng administration was: “the educational programs are for those who entrust their children to our schools; if you enroll your children elsewhere, tough luck.” While this may appear anomalous within the specific “formula” for ethnic incorporation laid out by the Comaroffs, their broader point bears out: “not all ethnically defined populations are caught up in it [the dialectic between the corporate and the cultural] to the same degree. ...not everyone need be equally embraced by the process. Or even embraced at all.” (2009: 116). It may be that the Bafokeng middle class, having achieved their own self-sufficiency earlier than most, will be left on the sidelines while services are targeted at those in the greatest need, irrespective of ethnic membership.

The Royal Bafokeng Nation’s 2009 budget for social and community-based spending was R1.2 billion (approx \$150 million, at June 2010 rates). Of this, 58%, or approximately R700 million (\$87.5 million), is allocated to infrastructure development and social programs. Education programs account for 29% of the budget, and 11% went towards to the development of commercial and community-level sports. Aside from loans for university students, and school lunches, very little

of the budget is targeted at the individual or household level. If the benefits are collective, how is the impact on individuals measured? What, specifically, constitutes evidence of “service delivery” and equitable distribution of communal resources? Is it the annual budget and spending priorities of the Nation? Is it anecdotal feedback from the community members, as they represent themselves to *kgotha-kgothe*, and increasingly to the media? Increasingly, it will be longitudinal and ethnographic studies that examine changes in household circumstances over time. A socioeconomic household survey is conducted every three years to determine whether spending, savings, and expenditure on health and education increase. Will programs that fund environmental management, loans for university education, education reform at the primary and secondary level, and installation of water-borne sewage help alleviate poverty in the short term? Maybe not. The Bafokeng agencies must successfully address food security, primary health care, and accelerated job creation in order to bridge the gap between the “traditional” expectations of the community and the longer-term strategic aspirations of the administration.

The Lebone II project is a good example of the ongoing debate between equitable distribution of the community’s wealth, and sustainable planning for the longer term goal of poverty alleviation through human development. Lebone II, College of the Royal Bafokeng, is an independent school founded by the late Kgosi Lebone II in 1999. Initially intended as a selective private school for future leaders of the Royal Bafokeng Nation, the vision of the school has been transformed under Kgosi Leruo into a competitive independent school *cum* teacher-training facility at the center of Vision 2020’s strategy for education reform. Designed to meet global standards of educational excellence, the total enrollment at Lebone II is capped at 800

(Kindergarten—Grade 12), and the planned mix of students is 70% Bafokeng students, and 30% non-Bafokeng (including white, Indian, non-Bafokeng black, and international students). The curriculum prepares students for the South African national exams, but also enables students to study for the International Baccalaureate (IEB), which positions them to apply to universities anywhere in the world. The school's new campus reflects the principles of green building, total integration with the local landscape and climate, and the school's role as a "teaching hospital" for forty-five schools in the Bafokeng region. The fee structure features a sliding scale, and all applicants take an entrance exam to determine academic ability.

For many Bafokeng, this unique and important institution is nothing more than an elitist institution satisfied to educate a few Bafokeng at the highest standards, leaving the rest to suffer the limited economic opportunities that inevitably accompany a diploma from the inferior state schools. The idea of Lebone II as a training centre for forty-five primary and secondary schools, whose teachers and principals have never been exposed to high standards of content knowledge, pedagogy, teacher-parent interaction, extra-mural activities, etc., is lost on many who are desperate for a pathway out of poverty. The rewards seem to be accruing to too few, and to the rest too slowly. But even with third-party funding, Lebone II is an expensive project (in excess of USD 56 million), and it will be at least ten years before the families of the students enrolled there will reap the economic benefits of the resources being invested. Many in the community feel that this is an unacceptable use of the resources that their forebears worked so hard to secure a century and a half ago. This pervasive sense of entitlement to a piece of the Bafokeng cake is one of the most difficult challenges for the current Bafokeng policy-makers, including this anthropologist.

## **Conclusion**

I've tried to show, through a discussion of the Bafokeng Nation's status as landowner, its control over some of the world's largest platinum deposits, and its resulting status as a major investor in South Africa, that the community's long-term strategy depends on its status as both community and corporation. As a recognized traditional authority, the community is able to maintain patriarchal and hereditary forms of governance that exist alongside, but in many ways supersede, the state's political mechanisms. As a *universitas persona*, the Nation also enjoys tax-exempt status, enabling it to marshal its resources for the benefit of the immediate community, rather than allowing its dividends to be dissipated by the national treasury and its highly bureaucratic spending programs.

On the other hand, the Nation has embarked on an aggressive corporatization process in order to capitalize on its platinum interests and ensure the financial viability of the Bafokeng community in the post-platinum era (generally estimated to be 50 years from the present). Corporate structures, strict financial controls and near-obsessive adherence to corporate governance laws are some of the initiatives introduced by Kgosi Leruo in his first ten years as leader of the community. Enthroned in 2003 wearing a navy blue suit under his leopard skin kaross (see Cook and Hardin, forthcoming), Kgosi Leruo is at once a symbol of traditional authority and a corporate CEO. The language and procedures of the Nation's business and administrative arms are a combination of global corporate protocols and more local forms of deference to patriarchy, ancestors, and traditional social mores.

The bottom line, as it were, for the Royal Bafokeng Nation, rests on a paradox. In order to successfully pursue its goal of being a major player in the global commodities market, the Bafokeng have adopted conventional corporate strategies and outlooks. As a community committed to perpetuating non-democratic forms of governance, the Bafokeng Nation has also clung to its status as a chieftainship, communal land administrator, and patriarchal society. The financial advantage in this is that the community, to date, has retained a tax-exempt status. The appeal in remaining a tribal authority extends well beyond the R220 million/year benefit, however. There is a cultural patina to Royal Bafokeng Holdings that, despite Mokgatla's comments about the drawbacks of being a communal investor, lends it an aura of uniqueness, potential, and vision. "A poor community that has its act together," as the former U.S. Ambassador to South Africa, Eric Bost, put it; the Bafokeng Nation represents the convergence of need, political will, and resources -- a highly attractive combination for investors, development professionals, and politicians alike. Bafokeng Inc., in fact, relies crucially on the simultaneous pursuit of tradition and modernity, the communal and the private, the local context and the global marketplace. And beyond the immediate (albeit ambitious) goals to achieve basic development and economic sustainability for the Bafokeng people, there are those who see the potential for the Bafokeng Nation to develop a policy/governance model with "contemporary relevance for the continent," in the words of a writer for The New York Times (2010). The World Economic Forum, United Nations, and World Bank all follow the Bafokeng approach to combating "the resource curse" with interest. With its relatively small area and population, impressive resources and professional competencies, the Bafokeng Nation aspires to more than providing for people's basic needs. Environmentally-sustainable mining, the mass-enrollment of

girls in sports, early childhood education, and decentralized HIV/AIDS treatment programs are only some of the localized answers to deeply entrenched problems that might yield far-reaching solutions.

It is ultimately the South African Constitution and current political dispensation that has allowed the Bafokeng Nation to straddle the line between traditional community and private corporation. As the legislative environment changes, it is possible, even likely, that the Bafokeng leadership will have to shift its strategy in pursuit of its goals. At the present juncture, however, the Nation's dual status is allowing it to amass wealth and maintain non-democratic structures in a way that many view, paradoxically, as "progressive" and "visionary."

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