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Khali Mofuoa,

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Prospering in the southern Africa's VUCA world of the nineteenth century

A case of resilience of Basotho of Lesotho

Khali Mofuoa

*Centre for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, Charles Sturt University,
Canberra, Australia*

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to discuss the notion of resilience in the context of the Basotho of Lesotho who managed prospering as a nation in the era of uncertainty during the “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa.

Design/methodology/approach – Using historical data from leadership and organizational behaviour perspectives, the theoretical context of the paper is established to inform discussion on the resilience of the Basotho during the “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa.

Findings – The paper has established that the notion of resilience was synonymous to Basotho's way of life and livelihood during the “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa. The paper has also established that resilience became the key quality of Basotho as they continued prospering as a nation in the era of uncertainty during the “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa.

Originality/value – From both leadership and organizational behaviour perspectives, the paper uses mainly historical data that are considered to be most relevant, valid and reliable to inform discussions on the notion of resilience as it relates to the Basotho as a nation during the “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa.

Keywords Leadership, VUCA world, Basotho of Lesotho, Moshoeshoe, Resilience and Basotho, Lesotho, Southern Africa

Paper type General review

1. Introduction

In the nineteenth-century, southern Africa was indeed the world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity – the “VUCA” world. It all started with wars of calamity in the early 1900s dubbed *Lifaqane* or *Difaqane* or *Mfecane*, which tested the resilience of Basotho as an emergent nation. *Lifaqane* or *Difaqane* in Sotho or Tswana languages, also known as the *Mfecane* in Nguni languages, is an African expression which means something like “the crushing” or “scattering”. It describes a period of widespread chaos and disturbance during the period between 1815 and about 1840 in southern Africa. Starting in the late 1800s, a long drought throughout southern Africa made people to move around in search for food and fight for meagre supplies, producing *Lifaqane* or *Difaqane* or *Mfecane*. It was during this dramatic and dangerous environment that the Basotho kingdom emerged and consolidated (Eldredge, 2002) under the leadership of King Moshoeshoe (1786-1870), hereafter called Moshoeshoe. It was also during this time that the territory of Basutoland (now modern-day Lesotho) played an important role in the emergent history of southern Africa as Basotho



demonstrated their resilient quality to become a prospering nation in the era of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, which is dubbed the “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa in this paper.

While empirical research directly linking resilience, leadership and nations could not be found, this paper presents the prospering nation of Basotho of Lesotho during the “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa as a case of resilience. In doing so, the paper uses historical data to provide insights into the making of the Basotho as a resilient nation, and how they became a resilient prospering nation in the era of uncertainty. The paper puts forward the view that resilience is not a capability that Basotho developed in isolation, but a characteristic of the wider system in southern Africa at the time in which the Basotho lived (Dana, 2007, pp. 100-114; Dana, 1997a, pp. 37-58; 1997b, pp. 83-87; Goebel and Epprecht, 1995, pp. 1-22). It argues that the bedrock of resilience is provided by the extent to which societal values, and the society’s resulting cultural and behavioural norms, are aligned with the evolving norms and changing expectations in wider society to cope and survive ‘tsunamis of uncertainty’. In this regard, resilience is understood and used in this paper as a phenomenon or quality of space and time, which describes Basotho’s ability to withstand, adapt to or rebound from extreme challenges or adversity of the southern Africa’s “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century. Indeed, as Thomas Pynchon notes, “You wait. Everyone has an Antarctic” (1961). The paper contends that how Basotho managed to “survive in one form or another in the face of their own “Antarctics” throughout the nineteenth-century is a function of resilience. Resilient individuals rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful (Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003). Indeed, resilience is the quality that Basotho of the nineteenth-century had in abundance in the face of their own “Antarctics” throughout the nineteenth-century southern Africa.

2. Emergence of the Basotho as a nation state of modern-day Lesotho

Before the 1800s, there was no such thing as the Basotho state or kingdom as it became to be known in the early 1900s. At the time, Basotho were loose communities set within small chiefdoms with no overall ruler (Mothibe, 2002). Although elements of patriarchy and communal ownership were widely practised, most of the customs and traditions were generally in flux (Gill, 1993). One author has described Basotho traditions at the time as “frequently innovative, localized and contested” (Epprecht, 1996) with simply a set of clans speaking similar dialects and with similar cultural practices. These loose clans formed constantly shifting sets of loose socio-political alliances and rivalries, and their socio-economic and political fortunes tended to wax and wane over time.

