
JONAS RAUBAAS MOHAASCHWA AND THE INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY TO MAMABOLOLAND IN THE LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY¹

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This study investigates the role of indigenous agents in spreading Christianity in the former northern Transvaal (today Limpopo Province) by tracing the life story of Jonas Raubaas Mohaaschwa (Mogashwa), also known as the Master of Kratzenstein. Mohaaschwa's biography was not only published by the Berlin Mission Society in 1920, but in the late twentieth century his legacy as it had lived on orally in the popular memory of the Mamabolo community was also recorded as part of a historical investigation. By extrapolating from Alan Kirkaldy's findings on Black Christian evangelisation of fellow Africans in Vandaland, Mohaaschwa's legacy in the history of the Berlin Missionary Society and in the history of the Mamabolo community is investigated. This is done by following Mohaaschwa's journey from childhood to old age. His lifelong accumulation of indigenous and foreign experience is portrayed and his acceptance of and negotiation with the institutions representing and facilitating African agency in the colonial Transvaal.

Keywords: Berlin Mission, education, Jonas Raubaas Mohaaschwa (Mogashwa) Mamabolo, literacy, northern Transvaal

Jonas Raubaas Mohaaschwa en die bekendstelling van die Christendom aan Mamabololand in die laat negentiende eeu

Hierdie studie ondersoek die rol van inheemse verteenwoordigers in die verspreiding van die Christelike godsdiens in die toenmalige Noord-Transvaal (vandag Limpopoprovinsie) deur die naspeuring van die lewensverhaal van Jonas

1 A summary of this chapter was published in German in the book *Mission: Reflexion – 200 Jahre Berliner Mission* (Berlin, 2024) (ed M Frank) as part of the Berliner Missionswerk's reflection on its two-hundred-year existence in 2024.

Raubaa Mohaaschwa (Mogashwa), ook bekend as die Meester van Kratzenstein. Mohaaschwa se biografie is in 1920 deur die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap gepubliseer, en in die laat twintigste eeu is sy nalatenskap soos wat dit mondelings in die gewilde herinneringe van die Mamabolo-gemeenskap voortgeleef het, as deel van 'n historiese ondersoek opgeteken. Deur afleidings te maak uit Alan Kirkaldy se bevindinge oor swart Christene se evangelisering van mede-Afrikane in Vendaland, word Mohaaschwa se nalatenskap in die geskiedenis van die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap en in die geskiedenis van die Mamabolo-gemeenskap ondersoek. Dit word gedoen aan die hand van Mohaaschwa se lewensreis van sy kinderjare tot sy oudag. Sy lewenslange versameling van inheemse en vreemde ervarings word weergegee en sy aanvaarding van en interaksie met instellings wat die swart agentskap in die koloniale Transvaal verteenwoordig en gefasiliteer het.

Sleutelwoorde: Berlynse sending, onderwys, Jonas Raubaas Mohaaschwa (Mogashwa) Mamabolo, geletterdheid, Noord-Transvaal

Introduction

The life story of Jonas Raubaas Mohaaschwa (more recent spellings Mogashoa and Mogashwa) is key to understand the long relationship between the Berlin Mission and the Mamabolo people – the southern Mankweng and the northern Sekwala factions, who both revere the *kolobe*, or the wild pig, as their totem.² To this day, these communities consider ‘home’ to be the area east of Polokwane, the capital of South Africa’s northern-most province, Limpopo. White settlers started moving into the area as from the late 1830s. Although Britain recognised the independence of these Boer settlers from 1854, this by no means implied that the Boers had effective control over all the African polities. Britain annexed the Boer Republic in 1877 under the pretence of trying to bring efficient colonial administration over the indigenous population. In 1881 the Boers regained their independence from Britain by force, determined to prove their ability to consolidate their power over the African population. In the last two decades of the nineteenth century one

