

THE PERPETUATION OF MYTHS:

A Case Study on 'Tribe' and 'Chief' in South Africa

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Introduction

South Africa's political constitution contains an array of structures designed to subordinate the majority ('black') population to minority ('white') rule. Not the least of these structures are those which pretend to preserve indigenous political heritages. For more than a century the ruling ideology has defined the social organisation of the rural African population in terms of the concepts 'tribe' and 'chief'. The projected image is of territorially discrete African groups content to pursue agricultural livelihoods under the authority of hereditary paternal leaders.

This official and popular conception of rural African social organisation, however, is less valuable as a description of one form of society said to exist in South Africa than as a reflection of one of the ideological tenets of *apartheid*. As ideological resources, the concepts 'tribe' and 'chief' are open to manipulation. It is this argument which is developed in this article with regard to the creation and development of South Africa's 'homelands'. The focus is both on the South African government's efforts to articulate its *apartheid* policies with regard to rural African communities and on the means by which co-opted African leaders have manipulated government conceptualisations about those communities in order to secure positions of authority. Central to this focus is the argument that through examination of the actions of these African leaders we can see how a particular image of rural African politics is perpetuated, and the ways in which this masks the nature of contemporary politics in the 'homelands'.

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These issues are discussed by means of a case study. The case in question is the 'homeland' commonly known as Qwa Qwa, situated at the juncture of Lesotho, Natal and the Orange Free State (see map). Qwa Qwa is a small territory (approximately 22 x 22km) which is the designated 'homeland' for people whom the South African government has categorised as being of 'South Sotho' ethnic origin.

During pre colonial times Qwa Qwa did not exist as a defined territory. It was simply part of the highveld region between the *Mokhokare* (Caledon) and *Lekoa* (Vaal) rivers, inhabited by Sotho-speaking peoples who identified the area in question by a mountain, *Thaba Qwa Qwa*. Following the formation of the Free State Republic in 1854, this locality became a loosely-defined territory known as Witsieshoek. Witsieshoek means literally 'Witsi's corner', an appellation given by Afrikaner settlers in reference to Oetsi, an African chief who had sought refuge there for his following during the wars between the African residents of the highveld and the European colonists. In 1867, this locality was mapped out as an African reserve by the Orange Free State government to accomodate a group of refugees from the Basotho polity lead by Moshoeshoe, who was struggling at that time to secure control of the area later to be known as Lesotho.

The origins of Witsieshoek involved an historical process similar to that in other parts of South Africa which contained rural African communities. The social organisation of Witsieshoek was soon officially conceived in terms of 'tribe' and 'chief'. These concepts became central features of the political model by which the reserve was governed during the colonial period.

The making of 'tribes' and 'chiefs' in Witsieshoek

Witsieshoek became an African reserve as a result of particular economic and political circumstances created by the wars between the colonial settlers and Moshoeshoe's Basotho polity. The official version is that in 1867 the Orange Free State government signed a treaty with Mopeli Mokhachane, a half brother of Moshoeshoe, who was given the right to settle in Witsieshoek with his followers. In terms of the treaty, Witsieshoek was reserved for these Africans, subject to the authority of Mopeli Mokhachane and under the general jurisdiction of the Orange Free State Republic (Eybers 1918: 320,325).

A series of events led to this treaty. Mopeli Mokhachane had led a varied career. During the 1840s he had nominally aligned himself with

Moshoeshoe's efforts to build up a centralised state with Moshoeshoe as the paramount authority. He had, however, continued to lead his own 'chiefdom',¹ which was based at Maboela (near present day Clocolan, O.F.S.) (J.de Mis. Ev. 1849, vol. 24; Damane & Sanders 1974: 96-97). According to oral reports, Mopeli Mokhachane was later forced by incursions of colonial forces to retreat with his following south of the Caledon river. There he joined Moshoeshoe and was placed in the latter's political hierarchy. He was allowed to settle with his people at Mokhetoaneng (in the Berea district of Lesotho today) where he was acknowledged as a chief (*morena*) under Moshoeshoe's third son, Masopha. Mopeli Mokhachane then appears to have become a valued advisor and military commander to Moshoeshoe (J.de Mis. Ev. 1866, vol. 41: 46; Damane & Sanders 1974: 96-97).

By the mid-1860s, however, Mopeli Mokhachane's future was in doubt. Oral tradition asserts that he was in conflict with Moshoeshoe's sons and that this led him to break away from the Basotho fold. Although Mopeli Mokhachane's praise poems (Damane & Sanders 1974) lend credence to this view, it is probable that the general turmoil within the Basotho polity during the 1860s determined the direction which Mopeli Mokhachane took to safeguard himself and his followers.

By 1866 Moshoeshoe's authority was on the wane. He was ailing and his subordinates were wont to act independently against his authority (Thompson 1975: 285-296). The previous year, his close ally Moorosi had negotiated an agreement with the colonial forces whereby there would be no intrusion into his communities as long as he stayed out of the settler conflict with Moshoeshoe. In 1866, colonial forces once again had military control over much of the land used by Moshoeshoe's followers. And during that year his son Molapo, who was chief over many communities in what is now north eastern Lesotho, conceded this land to the Orange Free State in a private treaty (Thompson 1975: 289). Under these pressing conditions, Moshoeshoe was forced to sign the Treaty of Thaba Bosiu later that year. The result of this treaty was that Moshoeshoe retained control

1. 'Chiefdom' is used here to indicate a relatively mobile group, a popular following behind an individual chief, which does not recognise permanent territorial boundaries. Historical sources indicate that this was the political character of pre-colonial African society on the South African highveld during the early 19th century. (Inskeep 1978; Kirby 1971; Legassick 1969; Thompson 1975).

of less than a third of the land which he had fought so long to retain for the use of his followers.

With little left of the land and aspirations of the Basotho polity, Mopeli Mokhachane took the cue from Moorosi and Molapo's actions. He negotiated a treaty with the settler republic in 1867, and during August of that year, having gathered seven hundred followers at Mabilela, he set off to settle in Witsieshoek (J.de Mis. Ev. 1868, vol. 43: 9). Although his followers were in fact no more than refugees of war led by a competent leader with a few trusted advisors, the treaty elevated the identity of this group. Under the jurisdiction of the settler republic, Mopeli Mokhachane was identified as a 'chief' ('kapitein') above a stratum of subordinate chiefs ('onderhoorige kapiteins') of the 'Bakoena tribe' (Eybers 1918: 320,325).

This treaty is an early example of how African political and social organisation on the highveld was codified according to the terms of dominant colonial settlers. Mopeli Mokhachane had become an authority in a settler-defined 'African' political structure. This structure was really a loose interpretation of indigenous pre colonial political hierarchies coloured by the contemporary efforts of Moshoeshoe to build a structured hierarchy of command in the Basotho polity.

By identifying Mopeli Mokhachane and his followers as members of a 'tribe', the settler government reified indigenous means of establishing social identity through the use of genealogical affiliations. The appellation was a colonial construction based upon a European perception that African society was primarily a kin-structured society whose core was the 'chief'. The 'chief' was identified as a paternal authority whose personal leadership stemmed from the kin and affinal ties between his forebears and their followers and between himself and his followers. This was true enough if, like the colonial settlers, one emphasised the way in which individuals were categorized according to their ancestry. Moreover it is not surprising, in the context of Moshoeshoe's efforts to secure dynastic authority over many Sotho communities, that the settlers identified 'chiefs' as personal leaders and African societies as kin-based entities, and defined African groups by reference to the paramount authority of each group.

From such a point of view it was but a short step to identify Mopeli Mokhachane's group as the 'Bakoena tribe'. Mopeli Mokhachane was a descendant of the Bakoena clan, a group which, according to oral tradition, had been the precursor of the various contemporary Sotho

chiefdoms. That affiliation, however, was not in itself of particular significance to the Africans on the highveld. All of Mopeli Mokhachane's agnates within and beyond the Basotho polity shared that affiliation. For the colonial settlers, however, the name provided a means to distinguish Mopeli Mokhachane's refugee group from the Basotho polity and, at the same time, to acknowledge the real and supposed affinity of the leader and his followers to that contemporary parent group and to their legendary origins.

One must suppose also, in the context of the negotiations between Mopeli Mokhachane and the settlers, that the former may well have found it politic to emphasise his genealogical claim to a position of authority, leaving it to the settlers to endorse this status by their interpretation of African society. However that may be, there were pressing economic reasons for Mopeli Mokhachane and his followers to accede to the formation of 'tribes' on the highveld.