The roots of the modern-day Lesotho were in an era of unprecedented political upheaval and destruction in southern Africa known to the Basotho as *Lifaqane* (also known as the *Mfecane* in Nguni languages) in the early nineteenth-century. While historians may give various explanations for these momentous events, there is a general agreement that the resulting wars, which started around 1818, shook the social, economic and political foundations of many societies in southern Africa. The *Lifaqane* triggered a series of catastrophes that caused bloodshed, social, economic and political disintegration and complete collapse of confidence in leadership. It was in this era of unprecedented political upheaval and destruction that Moshoeshe’s leadership abilities enabled him to create a stable Basotho kingdom that offered security to affected chiefdoms, despite the terrible *Lifaqane* environment at the time (Richner, 2005, p. 62).

In 1818, Moshoeshoe, who was the son of the chief of the *Bamokoteli* branch of the *Koena* (Crocodile) clan, gained power over smaller fugitive and displaced clans. In 1820, Moshoeshoe became chief of a larger unit of southern *Sotho* groups, who had fallen under his centralized authority due to competition for resources, which was intensified by a drought at the time. This competition for resources caused these larger groups to seek protection from other marauding groups, and Moshoeshoe and his people retreated to the mountain fortress of *Butha-Buthe* (Olivier, 2005), where he started providing refuge and forming alliances with an amalgam of clans and chiefdoms of southern *Sotho* people who occupied the area, which is presently the Northern and Eastern Free State and Western Lesotho (Thompson, 2001).

In the early 1824, Moshoeshoe's small fledging chiefdom was attacked at *Butha-Buthe* by the *BaTlokoa* of *Manthatisi* who were dislodged from their homeland by *MaNgwane* and *Mahlubi* chiefdoms who were running away from the ruthless *Zulus* of Shaka Zulu. Each of these dislodged chiefdoms marauded throughout most parts of southern Africa, causing devastation and driving some communities to cannibalism. Moshoeshoe was forced to move further south-west to the mountain fortress of *Thaba-Bosiu*, which means the Mountain of the Night. It was on this flat-topped mountain surrounded by a fertile plain where Moshoeshoe started building the Basotho nation state by incorporating refugees from remnants of peoples displaced by an expanding *Zulu* kingdom (Richner, 2005, p. 62).

In essence, the Basotho emerged as a nation state when Moshoeshoe gathered together remnants of various clans and ethnic groups fleeing the ravages of the tribal wars or "*lifaqane*" waged by the *MaZulu* and *Mandebele* across the southern Africa in the early nineteenth century, settling on the top of a small hill named *Thaba-Bosiu* (Becker, 1969), which is today a national shrine. *Thaba-Bosiu* proved to be an impregnable fortress. It successfully defended Basotho against an *Amangwane* army in 1828; against the *Batlokoa* during Moshoeshoe's absence on a cattle raid in 1829; and against the *Ndebele* of *Mzilikazi* in 1831. From the mountain-stronghold of *Thaba-Bosiu*, Moshoeshoe continued to amalgamate remnants of tribal groups eventually building up a small but steadily growing nation. Moshoeshoe gave assistance to his defeated enemies by giving them land, which led to the establishment of Basotho as a nation.

Defending his newly born Basotho nation state against the *Batlokoa*, *Mahlubi*, *MaNgwane*, *MaZulu* and *MaNdebele* chiefdoms, Moshoeshoe was able to offer security to many traumatized chiefdoms who flocked to join his growing kingdom for protection (Richner, 2005, p. 79). Lesotho, under the visionary leadership of Moshoeshoe, thus, simply coalesced and attracted people from various parts of southern Africa, who had fled from the devastation of *Lifaqane*. Moshoeshoe skillfully gathered together disparate clans of *Sotho* and *Nguni* origin who had been dispersed across southern Africa by *Lifaqane* in the early nineteenth-century to consolidate them into a prospering nation of Basotho. As an emergent nation, Basotho kingdom was further strengthened by alliances, as Moshoeshoe chose wives from other clans including daughters of the long-established *Bafokeng* chiefs.