2 MER Mamabolo, “The origin and development of the Mamabolo tribe: A historical perspective of Dikolobe-tša-Bjatladi up to the 1960s” (BA Honours essay, University of the North), 1994, p 1; MT Phala, “How is BaPedi marriage visualised in the Hoffmann and Van Warmelo ethnographic collections?” (MA dissertation, University of Pretoria), 2021, pp 36–47. See National Archives of South Africa (hereafter NASA) Transvaal Archive Sources (hereafter TAB): GOV-1089-(PS50-8-07) Parts 62 and 76 of 1907 for transcriptions and translations of witnesses’ reporting as well as a resultant summary of the history of the “Mamabolo Tribe” as compiled by the Native Location Commission. Also significant is GOV-1086-(PS50-8-07) Part 15, which entails the Native Affairs Commission’s reporting on the “Mamabul location”.

military campaign after the other was launched to drive African communities of the North into demarcated reserves while white settlers were encouraged to occupy the land as farmers.³

These were the circumstances under which the Berlin Mission expanded their work into the Transvaal. They needed cordial relations with both the white government and the leaders of the African polities.⁴ In turn, the African leaders had to navigate the interests of their people through these uncharted waters, while their subjects were not devoid of individual agency either. Christianity had the allure of a new knowledge that could be empowering (and alienating), and the missionaries, the teachers of this knowledge, offered possibilities for following a ‘third way’, sometimes parallel to, sometimes against, mostly through and often beyond, the two conventional responses to colonisation: resistance to or collaboration with the colonial powers.

Much was written in the past few decades to emphasise how mission historiography had previously neglected the role of indigenous agents in spreading Christianity⁵ – in this case, by Africans themselves into the interior of Southern Africa. This study of Raubaas Mohaaschwa builds on Alan Kirkaldy’s work on the role of indigenous agency in the spread of African Christianity in nineteenth-century Vendaland.⁶ As a case study it also aims to contribute to addressing the following problem identified by Stanley Skreslet: how missionary historiography can transcend the confines of earlier master narratives that tended to frame mission studies until recently. Skreslet calls the oldest of these master narratives “promise and fulfilment”, referring to the way the modern missionary movement perceived of itself as a God-inspired vocation to expand from the West to the ‘rest’ of the world. The subsequent master narrative perceived of “mission as a form of colonialism”, and of missionaries as arrogant destroyers of indigenous culture in the vanguard of Western imperial politics and commerce.⁷ While both these master narratives continue to circulate in opposing ideological corners, Skreslet sees potential for

3 JWN Tempelhoff, Die okkupasiestelsel in die Distrik Zoutpansberg 1886–1899, *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis* 60 (Pretoria, 1997), pp 241–266.

4 DW van der Merwe, Die geskiedenis van die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap in Transvaal, 1860–1900, *Argiefjaarboek vir Suid-Afrikaanse Geskiedenis* 46(1), (Pretoria, 1984), pp 1–17.

5 A good example of this scholarship is T Bradford, *Prophetic identities. Indigenous missionaries on British colonial frontiers, 1850–75* (Vancouver, 2012).

6 For a thorough discussion see footnote 41 in A Kirkaldy, The Berlin Missionary Society in southern Africa with particular focus on the Transvaal and Southern Mashonaland, unpublished paper/forthcoming article, 2024.

7 SH Skreslet, *Constructing mission history. Missionary initiative and indigenous agency in the making of world Christianity* (Minneapolis, 2023), pp 2–9.

more nuanced interpretations within a more recent, third interpretative framework, which he calls “the lens of World Christianity”. This master narrative blends the modern missionary movement into a polycentric approach to Christianity, emphasising how, worldwide, the formerly missionized (based mostly in the global South) have taken over the evangelising initiative from the formerly-missionizing (who used to be based mostly in the global North). He phrases the aim with such scholarship as follows:

... to recognise many different sources of leadership and initiative in mission over the past several centuries and not to assume that Western foreign missionaries were able to create mission history on their own with negligible contributions from others.⁸