The land which which indigenous farmers needed was rapidly coming under the control of colonial settlers and was only being allocated (sparingly) to settler-recognised groups. The devastation of war could be halted and land could be salvaged at the cost of political subordination to colonial government. Indigenous authority within the African communities could be retained at the cost of accepting colonial perceptions about chiefdom political structure. In short, the African population's economy could be revived only by acquiescing to settler conceptions about African society.

Thus the 'Bakoena tribe' and other 'tribes' were born. Of interest here is the creation and settlement of two further 'tribes' in Witsieshoek: the 'Makholokoe' and the 'Batlokoa' (as they were known throughout the colonial period). In 1869, the 'Makholokoe tribe' came to the reserve, followed in 1875 by the 'Batlokoa tribe'. In reality, the identities of these two groups prior to and after their settlement in the reserve were neither distinct nor permanent. As with the case of the 'Bakoena tribe', their identities were ideological constructions rather than apt conceptualisations of African society on the highveld. African and settler alike colluded in the creation of these two 'tribes'.

The pattern of this collusion was complex, as circumstances had changed by the late 1860s. The 'Bakoena tribe' had come about in the context of the turmoil of war and acquiescence of one group of Africans to the demands of a militarily dominant settler population. The late 1860s and early 1870s were equally turbulent years, but for reasons of conflict amongst the colonists over administration of the

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settler republic containing a resident African population. As Keegan (1983) has outlined, the settlers were divided on policy towards the African population: how to remove Africans from settler-claimed land; what conditions to impose upon Africans residing on settler farms (e.g., whether to allow squatting or to impose either sharecropping or labour tenancy agreements); whether to sell land to Africans or to provide official land grants to groups of Africans. As one policy gave way to another, groups of Africans formed, split and on occasion merged as they tried to adapt to the changing conditions of access and tenure to land.

The manner in which the 'Makholokoe' and 'Batlokoa' tribes evolved reflects the political confusion of the time. Prior to their demarcation as 'tribes', these two groups were no more than splinter formations from a number of chiefdoms which had collapsed during the earlier wars of the century. The 'Makholokoe tribe' was a product of the small chiefdom led by chief Oetsi who had previously found refuge in Witsieshoek. According to oral tradition, Oetsi's chiefdom was but one of several affiliated chiefdoms that had evolved from the fission of a large 18th century 'Makholokoe' chiefdom, and whose leaders were all agnate descendants of the 18th century 'Makholokoe' chief. During the 1850s, Oetsi and his followers had been expelled from Witsieshoek by a settler commando. Oetsi fled to the protection of Moshoeshoe but his three sons separated, according to oral tradition, to lead small independent followings in different parts of the Orange Free State. During the 1860s, one son, Hlomise, reportedly moved to the environs of the new settler town of Harrismith. There he appears to have merged with a splinter group from the large Batlokoa chiefdom that had been routed and dispersed by Moshoeshoe in 1853.

Hlomise's followers joined this splinter group which was known at the time by the colonial settlers as the 'Harrismith Tlokoa' (Keegan 1983: 5). During this period of merger, Hlomise and the 'Tlokoa' leader co operated to buy an area of land from the settlers for settlement by their followers. However, 'Makholokoe' historians of today in a village in Qwa Qwa assert that some of Hlomise's people later left their chief to join another descendant splinter group of the old 18th century 'Makholokoe' chiefdom.

This group was led by Phetha, an agnate of Hlomise, who had come to this area to negotiate with Mopeli Mokhachane for land in Witsieshoek. The oral report is that Phetha was turned away by Mopeli Mokhachane, but that he then turned to and won the consent of the republic's government to settle in Witsieshoek. Thus Mopeli

Mokhachane had to make room for Phetha who then brought with him to Witsieshoek his original following and others who deserted from the authority of Hlomise. By securing agreement with the Orange Free State government rather than with Mopeli Mokhachane, Phetha entered the political arena as an entity separate from the 'Bakoena'. If he had secured agreement with Mopeli Mokhachane it is highly probable that he and his people would have been seen by the colonial government as new members of the 'Bakoena tribe', as they would have become residents of the reserve under the patronage of the legally-recognised chief of that reserve. But by approaching the government and contesting for right of access to Witsieshoek, Phetha claimed, perhaps unwittingly, an independent status for his following. The name of the old 18th century 'Makholokoe' chiefdom was thus preserved for official history by the fortuitous actions of a descendant chief leading a somewhat mixed band of refugees.

The creation of the 'Batlokoa tribe' in Witsieshoek was equally complex. After being routed by Moshoeshoe in 1853, the Batlokoa chiefdom split into a number of groups that went their separate ways and settled in different parts of the Cape Colony, Natal and the Orange Free State. Each group retained the name of the parent chiefdom and one of these groups settled in the environs of Harrismith in the Orange Free State. This group of 'Batlokoa' refugees was led by a man by the name of Mota. In 1861 Mota acquired some settler farms to the north of Harrismith for his following (Keegan 1983: 4). However, for reasons that are not clear, he did not move to these farms but departed for Natal with his eldest son and some followers (*ibid.*). In his place, a man by the name of Letika came up from Natal with another splinter group from the original 'Batlokoa' chiefdom, and became recognised by the colonial settlers at Harrismith as the 'Head Chief of the Harrismith Tlokoa' (Keegan 1983: 5).

In 1874, the 'Harrismith Tlokoa' group split after the second son of Mota, Koos Mota, negotiated independently of Letika for land in Witsieshoek. Like Phetha of the 'Makholokoe', Koos Mota was first rejected by Mopeli Mokhachane but then on appeal to the settler government won the right to take a following to the reserve (Commission of Enquiry 1951: 2). And as in the case of Phetha, Koos Mota's independent action brought about the creation of the 'Batlokoa tribe' of Witsieshoek. This 'tribe' was a small group, if oral tradition is to be believed: reportedly it consisted of only about 50 people who left the 'Harrismith Tlokoa' to follow Koos Mota to Witsieshoek.

Upon settlement in Witsieshoek, Phetha's and Koos Mota's followings became subjects of, and participants in developing, a model of government which had already been outlined in Mopeli Mokhachane's 1867 treaty with the Orange Free State republic. What may be called the tribal paradigm of government had begun in Witsieshoek with the creation of the 'Bakoena tribe'. The type of political unit which the colonial government would administer was identified, in effect, as a territorially-based group whose members were supposedly of common ethnic origin and which was defined by reference to a single leader and the latter's genealogical heritage.

This condition was complicated by the arrival of the 'Makholokoe' and 'Batlokoa tribes' in the reserve. Although Phetha and Koos Mota entered the reserve as independent chiefs, the stipulation of the 1867 treaty whereby Mopeli Mokhachane was identified as the senior chief in the reserve was not changed. Accordingly, the civil administration of the entire resident population remained in the hands of Mopeli Mokhachane despite the *de facto* division of those residents into three 'tribes'. In short, the colonial government recognized distinct identities for the followings of Phetha and of Koos Mota, during their respective negotiations for right of settlement in Witsieshoek, but failed to codify that distinction after their settlement in the reserve.

The resulting ambiguity grew as the respective 'tribes' were accommodated in the reserve. It would appear that the colonial government was relatively uninterested in the internal administration of the reserve. The chain of authority had been laid out and as long as peace prevailed there was no need for the colonial authorities to interfere with the actions of the African authorities. Accordingly, it was left to the respective chiefs to work out the details of the local administration.

The first result was that to the initial division of the population into different groups, a further basis for different political identities was added by the settlement of these 'tribes' in different parts of the reserve. The 'Bakoena tribe' occupied the western region, the 'Makholokoe tribe' established a village a few kilometres to the east of the 'Bakoena' villages and the 'Batlokoa tribe' established a single village well away in the eastern section of the reserve. The significance of this development was, however, to be realised only later when the respective chiefs experienced the political and economic implications of confinement to a reserve.