3. Pressures to the existence of the Basotho kingdom aftermath of *Lifaqane*

Apart from the threats from external African enemies during *Lifaqane* caused by marauding chiefdoms, Moshoeshoe began to hear from returning refugees about other

external non-African enemies in the vicinity of his kingdom. In the late 1820s, *Lifaqane* was intensified by the arrival of *Griqua* and *Kora* raiders in the vicinity of Moshoeshoe's kingdom. Seizing the opportunity provided by *Lifaqane*, the *Griqua* and *Kora* raiders armed with guns and mounted on horseback, pounced on the severely weakened chiefdoms and caused further destruction. The use of guns and horses in the battlefield was foreign to Basotho and, it was a sophisticated military innovation to them. There is no doubt that the *Griqua* and *Kora* raiders' strange military tactics and methods instilled fear in Basotho who used knobkerrie, long spear, battleaxe and cowhide shield. So, Basotho retreated in face of *Griqua* and *Kora* raiders' unfamiliar warfare tactics and methods, thereby putting their hard-built kingdom at the risk of dissipating. Being a military tactician and strategist of note, Moshoeshoe was totally blown away by the *Griqua* and *Kora* raiders' military tactics and methods. To defend his hard-built kingdom, he decided to arm his people with guns and to give them horses.

Despite the continued raids from the *Griqua* and *Kora* raiders, which Basotho were used to somewhat, new influences began to filter into the kingdom in the late 1820s and early 1830s. One of the significant influences was the arrival of some of the Dutch farmers in the vicinity of Moshoeshoe's kingdom. They had begun moving from the Cape in the late 1820s in search for land. The other significant influence was the arrival of Boers, who called themselves Voortrekkers, in the vicinity of Moshoeshoe's kingdom in the early 1830s. Boers are Dutch settlers in South Africa, also known as Afrikaners. They left Eastern Cape protesting against the British rule and in search for land. Having created a stable kingdom following *Lifaqane*, Moshoeshoe now faced the Dutch farmers and Boers who threatened to seize his lands (Beck, 2000, p. 72). The contested land was the Caledon River Valley, which was the most fertile area. The Basotho used this valley for growing crops and keeping livestock. Grain could be grown without irrigation. Cattle and large herds of game grazed on the thick grass in the area. It was into this fertile valley that the Boers moved resulting in increased tensions between the Basotho and some of the Boers over the Caledon River Valley.

About the same time of the arrival of the Voortrekkers during the 1830s, missionaries also entered into the sphere of Basotho kingdom looking for converts (Sanders, 1975). The first missionaries to arrive were French Protestants followed by French Roman Catholics and the English Anglicans. Moshoeshoe was keen to have them in his kingdom for basically two reasons. First, he wanted to learn more about the powerful white settlers who were intruding into his land. Second, he wanted the missionaries to help him gain access to guns. These were the opportunities that Moshoeshoe was looking for when he allowed the missionaries to settle in his kingdom, despite being weary of the possibility that the converts' loyalty could sometimes be divided at the detriment of his kingdom – unwillingness of the converts to show allegiance to the Basotho kingdom.

Another significant influence in the vicinity of Moshoeshoe's kingdom was the British imperialists whom Moshoeshoe had already become aware of their power and how they had defeated the *Xhosa* on the Cape Eastern Frontier. The British were weary of the growing power and influence of Moshoeshoe's kingdom, and waged wars against Basotho in the late 1840s and early 1850s. However, the British under governors Smith and Warden suffered embarrassing defeats in the hands of Basotho culminating in their sacking and appointment of George Cathcart as the new governor of the Cape. George Cathcart believed that it would be best for Britain to withdraw from the area laying in

the vicinity of Moshoeshoe's kingdom. The British withdrawal gave rise to the independent Boer Republic of the Orange Free State (OFS) under the infamous Bloemfontein Convention in 1854, which recognized the independence of the Boers in the area between the Orange and the Vaal rivers in present-day Free State province of the Republic of South Africa. The Bloemfontein Convention ushered running tensions and wars between Basotho and the Boers of the newly formed OFS. The Convention did not state what the boundaries between the Basotho kingdom and the OFS were. Soon after 1854, the Basotho started taking cattle and horses from Boer farms, resulting in the declaration of war by the OFS on the Basotho kingdom in March 1858. The British came to the aid of the Boer state by supplying them with weapons including cannons. However, the Boer state was defeated by Basotho at the time.