Raubaas remembered

Raubaas Mohaaschwa, the main character in this study, passed away in the 1920s, by which time Britain had incorporated the whole of South Africa (previous British colonies and Boer republics) into the British Empire. But Mohaaschwa’s memory was kept alive in the social consciousness of the Mamabolo people, all the way through the apartheid era, during which the northern-Sotho-speaking Mamabolo were made part of the Lebowa homeland. As part of the grand apartheid project to keep all facets of black and white South Africans’ human endeavours separate, Lebowa also acquired its own university. In the 1960s the University of the North was established adjacent to Mamabololand. The institution lives on after apartheid as the University of Limpopo, a springboard for the tertiary education of local people and a repository of indigenous knowledge and resultant intellectual production. In 1994, Matopane Enos Richard Mamabolo, a history student at what was then still known as the University of the North, wrote a research paper about the history of his people: “The origin and development of the Mamabolo Tribe: A historical perspective of Dikolobe-tša-Bjatladi up to the 1960s”. Referencing interviews with several local interlocutors as source, he stated as follows:

There is an indication that around 1840 there were already a few white families at Bjatladi [Haenertsburg] where the Mamabolo tribe lived. Among them there was a man called Salmon Marais who was commonly called Oubaas [literally ‘old boss’ – a deeply entrenched form of address mostly exacted from colonised people but also used by whites themselves when referring to older white men]. When a son in the family of Matshemo Mogashoa, one of the reputable warriors of Kgoshi Maribe was born,

8 SH Skreslet, *Constructing mission history...*, p 29.

he named him after Oubaas. Perhaps it was because of the admiration Matshemo had for Marais. The Mamabolo people, unable to pronounce *Oubaas* properly, called the boy Rauwasa. Rauwasa Mogashoa was destined to play a great role in Christianising the Mamabolo people.⁹

Already in 1920, the Berlin Mission had published a book about Raubaas Mohaaschwa. It was a common practice in missionary societies to print life stories of exemplary early African Christians as part of their propaganda aimed at their home audience to encourage local Christians in their perseverance on the path of faith, and to open their purses for the society's activities abroad.¹⁰ The 48-page book on Mohaaschwa was called *Der Meester von Kratzenstein. Missionsgeschichte aus Nordtransvaal*. It was compiled by Carl Hoffmann, the prolific missionary writer who was stationed at Mphome-Kratzenstein from 1904 to 1934. Based on conversations Hoffmann had with Mogaaschwa in his old age, the information in the book shows striking resemblances to the memories the Mamabolo community had kept alive through oral transmission into the 1990s.¹¹ What is offered by the Hoffmann book from 1920 and the oral evidence compiled by Matopane Mamabolo in the 1990s, provide a very informative image of the "Meester" as a first-generation Christian who had played a significant role in the growth of Christianity in northern South Africa. These two texts, the latter in English and the former to this day only available in German, are the major sources for the portrait of Jonas Raubaas Mohaaschwa that follows.¹²

Methodologically, the 1920 publication *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* is thus approached and assessed in this study as a primary source of cultural historical investigation. It is considered as a document which is "active [and] generative" with a history and an itinerary of its own.¹³ It will be illustrated that what was published for a missionizing audience in Germany a century ago to showcase Mohaaschwa as a success story of the Missionary Society and to justify their activities in Africa, can be read against the grain¹⁴ – in search of the African

9 MER Mamabolo, "The origin and development of the Mamabolo tribe...", pp 14–15.

10 R Bodenstein, *Die Schriftenreihen der Berliner Missionsgesellschaft* (Berlin, 1996).

11 As recorded in MER Mamabolo, "The origin and development of the Mamabolo tribe...", pp 1–46.

12 It is likely that more illuminating material from other records compiled by Hoffmann and the missionaries who worked amongst the Mamabolo before him (Karl Knothe, Otto Kahl and Adolf Herbst) may shed even further light on Mohaaschwa. Schulze is currently undertaking this painstaking work for an annotated publication of an English translation of Mohaaschwa's story.