The immediate concern was the structure of authority among and between the various settlements, a matter with which the colonial

government had not been concerned and which was, therefore, open for elaboration by the chiefs. Generally speaking, Mopeli Mokhachane was initially accepted as the paramount authority but differing structures grew up within the different 'tribal' communities. Here, the discussion must confine itself primarily to the 'Bakoena' and 'Batlokoa' communities, since the evidence on the 'Makholokoe' community is questionable.²

Informants from the 'Batlokoa' community agree that Koos Mota initially accepted a status as a chief subordinate to Mopeli Mokhachane and within the hierarchy that the latter developed. Upon settlement in the reserve, Mopeli Mokhachane had established a number of villages to which he appointed kinsmen and non-related male councillors (*matona*) as hereditary chiefs (*marena*). Mopeli Mokhachane mapped out an area of land for each village and the chiefs were empowered to administer this territory. Mopeli Mokhachane's actions indicate that he adapted the principles of government that Moshoeshoe had developed. Moshoeshoe had attempted to establish a political hierarchy of chiefs under his paramount authority, and to entrench this hierarchy by appointing his agnates as chiefs. It is debatable, however, whether Moshoeshoe had in mind the idea of linking the office of chief to defined territories. Nonetheless, the colonial settlers certainly demanded the demarcation of land and the attachment of judicial authority to such land. For Mopeli Mokhachane, a premise of his authority was administrative control of a defined territory. It was in this light not surprising that he extended this principle to his subordinates. Their own authority would depend upon their control over the allocation of natural resources to a population which was confined to a specific territory.

The net effect was that a sound material base was attached to the office of chief and a solid political hierarchy - a chieftainship - was in the making. This development was perhaps influenced by the restrictions imposed on the African authorities by the Orange Free State government in the 1867 treaty. They were excluded from

2. Oral reports state that the 'Makholokoe tribe' remained an autonomous political unit until 1910 when its chief agreed to the incorporation of the 'tribe' and its village into the 'Bakoena tribe'. I do not have information on the circumstances of this development. The oral claim that the 'Makholokoe tribe' remained an autonomous unit until 1910 may be a modern perspective on the part of a group of people who are currently trying to resurrect the status of the 'tribe'. This development is discussed later in this article.

political and administrative matters beyond the reserve and within the reserve they were allowed to concern themselves only with civil matters. To oversee the administration of the reserve and to mediate between the residents and persons beyond the reserve, a *landrost* (magistrate) was appointed to the territory (Eybers 1918: 320,325). After the Anglo-Boer wars, the British colonial government kept this structure, substituting for the *landrost* an 'Additional Native Commissioner'.³

The chieftainship continued to develop generally along the lines laid out by Mopeli Mokhachane. As the reserve's population grew, new villages were established. Chiefs were empowered to appoint hereditary male village headmen (*ramotse*). Like a chief, a village headman not only governed his settlement but also the land which was set aside for use by the residents. The village headman however, was subject to the overriding authority of the relevant chief.

The office of *ramotse* was not a novelty but appears, on the basis of oral historical evidence, to have evolved amongst Sotho chiefdoms during the early 19th century as the people turned more to arable farming and established relatively permanent village sites. As villages became fixed features of the landscape, chiefs appointed individual men, often the founder of a settlement or a descendant agnate, to maintain law and order in the villages. Later the chiefs began to delegate authority to allocate natural resources to those individuals as the need for administration of rights to fields, springs and wood land became more complex.

Initially, the authorities of small hamlets and villages had been known as *phala*, meaning the 'trumpet' or 'whistle' of the chief. Such men only had authority to maintain order in the settlements and to issue directives on behalf of the chief. As the number of settlements grew, individual *phala* were granted the authority to allocate natural resources. Such men then became known as *ramotse*, meaning 'father of the village', a term which highlighted the paternal status of the office bearer and symbolically identified his rights, duties and authority for the care of the village residents.

Following the death of Mopeli Mokhachane during the 1890s, his successor, Ntsane Mopeli, made one significant modification to his predecessor's policy. Ntsane Mopeli realigned the budding chieftain-

3. The Native Reserves Management Ordinance No. 6, *Orange River Colony Government Gazette*, 8 April 1907.

ship in favour of his agnates. He redefined administrative boundaries and created new territories to which he appointed his brothers and sons as hereditary chiefs. On at least one occasion he replaced a non-related chief with a kinsman. The effect of his actions were twofold. First, these actions established a basis for identification of the chieftainship as a lineage structure with attendant implications, a matter which we will discuss shortly. Second, the progression towards a lineage structure within the 'Bakoena' section of the chieftainship served to heighten the differences from the 'Batlokoa' section.

Koos Mota, and later his heir Silas Mota, governed the 'Batlokoa' community with the aid of a principal councillor (*letona leleholo*) and a council of village headmen (*bo-ramotse*), as did all chiefs in the reserve. The difference from the 'Bakoena' section lay in the Motas' rejection of the principle of agnate succession to political office. Contemporary informants do not deny that some of the 'Batlokoa' village headmen were Mota agnates, but they state categorically that hereditary succession to office was not a principle employed by the Motas, except for the position of chief itself.

Codification of a lineage structure of authority contributed to the status and position of the 'Bakoena' paramount chief. And upon that basis, Ntsane Mopeli was able to consolidate the primary status of the 'Bakoena' paramountcy in the reserve's administration. In 1907, for instance, when the colonial government revealed its plans for the economic development of the reserve, Ntsane Mopeli was in a position to take a major role. During that year the Native Reserve Management Ordinance (No. 6, *Orange River Colony Gazette*, 8 April 1907) required the establishment in African reserves of a Board of Management with authority over matters such as taxation, education, road construction and fencing. These terms of reference were not strictly applied in Witsieshoek. The board consisted of eight members of which four were nominees and four were supposed to be elected by the residents of Witsieshoek (Commission of Enquiry 1951: 3). The nominees were the Additional Native Commissioner acting as chairman, another 'European' as vice chairman, the 'Bakoena' paramount chief and another nominee. According to old informants, however, all the 'elected' members were nominees of Ntsane Mopeli. The primary status of the 'Bakoena' paramountcy was further consolidated in 1914 when Ntsane Mopeli became patron of the newly established migrant worker organisation in the reserve, *Leihlo la Sechaba* ('Eye of the Nation').

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The political distinctions between the 'Bakoena' and 'Batlokoa' residents were apparent even to colonial officials. However, the subtleties of the political process were lost on them. For instance, Witsieshoek's Native Commissioner reported to the 1916 Native Land Commission that in the reserve there were "two distinct tribes ... (the) Bakoena and the Batlokoa," both of which had "sub-chiefs". In addition, he stated that:

Before Paulus Mopeli (Mopeli Mokhachane) died he gave certain lands to his brothers and they in turn gave these lands to their headmen, but since his death no land has been given out to these sub-chiefs. His brothers still have control over the land and exercise jurisdiction over it. (Report of the Native Land Commission 1916)

This colonial perspective is very revealing concerning the development of the tribal paradigm in Witsieshoek. The concepts of 'tribe' and 'chief' had become powerful constructs of a political ideology which was developed and shared alike by colonial official and African leader. Consequently, the early colonial perspective that access to and control of a 'tribe' was through its chief was fulfilled. Similarly, as the African leaders grasped the economic and political implications of confinement to a reserve, the political process within the African communities produced political structures in fulfillment of colonialist preconceptions about African society.

The apotheosis of this political dialectic came about in 1925, when Silas Mota rebelled against the authority of the 'Bakoena' paramount chief, Charles Mopeli. The issue which sparked the conflict was Mopeli's demand for tributary labourers from two 'Batlokoa' villages to work in '*masimo ea sechaba*' (literally: 'fields of the nation').⁴ Silas Mota's refusal to sanction Charles Mopeli's command led to a personal quarrel between the two chiefs which became the subject of a court case.

4. These were arable lands which were vested in the name of the paramount chief. They were cultivated by the chief's subjects on his command. The produce was supposed to feed people such as the destitute, emissaries and other visitors to the chief and the chief's own emissaries travelling away on business. This practice evolved from a policy initiated by Moshoeshoe who reserved some arable land for the provisioning of his regiments (see Mohapeloa 1971: 15; Sheddick 1954: 147-151).

The question put before the court was whether Silas Mota had insulted Charles Mopeli by calling the latter '*leqai*' (an uncircumcised man). According to informants, the case was first heard before the Additional Native Commissioner who, professing ignorance of Sotho law, referred the matter to the Harrismith magistrate. The magistrate absolved Silas Mota but the upshot of the dispute was that the Additional Native Commissioner saw in it evidence of a tribal feud and proceeded to demarcate a boundary between the 'Bakoena' and 'Batlokoa tribes'.