In 1865, a fierce and bitter war called "Cannon's Boom" broke out between the OFS and the Basotho over territorial boundaries (land). The military power of the Boers supported by cannons signalled the end of Basotho kingdom, whereupon Moshoeshoe appealed to Britain to come to his aid to save his Basotho kingdom. After numerous appeals for British protection from Moshoeshoe, the British finally agreed to place the Basotho kingdom under the British rule in 1868, and the Boers were ordered to leave. A treaty was signed at Aliwal North in 1869 between the British and the Boer defining the boundaries of present-day Lesotho (previously Basutoland), which saw Basotho losing the arable land west of the Caledon River in hands of the Boers state of the OFS which is still referred to by the Basotho as "the Lost or Conquered Territory" even today (Grant, 1981). Moshoeshoe, founder of the Basotho nation, died in 1870 at the age of 70 years, having secured Basotho kingdom under the British rule as a prospering nation, and having managed to help Basotho to survive in one form or another given the difficult conditions that prevailed in the region throughout the nineteenth-century.

The tensions and wars between Basotho and the British and the Boer state of OFS continued to flare even beyond the death of Moshoeshoe in 1870. The main source of the flaring tensions and wars was the infamous Aliwal North Treaty of 1869 in which Basotho lost large portion of their land (Grant, 1981). In 1871, the Basotho kingdom (then Basutoland) as a British protectorate was annexed to the Cape Colony. The Basotho resisted the British, and in 1879, a southern Mosotho chief, Moorosi, rose in revolt. The rising was crushed and Moorosi was killed in the fighting. The British extended the Cape Peace Preservation Act of 1878 to cover Basutoland and attempted to disarm the Basotho. Much of the Basutoland rose in revolt in the Gun War (1880-1881), incurring significant casualties upon colonial British forces sent to subdue it. An 1881 peace treaty failed to quell sporadic fighting. British Cape Colony's inability to control the Basutoland territory led to its return to British crown control in 1884 as the Territory of Basutoland. The colony was bound by the Orange River Colony, Natal Colony and Cape Colony and divided into seven administrative districts – *Berea*, *Leribe*, *Maseru*, *Mohales Hoek*, *Mafeteng*, *Qacha's Nek* and *Quthing* (present-day administrative districts with exception of *Butha-Buthe*, *Khokhotlong* and *Thaba-Tseka*). The Basutoland colony was ruled by the British Resident Commissioner, who worked through the *Pitso* (national assembly) of hereditary native chiefs under one paramount chief. Each chief ruled a ward within the territory. When Moshoeshoe died in 1870, he was succeeded by his eldest son, Letsie I who was the first *Morena-e-Moholo* to be styled Paramount Chief by the British Colonial government. When the Union of South

Africa was founded in 1910 following the defeat of the OFS by the British during the Second Boer war, Basutoland colony was still controlled by the British and moves were made to transfer it to the Union. However, the people of Basutoland opposed this, and the possibility of Basutoland annexation into the Union was halted (Bundy and Saunders, 1989). In 1959, a new constitution gave Basutoland its first elected legislature. This was followed in April 1965 with general legislative elections, and present-day Lesotho became an independent state in 1966 as the Kingdom of Lesotho, which is affectionately nicknamed as “the Kingdom in the Sky” due to its majestic mountainous terrain or landscape.

4. Prospering as a resilient nation in the era of uncertainty – the case of Basotho

There is no doubt that Basotho’s survival of their harrowing experiences in the face of their own “Antarctics” throughout the “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa to become a prospering nation is a function of resilience supported by the culture of entrepreneurship, which sinks deep into Basotho social consciousness (Dana and Anderson, 2011; Dana, 2007, 1997; Goebel and Epprecht, 1995; Bonner, 1990; Lawry, 1983). This positive outcome is attributed largely to the leadership of Moshoeshoe, whose leadership behaviours fuelled the resilience of his Basotho kingdom over and over again during and aftermath of *Lifaqane*. An exhaustive examination of Moshoeshoe’s leadership behaviours is found in the literature, mostly in biographical style (Sanders, 1975; Thompson, 1975). While a comprehensive discussion of all Moshoeshoe’s leadership behaviours is beyond the scope of this paper (Sanders, 1975; Thompson, 1975 for a thorough review), it may be instructive to list some of them to gain a sense of how such behaviours helped Basotho to survive in one form or another as a prospering, enterprising and resilient society in the face of their own “Antarctics” throughout the “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa.