13 AL Stoler, *Along the archival grain: Epistemic anxieties and colonial common sense* (Princeton, 2009), p 1.

14 A Brenner, Walter Benjamin, Walter Johnson, and reading early African-American history "against the grain", Society for US Intellectual History blog, 2018-07-24, <https://s-usih.org/2018/07/>

interlocutor's own intentions, aspirations and choices. And yet, as much as such a reading emphasises Mohaaschwa's own agency, the text is simultaneously also bound to be read, in the words of Ann Laura Stoler, along the archival grain:

What I call "watermarks in colonial history" are indelibly inscribed in past and present. The visibility of watermarks depends on angle and light. Watermarks are embossed on the surface and in the grain. As I use the term here, they denote signatures of a history that neither can be scraped off nor removed without destroying the paper. ...[They] render imperial governance and its disposition in bolder relief.¹⁵

As such, this Berlin Missionary Society publication must also be listened to for what it tells (without spelling it out) about the anxieties and tactics of African people living in a time of encroaching colonial governance. Mohaaschwa cannot not be reconstructed as an antithesis to the European colonial and/or missionary project; his agency was not such that he could have transcended the tone and temperament of his time. He cannot be carved out of the paper on which his story was documented; his agency remained embedded – engrained – in the colonial times he was enveloped in. Even though the accolade of missionary, with its associations of racial superiority at the time, would not have been afforded Mohaaschwa in his own lifetime, he had all the markings of a missionary by the end of his long career: he had become a transnational worker, an agent of cultural change, a vector of modernisation and a conduit of cross-cultural information flow.¹⁶ Yet there was nothing predictable about this trajectory for the son of a Mamabolo warrior.

Warrior-son of a warrior

According to Hoffmann, Raubaas was the son of Matchimo, a brave warrior in the service of the Mamabolo ruler Maribe. His mother was Matchimo's second wife, an orphan refugee from the Thulare people. She managed to find her way across the Olifants River into Mamabolo territory after the Ndebele of Mzilikazi had raided her family home around the 1820s. And so, it came that both Raubaas's parents had in fact been raised by his paternal grandmother, Ngwana Mokunu. Raubaas recalled that he was still living in his father's household at the time when the fight between Kgosi Maribe's sons Mankweng and Sekwala broke out. Matchimo's

[walter-benjamin-walter-johnson-and-reading-early-african-american-history-against-the-grain/](#), viewed 2024-10-30.

15 AL Stoler, *Along the archival grain...*, p 8.

16 SH Skreslet, *Constructing mission history...*, p 1.

family remained loyal to Maribe and Mankweng. While his father participated in the war, Raubaas and his brothers took care of the family's cattle, with clear instructions on where to flee in case the enemy came too close.¹⁷

Hoffmann explained that during the nineteenth century initiation schools for the coming of age of Mamabolo men were only organised with five-year intervals, and not annually as became custom after 1900.¹⁸ For Raubaas it worked out that he was already in his early twenties by the time his opportunity came to go through this rite of passage. Afterwards he was trained as a warrior, distinguishing himself by undertaking some brave errands on behalf of his aging father. After his father's death, Raubaas and his brothers were keen to join the increasing number of young African men who wanted to obtain firearms. Because his elder brother Pagatsi and most of his companions were murdered in Natal while on this sojourn, Raubaas rather joined a group of Mamabolo men who went to Kimberley to work in the diamond mines. After a few months, Raubaas was able to purchase a single barrel rifle along with the lead, gunpowder and other accessories for a little over six pounds. Shortly thereafter he participated in a war during which the Mamabolo crossed the Letsitele River to assist the Letsoalo in an attack against the Bapedi of Sekhukhune.¹⁹

Sojourn and return

Curious about book learning since his return from Kimberley, Raubaas sought the company of Kamela Raphela, a fellow-Mamabolo who had returned from the Cape Colony with some books and an ability to inspire his community with his wisdom. Kamela Raphela taught Raubaas to read, and soon Raubaas started teaching others to read.²⁰ It is not surprising that the title "Meester" commonly used for a schoolteacher in the Transvaal at the time, was given to Raubaas, and stuck. As Hoffmann narrates, it was Raubaas' desire to buy Western clothes to suit his newly acquired Western learning that made him leave on another labour sojourn, this time to Potchefstroom in the south-western Transvaal.²¹ Here he met Berlin Missionary Bruno Köhler,²² who gave him an introduction to the teachings of the

17 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), pp 7–9, 16–17.