The tribal paradigm in Witsieshoek had come of age. The early colonialist demands to separate the African population from 'white' settler society had produced a political model which both matched colonial presumptions about African social organisation, and which was endorsed by the African leaders. There was of course a disjunction in the ideology of 'tribe' and 'chief', between the empirical situation, as understood by the colonialists, and the opportunities the tribal concepts afforded the African leaders in the reserve to further their own ambitions. But beyond this disjunction there was a contradiction between the model and objective economic conditions in the reserve. This contradiction did not take long to come to the surface and it led to a political crisis in the reserve.

The crisis of the tribal paradigm in witsieshoek

The tribal paradigm is a political model which is insular in design. It identifies African political units as discrete, unambiguously-bounded societies and understands each unit by looking downwards and inwards from the perspective of its senior authority (e.g., the paramount chief). The model lends itself to the perception of African society as characteristically parochial in its concerns. Perhaps the most glaring flaw in the model is that its precepts do not take account of the economic realities of a population confined to a small territory.

As the population of Witsieshoek grew, the economic activities of the residents were increasingly at odds with the reserve's political structure. The shortage of arable land had become a problem in the early years of this century (Report of the Native Land Commission 1916) and many residents had become migrant contract workers. Problems over the allocation and use of land were later exacerbated by agricultural betterment schemes which began in the 1930s and which culminated in a popular but unsuccessful rebellion in 1950 (Hirson 1977; Moroney 1976).

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During these years, popular grievances led to the near collapse of the tribal paradigm. As the populace rallied around individual leaders, including chiefs and migrant workers and local community organisations, the authority of the 'Bakoena' chieftainship as a whole crumbled. Popular respect for the 'Bakoena' paramount chief faded as his moderate but unsuccessful negotiations with the colonial authorities were openly challenged by militant chiefs and individuals who rallied under the banner of *Lingangele* ('those who stand firm'). *Lingangele* appears to have been a militant faction formed by some members of *Leihlo la sechaba*, the migrant worker organisation which had developed links with the radical political movement in the wider South African society (Hirson 1977; Lodge 1983: 269-273).⁵

Furthermore, political affiliations were confused by the successful resistance of the 'Batlokoa' tribal area residents. Initially, the wife of the deceased chief, Silas Mota, who was acting as regent, led successful campaigns against livestock culling programs. Later her heir, Wessels Mota, assumed the title of chief and continued successfully to lead the resistance during the 1940s. Throughout their campaigns the 'Batlokoa' leaders relied on the popular legitimacy of the tribal structure in the tribal area to achieve their aims. Those who were prepared to accept the 'betterment' regulations were threatened with expulsion from the tribal area. According to oral reports, livestock culling regulations were also sidestepped by Wessels Mota's persuasion of the colonial authorities that the yearly slaughtering of livestock during initiation ceremonies were, in effect, an indigenous culling programme.

Matters came to a head, however, in 1950 and resulted in a violent clash between militants and the police (Commission of Enquiry 1951; Lodge 1983: 269-273). The Commission of Enquiry that followed the rebellion failed to locate the causes of the unrest, locked as it was into the tribal perspective on African societies (Commission of

5. Lodge (1983) seems to imply that *Leihlo la Sechaba* was revived as the Witsieshoek Vigilance Association during the resistance to the South African state, and that this Association was separate from *Lingangele*. Oral reports from participants in the resistance state that *Leihlo la Sechaba* functioned continuously from 1914 to 1950. These sources state that during the resistance the membership of the organisation was divided over strategy and support for the 'Bakoena' paramount chief, and that this led to the formation of *Lingangele* by militant members of the organisation.

Enquiry 1951). To the Commission, tribal traditions underlay the residents' grievances and the tribal way of life had been disrupted by outside agitators.

In fact, the grievances were based on the economic difficulties produced and threatened by agricultural betterment schemes. Government efforts to restrict herd sizes, to relocate villages away from mountain slopes and to create restricted grazing areas, threatened local income from livestock, portended difficulties in the use of arable land for resited villages, and implied increased government control over trade between residents and wool and mohair traders from Lesotho. In addition, new regulations for the allocation of arable land resulted in many people losing all their fields while others lost sizeable portions (Lodge 1983: 272). As regards the charge of outside agitation, it seems that the populace in fact received little if any assistance from activists of the broader South African political movement (Lodge 1983: 273).

The 'Witsieshoek rebellion' was but part of a groundswell of popular dissent in South Africa which occurred at a time of significant political changes in the country. In 1948, the South African National Party had come to power, and it had begun to revitalise the heritage of racial segregation through its policy of *apartheid*. The 1951 Commission of Enquiry into the rebellion thus came at a time when the National Party government was actively designing and implementing policies that reflected the tribal perspective on the African population. It is therefore not surprising that the commission produced a report which did not lead to any significant reconsideration of the political structure of the reserve. Instead, Witsieshoek was one of the many reserves that became subject to the government's new programme of 'Separate Development'.

'Separate Development' in Witsieshoek

'Separate Development' is a programme which, with regard to the African reserves, has sought to legislate the political development of Africans categorized in terms of 'tribe'. It reflects an essentially dualist perspective on this population. The basis is the tribal paradigm, by which target communities have been identified, onto which the programme seeks to graft a political model of ethnic nationalism. In short, this is a policy which aims to bring together 'tribal' communities perceived to be of common ethnic origin and to unite them into single 'national' ethnic units. The result of this programme is visible today in the existence of 'homelands' such as

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the Transkei and Bophutatswana which the South African government has legislated into existence as nation states of the 'Xhosa' and 'Tswana' ethnic groups respectively.

Witsieshoek was identified in the 1950s as the 'homeland' of the 'South Sotho' people of South Africa who were dispersed in a number of different 'tribes'. In Witsieshoek the focal point of Separate Development legislation has been the 'Bakoena' and 'Batlokoa' tribes who, in time, were expected to merge into one 'South Sotho' national identity. The same legislation identifies certain groups of Africans who live outside the reserve as 'South Sotho' and seeks to encourage them to remove themselves to their designated 'homeland'. With regard to Witsieshoek, the separate development programme has been a relative success for the South African government. In 1974, Witsieshoek became the self-governing 'homeland' known as Basotho Qwa Qwa. Since then the South African government has encouraged co-opted leaders in Qwa Qwa to forge this territory, and Africans elsewhere categorized as 'South Sotho' into an ethnic nation-state.

The years since the 1950s have witnessed power struggles in the reserve in which the South African legislation has been actively manipulated by aspiring politicians, and myths about African political structures have been perpetuated. Moreover, these struggles have highlighted the contradictions inherent in the policy of ethnic nationalism based on the premise of the tribal paradigm.

Separate Development was implemented in Witsieshoek in the same way as in other reserves. The 1951 Bantu Authorities Act which outlined the programme was applied to Witsieshoek in 1953. In terms of this Act, political authority in the reserve was divided between two 'Tribal Authorities', one for each designated 'tribe'. Each Tribal Authority had to include "the chief or headman of the tribe in question and councillors". In Witsieshoek, the 'councillors' were nominees of the 'Bakoena' paramount chief and of the 'Batlokoa' chief. The Tribal Authorities were empowered to administer community affairs within their respective tribal areas. In practice, however, their actions were dictated by the local magistrate, who was the liaison between them and the South African government.

For Wessels Mota, the 'Batlokoa' chief, the Bantu Authorities Act was an opportunity to raise his own status, that of his village headmen and of the 'Batlokoa tribe' in general. The Act simply stated the existence of two tribes in the reserve and thus ignored the historical pre-eminence of the 'Bakoena tribe' in the political history

of the reserve. Since the two Tribal Authorities were of equal standing in the legislation, the 'Batlokoa' authorities were placed on an equal footing with the 'Bakoena' authorities. It is thus not surprising that Wessels mota was the first African authority to accept Separate Development and to form a Tribal Authority (*Rand Daily Mail*, 1.3.74).

In 1957, Proclamation R110 (*Govt Gazette* 1957) redefined the tribal political structure in Witsieshoek. The Proclamation decreed that indigenous political authorities could exist but that official recognition and state salaries would be granted to only two offices, 'chief' and 'headman'. In terms of this Proclamation, the new office of 'chief' was the senior authority of the 'tribe' in question. The new office of 'headman' was effectively a composite office which described any territorial authority under the jurisdiction of the 'chief'. In addition, the Proclamation stated that the occupants of these new offices could only act on their own initiative in respect to 'tribal affairs'.