According to Thompson (1975, p. 212):

Moshoeshoe possessed the charisma of a leader who had emerged in his people’s darkest hour and steered them through unprecedented physical and moral disasters to a new plane of prosperity and self-confidence [...] Yet he remained a man of simple tastes: He retained the common touch, never demanding obsequious behaviour from anyone ... [and] [h]is reputation for justice and clemency was proverbial.

Through open-handed style of leadership, Knight (1994, p. 54) tells us that Moshoeshoe preferred to rule his people by consensus, leading them subtly round to his way of thinking in the *Pitso*, the public gathering where events (and/or issues) of national importance were discussed. Commenting on the distinctive virtuous qualities of Moshoeshoe’s rule, Azarial Sekese who had known Moshoeshoe said of him as related by Thompson: he disposed even-handed justice; he did not retaliate against people like *Rakotsoana*, the cannibal chief who had wronged him; he gave sanctuary and aid to refugees; and he was not too proud to pay tribute to other rulers, such as King Shaka of Zulu kingdom, for diplomatic advantage (1975, p. 215).

Indeed, through Moshoeshoe’s high moral standards, it is not rocket-science that Basotho kingdom emerged and consolidated under his influential leadership (Eldredge, 2002). As such, it may not be a farfetched conclusion that Moshoeshoe’s leadership behaviours have had positive impact on Basotho’s way of life. Indeed, in

leadership behaviours and subordinate resilience, Harland *et al.* (2005, p. 13) found that subordinate resilience may be positively impacted by leader behaviours and that there may be a variety of leadership behaviours that positively impact subordinate resilience. This could have been the case with Basotho as a prospering, enterprising and resilient nation under the leadership of Moshoeshoe, their founder. As Thompson (1975, p. 212) notes:

Moshoeshoe lived according to high moral standards, which made Lesotho to have all the hallmarks of a first-generation kingdom: its cohesion depended less on institutions than on the towering personality (or character) of its founder.

So it can be inferred that Moshoeshoe's leadership behaviours did make a difference in promoting resilience impulses that saw Basotho prosper as a nation during and aftermath of *Lifaqane*.

Historically, Lesotho (formerly Basutoland) was not always as dependent and poor as it is today (Germond, 1967; Murray, 1981, 1979; Epprecht, 1996). In contrast, from the ashes of devastating *Lifaqane* wars in mid-nineteenth century, Basotho staged one of Africa's most remarkable comeback as a prospering, enterprising and resilient nation (Epprecht, 1996, p. 186). They emerged from these crippling series of wars to become the industrial heartland of southern Africa. The loss of livestock and inability to reap crops due to wars seemed not to have hampered their remarkable recovery as they presented the appearance of a resilient, thriving and well-ordered people (Burman, 1976, pp. 42-46). For example, they resourcefully adapted to the loss of their livestock; they used their horses for ploughing and transport and demonstrated their industrious character in the larger economy in southern Africa at the time.

The Basotho resilient recovery was attributed largely to the discovery of diamonds in 1867 in the Northern Cape colony (now modern-day Northern Cape province of the Republic of South Africa) – Kimberley and that of gold in 1880 in the Transvaal – Witwatersrand (now modern-day Johannesburg in the Gauteng province of the Republic of South Africa). This South Africa's mineral boom rapidly and irreversibly incorporated the Basotho into a larger economic system, which set the stage for them to showcase their spirited entrepreneurial proficiency (Dana, 1997a, pp. 37-58). By the 1870s, they had become the principal suppliers of grain for South Africa's emerging mining sector, and when the grain market began to diminish in the early 1900s, they diversified their production to include wool and mohair (Epprecht, 1996, p. 186). The industriousness of Basotho and their trade considerably benefited the British colonial revenue (Burman, 1976, p. 46). For example, it is recorded that in 1873, Basotho exported 100,000 bags of grain – wheat, maize and sorghum – and 2,000 bags of wool (Burman, 1976, p. 46). In the same year, goods of British or foreign manufacture worth about £150,000 were imported into Lesotho (Burman, 1976, p. 46). Indeed, in the 1870s, Basotho made an excellent livelihood from production and the sale of grain (Murray, 1981, 1979).