18 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 20.

19 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), pp 21–22, 23–26, 26–27, 28–29.

20 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), pp 29–30.

21 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 30.

22 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 30; L Zöllner & JA Heese, *Berlynse Sendelinge in Suid-Afrika en hul nageslag* (Human Sciences Research Council, Institute for Historical Research, 1984), p 201.

Berlin Mission Church. Raubaas then started working for a young white farmer, Philippus Minnaar, who encouraged him to preach to his other farmworkers. While working for Minnaar, Raubaas met Missionary Carl Knothe,²³ who would soon become the Superintendent of the Berlin Mission in the Northern Transvaal. Knothe promised Raubaas that he would visit the Mamabolo in the Woodbush Mountains. Raubaas returned home in anticipation of this visit, in the meanwhile rejoining Kamela Raphele, teaching others from the books he had brought along. The expansion of these activities upset the Mamabola ruler, so that Kamela Raphele and Raubaas Mogaaschwa had to continue their worship sessions clandestinely in the bushes.²⁴

Way made for a German missionary

In 1878 the Berlin Mission sent Otto Kahl to the Mamabolo and their neighbours.²⁵ He found lodgings in the white lumber workers' town in Woodbush. On Sunday, 24 March 1878, Raubaas and five others sought him out and introduced him to the people interested in the Christian teachings. Kahl gave open-air sermons as he travelled through the Woodbush Mountains. He did meet with rulers Mankweng and Dikgale, but without their formal consent, a mission station could not be established on their land.²⁶ By December 1878 Knothe was back in the Woodbush. With the permission of the Berlin Mission's Committee, he had purchased farmland on which the people who wished to learn about the Gospel could come to settle, independent of their rulers and thus free from persecution.²⁷ On Knothe's request the British officials who had taken over the government of the Transvaal from

23 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), pp 30–31; L Zöllner & JA Heese, *Berlynse Sendelinge in Suid-Afrika...*, pp 194–195; DW van der Merwe, *Die geskiedenis van die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap in Transvaal, 1860–1900...*, *Argiefjaarboek...* 46(1), (Pretoria, 1984), p 20.

24 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), pp 31–32.

25 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 35; Kirchliches Archivzentrum Berlin, Archiv des Berliner Missionswerks, Personalakten: BMW 1/3399, Personalien des Missionsar Otto Kahl: Houtbosdorp März 1878.

26 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), pp 36–38.

27 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 42.

The small portion of land called Mphome was government land gifted to the Berlin Mission. See *Nachrichten über unsere neuangelegte Station Mp'hôme (Nord-Transvaal)*, *Berliner Missionsberichte* 21 & 22 of 1879, p 418. According to the information gathered by the Native Affairs Commission in 1907, the Berlin Mission owned not only Mphome, but also adjacent Doornhoek to the west, as well as Bergvlei south of Doornhoek, and the farm Syferfontein further west. Except for the westernmost corner, Syferfontein was given to the Mamabolo people as a Location. By the time of the Commission's investigation the Berlin Mission had still not received compensation for Syferfontein. NASA, TAB, GOV 1089, Report of Native Location Commission on Mamabolo's Location, April 1907, pp 1–19.

the Boers in the previous year, also instructed the Mamabolo and Dikgale rulers to leave the Berlin Mission and their followers in peace.²⁸ Knothe settled on Mphome. He also brought an African helper, Timotheus Sello,²⁹ who was later ordained as pastor. Sello stayed on nearby Leshoane with Mamabolo people who had fled from the persecution of their rulers. Raubaas studied under him, but then moved back to his family while attending baptismal classes with Knothe himself. Raubaas was amongst the first group of people to be baptised on the Mphome Mission Station over Christmas 1879.³⁰