The effect of this Proclamation was twofold. Firstly, though the Proclamation did not clearly define 'tribal affairs', the implication was that these were any matters which were culturally peculiar to the local community and which did not intrude upon the general administration of the reserve. In effect, the Proclamation served to narrow the scope of authority of the tribal officials.

Secondly, the Proclamation disrupted the indigenous structure of authority. This provided opportunities for political manoeuvring for some of the African authorities. Since local distinctions in rank between *morena emoholo* (paramount chief), *morena* (chief) and *ramotse* (village headman) were not taken into account, the Proclamation required considerable re-organisation of the 'Bakoena' hierarchy. In the 'Bakoena' tribal area there were the paramount chief, 15 locally-recognised chiefs and between 20 and 25 village headmen. The paramount chief automatically took the new position of 'chief' and, in the scramble for official recognition, the locally-recognised chiefs took the position of 'headman'. The existing stratum of locally-recognised village headmen was obscured from official view.

This reorganisation favoured the political ascendancy of the 'Batlokoa' authorities *vis à vis* the 'Bakoena' authorities. The new offices of 'chief' and 'headman' replicated the existing structure in the 'Batlokoa' tribal area, where there was only one chief and beneath him 8 or 9 village headmen. These village headmen took the position of state recognised 'headman' and thus became effectively of equal

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rank to their hitherto superiors, the 'Bakoena' chiefs who had become 'headmen'.

Nonetheless, the Proclamation also provided an opening for the 'Bakoena' paramountcy to initiate a counter to 'Batlokoa' aspirations, albeit on a different tack. This was a strategy which did not attempt to challenge the statutory advantage given to the 'Batlokoa' authorities but to manipulate popular and official beliefs about African society in order to impress upon the government the right of the 'Bakoena' chieftainship to supremacy in the administration of the reserve. An early facet of this strategy lay in stressing the lineage character of the 'Bakoena' hierarchy. The vast majority of officially-recognised officials were Mopeli agnates. This helped the 'Bakoena' paramountcy to propagate the inaccurate impression that political authority in the 'Bakoena tribe' had always been held by a 'royal lineage' of Mopeli agnates. This effort was successful, as indicated by the fact that since the 1950s South African legislation has consistently spoken of the 'Mopeli tribe' and the 'Mopeli Tribal Authority' in place of the term 'Bakoena'.

Separate Development legislation, however, continued to advantage the 'Batlokoa' authorities. The Promotion of Bantu Self Government Act of 1959 gave detailed contents to the ethnic nationalist model. Various reserves were identified with particular ethnic categories. Witsieshoek was identified as the territory of the 'South Sotho' people, the Act also endorsed the creation of a 'Regional Authority' in each reserve. These bodies were to be formed from the senior leadership of the Tribal Authorities and were to be superior to the latter. The creation of the Regional Authorities marked the South African government's intention to grant local African authorities responsibilities beyond 'tribal affairs'. This legislation was applied to Witsieshoek in 1962. Informants report, however, that two Regional Authorities - one in each tribal area - were established, subordinate to an executive committee headed by Wessels Mota.

The formal dictates of Separate Development favoured Wessels Mota. Having parity with the 'Bakoena' authorities at the level of the Tribal Authorities undoubtedly gave him the necessary power to influence the structure of the Regional Authorities. Moreover, it is highly likely that his appointment to the head of the executive of the Regional Authorities was influenced by the political situation in the reserve at the time. The leader of the 'Bakoena tribe' during that period was the wife of the deceased paramount chief, acting as regent for her infant son. Informants note that her appointment was considered unusual at the time, as convention held that only men

could hold political office. In the context of the patriarchal attitudes of the population, Wessels Mota held a personal advantage, as a man and as a chief of a tribe, in securing appointment to the senior administrative post in the reserve.

Both the 1951 and 1959 Acts outlined the next step in the creation of national ethnic entities: the Regional Authorities were to be replaced eventually by a 'Territorial Authority' in each reserve. The Territorial Authority would be a fledgling legislative body and the members of its executive would head newly established government departments. In short, with a Territorial Authority each reserve would acquire a limited form of self government. In 1969, a number of Proclamations (*Govt Gazette* 1969) created the Basotho ba Borwa (South Sotho) Territorial Authority. This body consisted of the 'Bakoena' paramount chief, the 'Batlokoa' chief and twelve councillors, six drawn from each Tribal Authority.

These Proclamations once again assisted Wessels Mota's career, this time to the extent of letting him reach the pinnacle of political authority in Witsieshoek. With equal numbers of 'Bakoena' and 'Batlokoa' councillors on the Territorial Authority and in the context of his experience and personal status in the reserve, Wessels Mota was able to get himself elected 'Chief Councillor'. At that moment Wessels Mota was the most significant political figure in the reserve, overshadowing even the office of the 'Bakoena' paramount chief. Similarly, his 'Batlokoa' subordinates enjoyed authority unparalleled in the history of the 'Batlokoa' tribe. Only two or three 'Batlokoa' village headmen had to be excluded from the Territorial Authority, where they enjoyed equal status to their 'Bakoena' counterparts (who in indigenous terms were their superiors, being *marena* (chiefs)) and were effectively superior to the many other 'Bakoena' chiefs (officially 'headmen').

Obeisance to the tribal paradigm and to its modification by Separate Development had served the 'Batlokoa' authorities well. For the 'Bakoena' authorities, Separate Development had caused considerable disruption and threatened the demise of their longstanding dominance of the political structure of the reserve. Only in the early 1970s did the 'Bakoena' authorities manage to change the course of events. The Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970 and the Bantu Homelands Constitution Act of 1971 paved the way for the transformation of Witsieshoek into Basotho Qwa Qwa. On the basis of these Acts, Proclamation R225 (*Govt Gazette* 1971) converted Witsieshoek's Territorial Authority into a Legislative Assembly. In 1974, Proclamation R203 (*Govt Gazette* 1974) converted Witsieshoek into the

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self-governing territory of Basotho Qwa Qwa and provided for the reconstitution of the Legislative Assembly to include sixty members. These members were to include forty nominated tribal representatives (26 from the 'Mopeli tribe' and 14 from the 'Batlokoa tribe'), and 20 elected representatives of the 'homeland's' citizens. The elected representatives were to be members of political parties which could be formed by 'South Sotho' people and which could contest a number of constituencies that had been created within and beyond Qwa Qwa.⁶

The political ascendance of Wessels Mota and of the 'Batlokoa tribe' was brought to an abrupt halt by these statutes. For the first time South African government policy planners appear to have taken into account the history of Witsieshoek and to have acknowledged 'Bakoena' pre-eminence in that history. Although I do not have detailed information on this matter, I think it likely that the statutory change in favour of the 'Bakoena' authorities would not have occurred unless the South African government had been susceptible to empirical claims that the 'Bakoena tribe' was the 'largest' and 'foremost' tribe in the history of the reserve. On that basis, I would argue that in essence the 'Bakoena' authorities had successfully manipulated two ideological preconceptions of *apartheid*.

The first preconception is that 'tribes' have a primordial attachment to defined territories and to particular traditions. This convention was elaborated to imply that the tribe with the largest territory, and the tribe with the strongest 'traditional' claim to a territory, deserves a prominent status in the political structure of the new 'homeland'. Settlement in the reserve by the 'Bakoena' tribe before any others, the primary status accorded Mopeli Mokhachane by the colonial authorities, and the consistent prominence of the office of the 'Bakoena' paramount chief in the administrative history of the

6. Many people who have been categorised as 'South Sotho' by the South African government did not (and still do not) live in Qwa Qwa. However, in promoting the ethnic nationalist model, the South African government stipulated that these people should be represented in Qwa Qwa's Legislative Assembly. To this end the government demarcated constituencies in a number of Orange Free State towns. Furthermore, the government appropriated a small area, about 60 kms east of Bloemfontein, for the settlement of relocated 'South Sotho' people. This area is known as Onverwacht and was only formally incorporated into Qwa Qwa in 1987. For further information on political developments in the area of Onverwacht see Murray (1981; 1984).

reserve, were empirical claims which could be used to influence the South African government. Furthermore, throughout the Separate Development era, the 'Bakoena' authorities had ensured that their tribal area remained the largest in the reserve. Informants record that during the 1950s the 'Bakoena' authorities appealed successfully for enlargement of their tribal area at the expense of the 'Batlokoa' tribal area. Moreover, eight farms, which were appropriated by the South African government for Witsieshoek in 1964, were incorporated into the 'Bakoena' tribal area (Makhanya 1970: 193).