The fluctuating economic conditions in the late 1800s and early 1900s due to savage depression and drought did not hurt the resilient and spirited industrious character of Basotho. If anything, the emergent conditions spurred the Basotho industriousness and business acumen. For example, in early 1900s, whilst lice and drought destroyed wheat and maize crops, the exports of wool and mohair steadily increased. And though the steadily declining per capita income from agriculture due

to poor harvests meant low imports of manufactured goods during this period, the sale of grain and livestock products was still the most important means of generating a cash flow in Lesotho (Murray, 1981, 1979). The First World War sustained high prices in wool and grain, and the Basotho were able to take advantage of this – maize and wheat production was particularly vigorous. For instance, wheat exports in 1919 were a record 256,000 bags (Pim Report, 1935, p. 191), and 100,000 bags of maize were exported in the 1928 (Murray, 1981, 1979). However, wool and mohair were by far the most important exports at this time (Pim Report, 1935, p. 191). Notably, this was the case despite serial economic depression and climatic vicissitudes such as drought that the Basotho experienced at the time.

The Basotho resilient response to the market and trade incentives at the time with such zeal and success amid all odds attracted attention from a score of interested observers (Murray, 1981, 1979) and earned Basotho notable accolades. In 1870, a newspaper “The Friend of the Free State” in the OFS was moved to remark, “Nowhere else in South Africa is there a more naturally industrious nation, as honest and as peaceable as the Basuto [Basotho]” (Germond, 1967, p. 319). In 1871, partly because of their business acumen, the “Jews of South Africa” (Theal, 1964, p. 876) were much admired by the early missionaries: “superior intelligence, that spirit of enquiry, and that craving for good government [...] reveal themselves in this people to a greater degree than with any other in South Africa” (Germond, 1967, pp. 325-326). As late as 1942, the British described Basotho as “comparatively wealthy and progressive”, while according to Sir Alan Pim’s 1935 study, “this tranquil state of affairs” was such that “conditions were in fact too easy” (Pim, 1935, p. 70). Indeed, whilst in the South African mines, Basotho men made a name for themselves performing skilled and elitist work of being “reader” (clerks) on the surface and “shaft-sinkers” below (Epprecht, 1996, p. 186). Basotho women acquired an early reputation of being the most intelligent and resourceful “native women on the South African locations, with skills in entrepreneurship and evasion of the law” (Bonner, 1990). Indeed, the culture of entrepreneurship has always been the backbone of Basotho’s cultural livelihood and survival from their founding as a nation to present day (Dana and Anderson, 2011; Dana, 2007, 1997, 1997; Goebel and Epprecht, 1995; Bonner, 1990; Lawry, 1983 for analysis of Basotho’s entrepreneurship).

5. Factors that enhanced Basotho resilience in the face of their own “Antarctics”

Today, it is hardly possible to recall that Lesotho (formally Basutoland) ever produced an agricultural surplus and that Lesotho was the net exporter of maize until around 1865 (Gill, 1993). However, the fact is that Lesotho has always been average performer in Africa over time (Epprecht, 1996; World Bank, 1995; Murray, 1981, 1979; Burman, 1976; Germond, 1967). Indeed, the heydays of Lesotho’s macroeconomic management prowess can be traced back from the 1860s under the leadership of one of Africa’s most visionary diplomat and warrior, King Moshoeshoe. It was during this epoch when Lesotho was described as “the granary of the Free State and parts of the Cape Colony” (Germond, 1967). Murray (1981) vividly describes the Basotho of the nineteenth century as a resilient, prosperous and self-sufficient people, who were quick to grab the economic opportunities for grain export offered by the newly opened diamond mines in Kimberly in the present-day North West province of the Republic of South Africa. In 1873, Basotho

exported some 100,000 bags of grain and other products such as wool and mohair (Ferguson, 1990). In the foreword to the National Vision 2020 document launched in 2005, the present Prime Minister of Lesotho, Pakalitha Mosisili, recalled this time when Lesotho earned the reputation of being the Granary of Southern Africa as a major supplier of wheat to meet the unprecedented demand for grains for a population that had come into sudden wealth (Government of Lesotho, 2005).