When Knothe established a “Nationalgehilfen-Schule” (National Helper School) at Mphome in 1881, Raubaas was one of the first pupils, subjecting himself not only to learning the Old and the New Testament, but also to “Lesen, Schreiben, Rechnen, Singen, Geigen, Erdkunde”.³¹ Once completed with his studies, Raubaas took charge of the Christian town of Kwara, at the foot of the mountains of the same name, halfway between Mphome and Leshoane.³² Raubaas’s mother and his wife could join him there, and they were eventually also baptised.³³ Raubaas’s missionising was successful. One of his most famous converts was Mankopane (Moses) Rakoma from Khopa in the nearby Wolkberge. Rakoma was a bodyguard of Mamatola, the ruler of the Mamabolo people’s neighbours, the Letsoalo.³⁴ Curious about Christianity, he began to frequent Raubaas’s house, where Raubaas’s mother apparently had a positive influence on him. Rakoma was baptised in 1899. He graduated from the Berlin Mission Seminary at Botshabelo and in 1912 he was ordained as the Berlin Mission Pastor at Mabeleke in the Wolkberge.³⁵ Throughout this time, Raubaas continued preaching and teaching. He welcomed people from Moshutle to the number of inhabitants of Kwara and established a new congregation in Letlakaneng.³⁶

28 It was reported in *Nachrichten über unsere neuangelegte Station Mp’hôme (Nord-Transvaal)*, *Berliner Missionsberichte* 21 & 22 of 1879, p 421 that these instructions were given by “Sir Theophilus” Shepstone himself.

29 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin 1920), p 43; DW van der Merwe, *Die geskiedenis van die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap...*, *Argiefjaarboek...* 46(1), (Pretoria, 1984), pp 63, 106.

30 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 43.

31 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 43 (in translation: reading, writing, arithmetic, singing, playing the violin, geography).

32 By the end of the 1880s Kwara was one of Mphome station’s twelve outstations. Kirchliches Archivzentrum Berlin, Archiv Berliner Missionswerks BMW 1/5569-1, D50476, Station Bericht Mphome 9 Januar 1889.

33 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 44.

34 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 44.

35 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 44.

36 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), pp 44–45.

Crossroads and choices

While Mohaaschwa was fully supporting the Berlin Mission, Kamela Raphele heeded the call of the Mamabolo ruler Nkoshilo to return to Mamabololand along with his Christian followers.³⁷ Nkoshilo's successor Sehlomola converted to Christianity, taking the baptismal name Kaiser, auguring that there was still some recognition for German influence at the time of his conversion. But the fact that the Berlin Mission had purchased land from the Transvaal Republic within the Mamabolo territory did not sit well with Sehlomola. Knothe also experienced resistance from within his own ranks. In 1892 some of the Berlin Mission evangelists submitted a complaint against him.³⁸ He died of a heart attack just days after the verdict of "a possibility of guilt" was delivered by a commission of fellow missionaries unkindly disposed towards him.³⁹ It is unlikely that Mohaaschwa was amongst the accusers, because Knothe's son remembered that "his congregation supported him to the man".⁴⁰

The dissatisfaction with Knothe raised by (at least some) evangelists, adds to the impression that the Berlin Mission was not most successful in ingratiating itself with the Mamabolo community during the 1890s. This was confirmed when, in 1896, with Kamela Raphele's assistance, Sehlomola invited the Free Church of Scotland to establish a church at Monywaeng (Donhill). Under their inspiring Reverend William Mpamba from the Eastern Cape, the church did well and grew within the Mankweng heartland.⁴¹ The followers of Mpamba found an alternative way to Christianity and the founders of the Zion Christian Church, today one of the foremost African Independent Churches in South Africa, also had early brushes with the Berlin Mission Church before going their own way and establishing

37 MER Mamabolo, "The origin and development of the Mamabolo tribe...", pp 27–28.

38 A woman from the local congregation accused Missionary Knothe of indecency towards her. After Knothe's death she confessed that she had made it up. Knothe's innocence was confirmed posthumously only in 1938. See K Poewe, A curious exercise in archival research: Martin Jäckel, the unravelling of his mixed genre novel, and the tragedies it revealed, in U van der Heyden & A Feldtkeller (eds), *Border Crossings. Explorations of an interdisciplinary historian. Festschrift for Irving Hexam* (Stuttgart, 2008), pp 247–250.