The second preconception is that kinship in general and lineages in particular, are a fundamental basis of 'tribal' social and political structure. Presentation of an image of a coherent political structure in the 'Bakoena' tribal area in terms of a 'Mopeli lineage' was an astute manoeuvre. On the one hand, the real state of the chieftainship in the 'Bakoena' tribal area virtually defied description given the confusion of roles and statuses amongst the office bearers. On the other hand, presentation of the chieftainship as a solid block of Mopeli agnates played to the South African government's presumptions about the cultural peculiarities of African societies and its professed commitment to take into account ethnic differences.

With regard to the first point, there existed in the 'Bakoena' tribal area the offices of locally-defined *morena emoholo* (paramount chief), *morena* (chief) and *ramotse* (village headman), of state-defined 'chief' and 'headman', and of councillor on the Tribal and Territorial Authorities. The 20-25 village headmen (*ramotse*) still administered their settlements but were not officially-recognised authorities. The 15 chiefs (*morena*) had a high social status locally but as state-defined 'headmen' were relatively lowly in the eyes of the government. The six chiefs who were councillors on the Territorial Authority had effectively more authority and power than their locally-recognised peers. The image of a 'Mopeli lineage' produced for official consumption covered up the actual confusion and provided the structure that the South African government expected to see.

With regard to the second point, ambiguities in the South African government's efforts to implement ethnic nationalism provided the opening for the 'Bakoena' authorities to reassert themselves in the political structure of Witsieshoek. The major ambiguity lay in the inconsistency between the legislative provisions and the underlying ideology of Separate Development. The legislation worked on the premise that all 'tribal' structures were essentially the same, and the primary concern was to transform tribal authorities into government bureaucrats. But the rationale for Separate Development, and of the

institution of ethnic nationalism, is that cultural differences between South Africa's 'tribes' are fundamental factors to be taken into account for the sake of the peaceful political development of South Africa. It was this rationale for Separate Development which the 'Bakoena' authorities latched onto in order to regain their historical pre-dominance in the reserve's administration. By manipulating the South African government's ideological preconceptions about African society, they were able to impress upon the South African government the need to take into account the 'Bakoena heritage', as demonstrated in the 1970s legislation.

While the struggle for power in Witsieshoek revolved around ideology of 'tribe', Separate Development legislation continued on its pragmatic course to create a nation state out of the reserve. The legislation of the 1970s introduced an important constitutional feature, namely political party representation in the Legislative Assembly of the 'homeland'. It was T.K. Mopeli, a close advisor of the 'Bakoena' regent and mentor to her heir,⁷ who seized the initiative to exploit this development.

T.K. Mopeli became involved in Witsieshoek's political development in 1969 when he became a member of the Territorial Authority. Later he established and led the *Dikwankwella* political party and focused his attentions on the first general elections that were to be held in 1975. The result of these elections was a landslide victory for his party, which won 19 of the 20 electoral seats in the Legislative Assembly. As leader of this party and on the basis of his personal status in the Mopeli hierarchy, T.K. Mopeli's election by the Legislative Assembly as 'Chief Minister' of the Qwa Qwa government was inevitable (see *Verbatim Reports* 1975, vol. 9: 3). T.K. Mopeli appointed members of his party and Wessels Mota as Ministers of the six government departments (*Verbatim Reports* 1975, vol. 9: 8).

A new political era in Witsieshoek's history had begun. The territory was firmly on the path towards 'independent' nationhood. Nonetheless, progress towards this end has not been without problems. Notable amongst these problems have been the ambiguities between the broader aims of ethnic nationalism and its tribal premises. The ways in which T.K. Mopeli's government has contended with these issues highlights the ideological character of the concepts of 'tribe' and 'chief'. In short, the last decade has witnessed further changes in

7. H. Robinson, personal communication.

form and content of these concepts but they remain central features of the public image of Qwa Qwa.

'Tribe' and 'chief' in contemporary Qwa Qwa

To date T.K. Mopeli has managed not only to stay in power (the *Dikwankweta* party won convincingly both the 1980 and 1985 elections) but also to streamline Qwa Qwa's tribal structure, and to satisfy Pretoria. In particular, in his government's elaboration of ethnic nationalism, he has successfully retained 'tribe' and 'chief' as cultural exotica for public consumption whilst using the same concepts to outmanoeuvre his local opponents. We will focus on these political issues below, but a significant factor to be considered first is the material condition of the majority of Qwa Qwa's population. Simply put, the Qwa Qwa government's elaboration of ethnic nationalism is on a tangent to the material condition of its citizens, and this divergence has influenced changes in the territory's local institutions.

The small size of Qwa Qwa (approximately 480 sq kms) has become very apparent in recent years as a result of a population explosion in the territory. Since 1970 Qwa Qwa's *de jure* population has increased from 23,860 to an estimated 200,000 in 1977, to 300,000 in 1980, to 500,000 in 1984 (Krause 1982: 2; Niehaus 1984: 13). The majority of this population are immigrants who have been displaced from predominantly rural homes elsewhere in South Africa as a result of government relocation policies and changes in the broader economy of the country (Krause 1982: 10; Robbins 1982; Morris 1976; Sharp 1982).

Throughout the 1970s, the South African government relocated massive numbers of Africans who were deemed not to be living in their appropriate place of origin. Included amongst these people were many who were categorised as 'South Sotho' and who were relocated to Qwa Qwa. In addition, many farmworkers in the Orange Free State were displaced from their farms by increasing mechanisation of South African agriculture during the 1960s (Morris 1976). Established patterns of labour tenancy (e.g. sharecropping) were eroded by this development as farm owners turned to wage labour arrangements coupled with efforts to reduce the size of their work forces.

For those South Sotho-speaking Africans who did not fall within the scope of the government's relocation operations, the choices of where to resettle were limited. The towns and cities were an option but the

costs were high. Not only would a rural dweller have to sell his livestock but also, because of the country's 'pass laws', he could only enter on a migrant work contract or else illegally. Migrant workers were not allowed to bring their families with them. Furthermore, those who entered the towns illegally faced the prospect of harrassment from the police, heavy fines or imprisonment, and possibly deportation to Qwa Qwa. Apart from such persuasion, many people were undoubtedly influenced to settle in Qwa Qwa by an extensive media campaign conducted during the 1970s. This campaign publicised Qwa Qwa as a haven from the insecurities of life in South Africa, as a place where arable and grazing land was abundant and where jobs were plentiful. The reality, however, was very different from this image.

Although the population of Qwa Qwa increased enormously during the 1970s, there was no corresponding development of the economic infrastructure. Much of the arable land was quickly taken over for housing the population and 'villages' have become vast shanty towns. Faced with the population explosion, the Qwa Qwa government has had to enforce strict regulations on the use of natural resources. Permits must be obtained to keep livestock, to obtain a residential site and to use building materials such as clay and reeds. Inevitably, these permits proved available only to those able to offer a gratuity to the chiefs and village headmen. These conditions mean that agriculture now has a place only in history for most residents.

Wage-paying jobs were scarce and remain so. In 1983, for instance, Qwa Qwa's three industrial sites housed 73 firms which employed only 4,382 people, approximately 1% of the *de jure* population (Niehaus 1984: 59-61). In 1984, the average weekly wage for an unskilled factory worker was between R12 and R20 per week, and in some cases, women workers earned as little as R5 per week.⁸ Despair of finding work was highlighted on one occasion in 1984 when men rampaged through an industrial site, chasing women from their work places.

Apart from the industrial sites, there are few other opportunities for wage employment. Qwa Qwa's only town, Phuthaditjhaba, contains few firms. Much of the economic activity in the town is to be seen on the streets. Fruit and vegetable hawkers, mainly women, are a common sight while an inordinately large number of 'Hi-Ace' taxis

8. Niehaus, personal communication. One Rand in real terms equalled one US Dollar.

cruise the roads for fares. The extent of these informal trade activities highlights the local residents' dependence upon the incomes of migrant workers who travel between Qwa Qwa and towns such as Harrismith and Johannesburg.