Basotho's resilience in the face of their own "Antarctics" throughout the "VUCA" world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa can be understood in the context of the growing research in psychology and organizational behaviour that focuses on examining positive aspects of people and organizations (Luthans *et al.*, 2001; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Wright, 2003). The brain behind the engendering of Basotho's resilience can be attributed to their institutions of productive relations or sharing mechanisms at the time (Turner, 2005), which were largely responsible for the development of "entrepreneurial spirit" (Dana, 1997a, 1997b) and "the culture of entrepreneurship in Lesotho" (Dana, 2007). These institutions were extensively used to facilitate the entrepreneurial pooling of different resources needed for agriculture – crop and livestock production. *Seahlolo* (sharing), *letsema* (work party), *tsimo ea lira* (the field of enemies) and *mafisa* (livestock loaning) were the most prominent forms of institutions of productive relations and co-operation used by the Basotho for the purpose of agricultural entrepreneurship – ploughing, planting and harvesting (Turner, 1978; Spiegel, 1979; Robertson, 1987). These institutions of productive relations or sharing mechanisms managed to sustain the Basotho granary economy in the nineteenth century (Turner, 1978, 2005; Sheddick, 1954; Wallman, 1969; Murray, 1976, 1981; Phororo, 1979; Robertson 1987; Franklin, 1995; Boehm, 2003). Each of these institutions of productive relations or sharing mechanisms, which facilitated positive entrepreneurial aspects of organizational life such as optimism, hope, resilience and creativity amongst Basotho, is discussed below.

Seahlolo was the common and practised sharecropping agricultural mechanism among the Basotho during the nineteenth-century southern Africa. It was associated with the entrepreneurial retributive function of helping people out of temporary difficulties or longer-term resources shortages by pooling land, cattle and equipment (Turner, 2005, p. 42). Through *seahlolo*, farming partners got their fields ploughed and planted and had enough labour to fulfil weeding and harvesting obligations. For example, Lawry (1983) describes Basotho entrepreneurs entering into *seahlolo* sharecropping agreements with widows that last for the rest of the old woman's life and guaranteed certain funeral expenses when death finally closes the contract.

Another commonly practised sharecropping mechanism for the Basotho to sustain their livelihoods was *Tsimo ea lira*. It was a traditional practice where chiefs retained some land to grow food stuff for the support of not only orphans but other vulnerable groups in the community such as the disabled and widows. The chief's public fields (*lira*) were cultivated by the community to help them in times of hardships and to provide social protection to the needy. The surplus of the produce of *tsimo ea lira* was also extensively used to sustain the granary economy – buying agricultural implements for farming. Although the *tsimo ea lira* have disappeared altogether (Turner, 2005), it was an important institution of productive relations and co-operation managed by the chief to produce a grain reserve for the needy and to sustain the Basotho granary economy during the nineteenth-century southern Africa.

Letsema was also a central sharing mechanism in the Basotho granary economy of the nineteenth-century southern Africa. The older literature about Lesotho makes references to the centrality of *letsema* to the livelihoods of Basotho. In his book on farming in Lesotho in the old days, Mohapi (1956) gives a description of *letsema*. It literally refers to the use of organized, co-operative work parties in all phases of agricultural work – ploughing, planting, weeding and harvesting. Casalis (1861, pp. 162-173) writes, thus, about *letsema*, “the Basuto assemble every year to dig up and sow the fields [...] it is interesting to see on these occasions hundreds of [people] in a straight line raise and lower their mattocks simultaneously, and with perfect regularity. The air resounds with songs, which serve to invigorate the labourers and keep time in their movements”. *Letsema* was the most efficient traditional institution of productive relations and co-operation for shared ploughing, planting, weeding and harvesting that sustained the granary economy.

Mafisa was also the prominent traditional institution of productive relations and co-operation amongst the Basotho during the nineteenth-century southern Africa. In *mafisa*, one household has a long-term custody of some or all of another household’s livestock and the right to use them and consume their produce (Sheddick, 1954, pp. 109-110; Ashton, 1967, p. 181; Casalis, 1955, p. 155; Mahao, 2006, p. 28). Under the *mafisa* system, livestock have traditionally played a central role in the economy and society of the Basotho. To some extent, their cultural roles included the payment of *bohali* (bridewealth) and the ploughing for which teams of cattle have traditionally been used. Overall, however, livestock remain an important asset: both for their direct productive functions and also for their role in household savings and liquidity. Sheep and goats were an important source of income for many Basotho during the twentieth century, especially in the mountains, as wool and mohair were sold and marketed internationally through a relatively efficient network of producer groups and government shearing sheds.