39 DW van der Merwe, Die geskiedenis van die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap in Transvaal, 1860–1900..., *Argiefjaarboek...* 46(1), (Pretoria, 1984), p 109; J Richter, *Die Geschiede der Berliner Missionsgesellschaft*, p 271; K Poewe, A curious exercise in archival research..., in U van der Heyden & A Feldtkeller (eds), *Border Crossings...*, pp 246–251.

40 Gerhard Knothe's letter of 31 August 1905 to the Committee of the Berlin Mission as quoted and translated into English by K Poewe, A curious exercise in archival research..., in U van der Heyden & A Feldtkeller (eds), *Border Crossings...*, p 249.

41 MER Mamabolo, "The origin and development of the Mamabolo tribe...", pp 27–28.

headquarters in Moria in the southern part of the Mamabolo heartland.⁴² The Berlin Mission centres in the Woodbush and Wolkberg areas remained concentrated in the enclaves acquired in Knothe's time.

Back in 1878 Knothe's land purchases and the protection offered by the British rulers of the Transvaal gave the Christians in Mamabololand a means to survive, but much had changed by the end of the nineteenth century. The Boers had a much stronger presence in the northern Transvaal by then, and it was in the best interest of the Berlin missionaries to maintain good relations with them.⁴³ In 1899 the British returned to reconquer the Boer Republics. They captured the Transvaal capital Pretoria in 1900 and subsequently the British forces moved north, gaining much support from Africans who saw their arrival as a liberation from the Boers.⁴⁴ The British considered Adolf Herbst, at that time the Berlin missionary at Mphome, as a threat and removed him from the station for internment in Pretoria.⁴⁵ Herbst's family was allowed to stay on in Mamabololand, and Raubaas Mogaaschwa, in those war years the true master of Kratzenstein, supported Mrs Herbst.⁴⁶ Adolf Herbst returned in 1902 but died in an accident in 1904.⁴⁷ Carl Hoffmann took over from him, and soon befriended Raubaas (whom he had already acquainted ten years earlier), as well as the Mamabolo ruler Sehlomola.⁴⁸

Raubaa's role at Mphome-Kratzenstein as an aged man

The Raubaas that Hoffmann got to know as from 1904, was an aging figure in a changing time. When writing his life story in 1920, Hoffmann observed:

Jonas Raubaas Mohaaschwa can certainly no longer keep up with the new requirements. But he is one of the old, proven servants of God, who support the missionary work. The wisdom of the state-certified teachers is a book

42 B Morton, *The Berlin Mission and its religious rivals in the Mamabolo Reserve, 1879–1949*, unpublished paper presented as part of the proceedings of an NIHSS-funded project on the Berlin Mission, 2017–2021, p 6.

43 G Pakendorf, "For there is no power but of God": The Berlin Mission and the challenges of colonial South Africa, *Missionalia* 25(3), 1997, pp 255–273.

44 DW van der Merwe, *Die geskiedenis van die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap in Transvaal, 1860–1900...*, *Argiefjaarboek...* 46(1), (Pretoria, 1984), p 127.

45 DW van der Merwe, *Die geskiedenis van die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap in Transvaal, 1860–1900...*, *Argiefjaarboek...* 46(1), (Pretoria, 1984), p 127.

46 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 3.

47 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 3; L Zöllner & JA Heese, *The Berlin Missionaries in South Africa...*, p 164.

48 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 1; L Zöllner & JA Heese, *The Berlin Missionaries in South Africa...*, p 165; MER Mamabolo, "The origin and development of the Mamabolo tribe...", p 28.

with seven seals to him. But in divine wisdom and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, he surpasses them all by far.⁴⁹

Hoffmann added further examples of Raubaas's shrewdness, such as, how, in the time of anti-German propaganda with the outbreak of World War 1 in 1914, it was Raubaas who convinced the inhabitants of Mphome to continue paying their lease, an income which the Berlin Mission desperately needed while deprived of resources from Germany.⁵⁰ Thereafter Raubaas also played a key role in convincing younger generations of African Christians that they could expect Hoffmann to accommodate their demands for greater autonomy in the administration of their own affairs on mission land.⁵¹ In this way he ameliorated expectations of increasing tension between the Berlin Mission as landowner and African Christians as tenants at a time when Germans were seen as the defeated enemy of the British Empire.⁵²