Despite such conditions, T.K. Mopeli's government thrives because of external support. Apart from direct financial support from the South African government (R 32 million for administration in 1982 according to the *Rand Daily Mail*, 4.4.83), Qwa Qwa supplies cheap labour for many industries in and beyond the territory. Furthermore, a growing number of people are economically dependent upon the 'homeland' administrative machinery. The civil service, for instance, now manages eight government departments and employs a large number of teachers. Qwa Qwa is noted for its large number of schools, and it has been favoured by many parents who want to remove their children from trouble-torn areas in South Africa (Robinson 1983). For many professionally trained Africans, the Qwa Qwa government offers them higher salaries and better jobs than they could normally obtain outside the 'homeland'. Also, the Qwa Qwa government's control over matters such as pensions and trading licences makes it a powerful patron of many residents outside the administrative apparatus.

Ironically, T.K. Mopeli's government has consolidated its position by default of the tribal authorities. Firstly, the legitimacy of these authorities has been tarnished. Their basis of patronage and political control in the form of arable land and other natural resources has been affected by the population explosion. The enormous demand for housing sites and consequent depletion of natural resources became a means for gross exploitation of the immigrants (Bank 1983; Niehaus 1984). For example, immigrants had to pay the notorious 'residence fee' to chiefs and village headmen in order to receive the letter, required by the government ministries, for legitimation of residence and citizenship in the territory. Furthermore, apart from the gratuities paid to these tribal officials for access to natural resources, residents suffered arbitrary fines for misdemeanours against local regulations. In short, the heritage of reciprocal balance between political control and access to and use of natural resources has deteriorated.

Secondly, the tribal authorities operate from an ideological basis which has rapidly become antiquated if not entirely irrelevant. Many residents are migrant wage workers whose economic ties are not with agriculture. They are members of a burgeoning quasi-proletariat whose attentions are more likely to be focused on the growing national worker movement (e.g. The Congress of South African Trade Unions;

the National Union of Miners). The influence of tribal authorities over migrant worker recruitment has declined. Previously, the Tribal Labour recruitment offices in each tribal area handled many official mine contracts and unofficial farm labour requirements of Orange Free State farmers. In the 'Batlokoa' tribal area, for example, Wessels Mota was reportedly instrumental in finding jobs for residents on the construction of a major industrial complex (SASOL) in South Africa during the 1960s and early 1970s. This complex, however, has since been completed. Nowadays the vast majority of work seekers go directly to Phuthaditjhaba, to the THEBA mine recruitment office (the main mine labour recruitment organisation in South Africa) or to obtain unofficial contracts with farmers who stop in the town when they need seasonal labour.

Professional workers in Qwa Qwa have likewise moved beyond the orbit of the tribal authorities. Most of these professionals reside in Phuthaditjhaba, which is administered by an elected town council, and most of them are integrated into the civil service structure. As regards the very poor with nothing but their homes, the agricultural basis of the tribal officials authority is irrelevant.

T.K. Mopeli has whittled away the capacity of the Tribal Authorities to be effective local government agents. Since 1975 the Qwa Qwa government has given only token budget funding to the Tribal Authorities. It was noted in the Legislative Assembly, during 1979, that the Tribal Authorities always ran out of funds by the middle of the year (*Verbatim Reports* 1979, vol. 119: 188,192). In 1980, T.K. Mopeli conceded that the 'Mopeli' and the 'Batlokoa' Tribal Authorities received respectively only R20,000 and R10,000 for that year (*Verbatim Reports* 1980, vol. 23: 52-53, 62-63).

Although the tribal authorities have become economically ineffectual, the ideology of 'tribe' and 'chief' remains a potentially significant political force in Qwa Qwa. Accordingly, he has had to contend with the tribal authorities on a political level. In particular, he has had to contend with the re-appearance of the 'Makhokokoe tribe'. This is a group which was formed during the late 1960s with the aim of recognition as a rightful constituent of Witsieshoek. Its members aspire to a grant of a tribal area in the territory and to positions of political authority in the 'homeland' government structure.

Initially, the group appears to have met with little success. During the early 1970s it was ineffectual due to an internal dispute over leadership. During the mid 1970s, the dispute was resolved and the group's locally-recognised chief, Letsitsa Moloji, attempted, according

to oral reports, to live in Qwa Qwa. However, for reasons that are not clear, informants record that in spite of tacit support from Wessels Mota, Letsitsa Moloji was forced out of Qwa Qwa by T.K. Mopeli's agents.

Since then, the 'Makholokoe Tribe' has reasserted itself as a well-organised pressure group. The 'tribe' is represented by an active executive committee whose members, though dispersed,⁹ have resolutely pursued their aims. During the late 1970s, this group received recognition in principle as a 'tribe' from the South African government. On the basis of this old ploy from colonial times, the 'tribe' has renewed its efforts to gain entry into Qwa Qwa. In 1982-83 it received state support to conduct a census survey in the Orange Free State to find 'Makholokoe' people. By 1984, Letsitsa Moloji had appointed a number of *ramotse* (village headmen) as authorities amongst this population. In recent years, members of the executive committee have conducted considerable historical research on the 'Makholokoe' with the apparent aim of finding support for its claims.

Faced with this challenge, T.K. Mopeli could hardly deny in public the legitimacy of the group's aspirations, given the tribal premises of Separate development, his own acceptance of that programme and the historical record of a 'Makholokoe' presence in Witsieshoek. His initial response was to turn the rationale of Separate Development against the 'Makholokoe tribe'. As he remarked in one of his speeches (*Verbatim Reports* 1979, vol. 19: 176-177):

Our government is prepared to assist them [the 'Makholokoe tribe'] in every way possible and to help them build their nation and maintain their culture.... We have now commenced discussions ...in an attempt to acquire land for them and have requested that the Makgolokwes [sic] should be counted and that land be granted to them according to their numbers. There are some Basotho leaders who are causing confusion in an effort to prevent us from achieving this goal ... and who encourage the Makgolokwe people to come here and demand the land which they say belongs to the Wetsis [sic: reference to chief Oetsi of the colonial period] and to ignore their present chiefs. I would like to emphasise the fact that this will not happen. We have two chiefs in the Qwa Qwa homeland and that

9. Some members live in Qwa Qwa, the chief lives in Clarens, O.F.S., and the Secretary lives in Orlando, a Johannesburg township.

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is how it will remain.... I informed the Makgolokwes [those resident in Qwa Qwa] that if they wish to take part in the proposed census, which will affect them directly, they should advise their chiefs [the 'Bakoena' and 'Batlokoa' chiefs] accordingly and tell them that they would prefer to come under the authority of the new chief [Letsitsa Molo] so they may be removed from this homeland and resettled in their new homeland.

This rhetoric has not deterred the 'Makholokoe tribe'. Nonetheless, the tribal paradigm is no longer what it used to be, and tactics from the colonial period are unlikely to produce the desired result. The reasons for this lie in the way T.K. Mopeli has redefined Qwa Qwa's tribal structure. He has moved to shift the bases of real power away from this structure while keeping the trappings intact. The result is a political trap for opponents such as the 'Makholokoe tribe'. In short, it is important to T.K. Mopeli that this group continue to base its claims in terms of 'tribe' and 'chief', and that he answer them in the same language. When the moment of compromise arrives, the 'Makholokoe tribe' will find that a grant of a tribal area and acknowledged tribal status in Qwa Qwa's political structure will be a hindrance, rather than an asset, to their aspirations to political authority in the territory.

The instrument which T.K. Mopeli has used is the Qwa Qwa Administration of Authorities Act of 1983. This Act contains many concepts which have been familiar items in the political history of the territory, and on the surface, there is nothing extraordinary about the image of society in Qwa Qwa and of the chieftainship which this Act projects. Firstly, the Act identifies two 'tribal areas' in Qwa Qwa in which there are two tribes, the 'Bathlokwa tribe' (sic) and the 'Mopeli tribe'. Secondly, the Act identifies in both tribal areas an office of 'Paramount Chief' which is defined as the supreme local authority of the respective tribal areas. These two stipulations provide the rationale for the Qwa Qwa government's subdivision of the territory, in the wake of the Act, into ten districts and its appointment of a 'chief' to each district. As the 'Mopeli' tribal area is larger than the 'Batlokoa' tribal area, the former is divided into seven districts and the latter into three. The office of paramount chief in each tribal area serves to define the general structure of authority. The district chiefs form a stratum beneath their respective paramount chiefs. Within each district, the chiefs are superordinate to a stratum of 'village headmen'.