Thus, during the nineteenth-century southern Africa, the “social embeddedness of fields” in a way was a strength of Basotho’s positive behaviours of optimism, hope, resilience and creativity. It is worth noting that until around 1930s, what is now Lesotho used to be a rich and very efficient agricultural economy. It was both self-reliant for food and certain handicrafts products and well-integrated into the cash economy of South Africa through large exports of wheat, maize and sorghum, as well as through the consumption of manufactured goods, thanks to Moshoeshoe who made Basotho become more and more resilient as years passed by. There is no doubt that the natural industriousness of the Basotho, and of course, their ability to successfully support and sustain their granary economy over time was as function of what Harland *et al.* (2005) dubbed “leadership behaviors and subordinate resilience” coupled with the efficient use of the land at the disposal of Basotho throughout the nineteenth-century southern Africa.

Initially, despite Moshoeshoe’s leadership qualities and their resilient character, the Basotho had extensive control of the most fertile region along the Caledon River. This made it easy to produce enough grain for their own use and to sell to Cape Town markets where they made huge profits. The money earned was mainly used for agricultural production. The diamond discovery in Kimberly in 1867 and gold in the Witwatersrand in 1866 attracted thousands of people who needed to be fed. Whence, Lesotho became one of the main suppliers of wheat, maize and sorghum to Kimberly and

Witwatersrand. For example, Lesotho was able to supply Kimberley with more than 100,000 bags of excellent quality grain each year (Burman, 1976; Ferguson, 1990). With the might of agricultural prowess that Lesotho boosted at the time, Lesotho thus earned the reputation of being the granary of southern Africa, an advantage that she has not managed and developed well enough to keep that enviable status today. This is the case despite Basotho having had a long history of being involved in entrepreneurial activities for livelihood and survival (Dana and Anderson, 2011; Dana, 2007, 1997a, 1997b; Goebel and Epprecht, 1995; Bonner, 1990; Lawry, 1983).

6. Concluding remarks

Basotho are described as a resilient nation, and indeed, history has it that Basotho were so resilient that their country was never conquered. That accolade stems from their association with Moshoeshe, their founder. Possessing great intelligence and sensitivity, Moshoeshe was admirably known as a benevolent leader of his time and is often referred to as the father of the Basotho nation. At his *Thaba-Bosiu* stronghold, he strategized and successfully defended his nation against advancing African and European invaders for most of the nineteenth century. In discussing the notion of resilience in the context of the Basotho of Lesotho, the paper has provided insights into how Basotho managed to survive in one form or another prospering as a nation in the face of their own “Antarctics” throughout the “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa. It has located the rise of Basotho as a function of the positive relationship between leader behaviour and subordinate resilience (Harland *et al.*, 2005; Luthans *et al.*, 2001; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Wright, 2003). It is hoped that beyond sentiments and hagiography, this paper is a historical fool-proof, which directly links resilience and leadership research in the area of resilience, coping and leadership research. For their resilient character during and aftermath of *Lifaqane*, Moshoeshe and his Basotho kingdom deserve our profound recognition for showing the way to imagine that “subordinate resilience may be positively impacted by leader behaviors and that there may be a variety of leader behaviors that positively impact subordinate resilience” (Harland *et al.*, 2005, p. 13). As Daft (2004, p. 8) argues:

Considering the turmoil and flux inherent in today’s world, the mindset needed by organizational leaders is to expect the unexpected and be prepared for rapid change and potential crises *which can be only managed by enhancing leadership and subordinate resilience in coping with them [my emphasis]. Thus, there is no doubt that Moshoeshe and his Basotho nation would have been a Nobel-laureates in leader-subordinate resilience today, having survived their own “Antarctics” throughout the “VUCA” world of the nineteenth-century southern Africa.*

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Corresponding author

Khali Mofuoa can be contacted at: khalimo25@gmail.com