Conclusion

Raubaas Mogaaschwa was a first-generation African Christian, and a first-generation African literate. He added these accoutrements to his status of a fully initiated, battle-experienced Mamabolo warrior. Mogaaschwa was both traditional and modern, representative of the old and the new. Hoffmann had captured his memories in writing in 1920, but decades after his death, the Mamabolo community remembered his role in the introduction of Christianity to his people within and well beyond their encounter with the Berlin Mission. Mogaaschwa's influence also stretches further. He may not have met the scholarly requirements to be ordained as a Lutheran Pastor, but his knowledge of the history of his part of the world and his people's understanding of the world made rich contributions to Hoffmann's project of harvesting such indigenous knowledge for posterity.

It is important to note that like Africans who were missionized by fellow African evangelists in Mashonaland from the 1860s onwards⁵³ it was Jonas Raubaas

49 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 45. English translation by M Schulze. "Jonas Raubaas Mogaaschwa kann freilich mit den neuen Anforderungen nicht mehr Schritt halten. Aber er ist einer der alten bewährten Gottesknechte, die das Missionswerk stützen. Die Weisheit der staatlich geprüften Lehrer ist ihm ein Buch mit sieben Siegeln. Aber in der göttlichen Weisheit und in der Kenntnis der heiligen Schrift übertrifft er sie alle weit."

50 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p. 46; DW van der Merwe, Die geskiedenis van die Berlynse Sendinggenootskap in Transvaal, 1860–1900..., *Argiefjaarboek...* 46(1), (Pretoria, 1984), p 42.

51 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), pp 46–47.

52 C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein* (Berlin, 1920), p 46.

53 See A Kirkaldy, The Berlin Missionary Society in southern Africa with particular focus on the Transvaal and Southern Mashonaland, unpublished paper/forthcoming article, 2024.

Mohaaschwa's *life circumstances* that took him to environments that exposed him to Christian teachings and teachers. Initially he was not directly subject to evangelisation, but rather his conversion proceeded more organically. Even though not mentioned in his biography written by Hoffmann, Raubaas must have met Christians on the Kimberley diamond diggings in his efforts to purchase a firearm. It seems that Kamela Raphela, his first literacy teacher, who "had heard the message of Jesus Christ ... from missionaries of the independent church"⁵⁴ was the first person to give Raubaas Christian teachings, probably through using the Bible as a vehicle for literacy instruction. When in Potchefstroom, Missionary Köhler's Christian teachings offered him deeper insights compared to what he had received from Kamela Raphela back home. "Only now did Raubaas get to know Jesus Christ, the Crucified and Risen One."⁵⁵ These teachings opened the way for Raubaas' relationship with the farmer Minnaar who promoted Christianity. Upon his return to Mamabololand, despite not yet having been formerly baptised, Raubaas and the prospective Christian converts experienced a sequence of severe persecutions by the Mamabolo ruler and his henchmen,⁵⁶ which had the opposite effect of the ruler's intention, namely that it strengthened the Christian beliefs of Raubaas and his fellow believers. This all happened before the first Berlin missionary, Missionary Kahl, arrived in 1878. Only at the end of 1879, when Raubaas was approximately 39 years old, he was baptized. Raubaas' conversion to Christianity was thus an organic process. His understanding and opinions deepening through events over time, contributed to his making as an indigenous missionary

54 C Hoffmann *Der Meester von Kratzenstein*, (Berlin, 1920), p 29.

55 C Hoffmann *Der Meester von Kratzenstein*, (Berlin, 1920), p 30.

56 Persecutions before Raubaas's baptism, see C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein*, (Berlin, 1920), pp 32, 33, 33–34, 34. Persecutions after Raubaas' baptism, see C Hoffmann, *Der Meester von Kratzenstein*, (Berlin, 1920), pp 39, 40, 41, 43–44.