The main body of the Act provides the administrative regulations which govern these authorities. In each tribal area, the paramount chief has to form a 'Tribal Council' consisting of himself and 'Councillors' nominated by him. The Act defines 'councillors' as persons "who in accordance with the relevant laws and customs of the tribe are recognised as councillors". In practice, this means that the councillors are the chiefs and village headmen of the tribal area and any other person whom the paramount chief cares to nominate.

The Act describes the two Tribal Councils as the main institutions of 'tribal government'. They are to 'administer the affairs of the tribe(s) in general'. What constitutes 'tribal affairs' is subject to the decision of the Chief Minister of the Qwa Qwa government. Thereafter, the Tribal Councils may administer these affairs as they see fit. At present, 'tribal affairs' include a range of matters, from land administration to flora and fauna conservation to local health welfare. On matters such as education, building, pensions and trading licences, they may act only in an advisory capacity to Qwa Qwa government ministries.

The Tribal Councils are really the old Tribal Authorities under a new name, and people commonly call them by the old name. The new district chiefs have emulated the Tribal Councils by forming councils of their own. These councils consist of the village headmen of the relevant district and any other person whom the chief cares to nominate. The Act, however, does nothing to enhance the status of these tribal authorities. The Tribal Councils, like the old Tribal Authorities, cannot be effective local government bodies given the very limited budgets with which they operate. Similarly, given that the new district chiefs fall under the jurisdiction of the Tribal Councils, it is unlikely that they will be any more capable than their governing bodies. Moreover, the tribal authorities are clearly subordinate to and under the control of the Qwa Qwa government's Chief Minister.

What the Act does is recreate a chieftainship in the image of the 'Bakoena' hierarchy prior to state interference in 1957. Nevertheless, even though the local distinctions in rank (i.e. *morena emoholo*, *morena*, *ramotse*) are now formally-recognised, the content of the structure is novel. Ironically, the new dispensation has created for the first time a fully fledged three tier chieftainship in the 'Batlokoa' tribal area. Wessels Mota became a *de jure* paramount chief and, following the division of this area into three districts, he was required to appoint three residents as 'chiefs' above the established stratum of village headmen. His choice of individuals to be chiefs echoed

genealogical 'tradition': he appointed his wife, his son and his senior advisor.

In the 'Mopeli tribal area', the restriction of appointments to ten district chiefs allowed only a vestige of the colonial structure to stay intact. Moreover, it allowed T.K. Mopeli to reduce the standing of some locally-recognised chiefs and to patronise favoured individuals. For example, of the 15 locally-recognised chiefs in the 'Mopeli tribal area', only seven were retained in the new structure. Five of these chiefs were Mopeli agnates. Only one of the four locally-recognised chiefs who were not Mopeli agnates was recognised under the new dispensation. This single chief is N. Mohale who is Minister of Finance in Qwa Qwa, and whose predecessors had always maintained close links with the Mopeli paramount chief.¹⁰ Significantly, T.K. Mopeli ignored chief P. Moloi, who is commonly proclaimed as the *morena* of the 'Makholokoe' community in Qwa Qwa, as had been his predecessors since 1869. In contrast to this development, the outstanding vacancy was filled by M. Mooko, a man who was not a locally-recognised chief but who was a confidant of the Mopeli paramount chief and who had been a confidant of the latter's mother during her regency.

The village headmen, apart from being officially-recognised again, were virtually ignored in the 1983 Act and taken for granted in the new chieftainship. Their status continues to be eroded. On the one hand, some of the new chiefs appear to have replaced some of the hereditary village headmen with businessmen and other individuals of their choice. On the other hand, the village headmen are no longer commonly called *ramotse*. Instead they are often referred to as *ramohlangoana*, meaning literally 'father of a small settlement'.

10. N. Mohale is a descendant of Mohale Mokhachane, a half brother of Mopeli Mokhachane. During the 19th century, Mopeli Mokhachane married by levirate a wife of his deceased half brother. Mohale Mokhachane's son and heir, Molomo, married Mopeli Mokhachane's sister Nyebe. The eldest son of this union, Hlajoane Mohale, was later taken by Mopeli Mokhachane to Witsieshoek in order to resolve a succession dispute amongst Mohale agnates. Hlajoane was appointed by Mopeli Mokhachane as a chief in Witsieshoek and also married one of the latter's daughters. Later an agnate successor (Hlajoane II) to Hlajoane married the eldest daughter of the 'Bakoena' paramount chief, Ntsane Mopeli. Similarly, in the next generation a daughter (Mahlapi) of Hlajoane II married the 'Bakoena' paramount chief, Ntsane Mopeli II.

Ramohlongoana is a synonym for *phala*, mentioned earlier. Like *phala*, the political connotation of this term is an appointee of a chief responsible for keeping order in a settlement: he communicates the decisions of the chief to villagers and has a right to adjudicate the distribution of thatching grass used by villagers. In popular usage the term *ramohlongoana* has developed a slightly derogatory meaning of 'chief's messenger'. As the name implies, the village headmen are seen as minor functionaries in the service of chiefs rather than as 'fathers of the villages' as their status as *ramotse* should imply. The popular derogation of the village headmen is probably due both to the exploitation which these officials practices on villagers during the population explosion in Qwa Qwa and to the fact that much of the territory presided over by these officials is now covered by housing so that they have only settlements to administer.

Other provisions in the 1983 Act suggest that the tribal structure is significant in the local administration of Qwa Qwa, but the impression is misleading. For example the Act requires the formation of 'Community Councils' which have similar functions to those of the Tribal Councils. The Act, however, does not define a 'community' adequately: it can be a group of villagers, one or more villages or even a district. However this may be, the Community Council must include the relevant chief and village headmen. The only variation from the definition of 'councillor' in connection with the Tribal Councils is that adult male members of a 'community' are allowed to elect an unspecified number of councillors and the chairman of the Community Council. This apparent proviso for popular participation in local government is, however, of little value to most of Qwa Qwa's residents: the election of councillors is restricted to men, ignoring the fact that most men are absent on migrant work contracts and excluding the resident majority of women.

Equally problematic is the Act's requirement for the formation of a 'Council of Chiefs' in each tribal area. As the name suggests, the nuclei of these bodies are the chiefs but in addition a council must include two village headmen and the chairmen of the Community Councils in the area. These 'councils of chiefs' are supposed to regulate the appointment and duties of chiefs and village headmen. Since the Act stipulates that these councils can act only in an advisory capacity to Qwa Qwa's government ministries, and given the control of the chiefs by the Chief Minister, the councils can be of only minimal effectiveness.

As indicated above, the 1983 Act narrowly defined the scope of authority of the tribal structure, but there remained the potentially

powerful bloc of tribal representatives in the Legislative Assembly. T.K. Mopeli began to tackle this issue in 1983. During that year his government decided to increase the number of representatives in the Assembly from 60 to 80 (*Verbatim Reports* 1983, vol 29: 162-163). The number of tribal representatives (40) stayed the same but the number of elected representatives was increased to 34 and the Act provided for 6 representatives nominated by the government.

During the same year, T.K. Mopeli outlined a new map of electoral constituencies which would be used for the 1985 elections.¹¹ Three constituencies were mapped out in Qwa Qwa (*Verbatim Reports* 1983, vol 29: 162-165). Since these constituencies cut across the district and tribal area boundaries, the door was open for political parties to compete against the Tribal Councils for the political support of the residents. New constituencies were created outside Qwa Qwa¹², notably amongst the rural population categorised as 'South Sotho'. These 'farm constituencies' were designed to draw in people who lived on farms in the Orange Free State, the Transvaal and the Cape Province (*Verbatim Reports* 1983, vol 29: 164). Again, such constituencies effectively challenged the authority of the resident tribal authorities, the local village headmen, and directed the attention of the residents to a new 'national' government.

Through these electoral changes and with the 1983 Act, T.K. Mopeli has sealed the fate of the tribal structure in Qwa Qwa. He has played an astute political game. On the one hand, he has closed off openings for people to use the tribal structure as a means to political power and thus to challenging his authority. The 'Makholokoe tribe' is a case in point. On the other hand, T.K. Mopeli has satisfied his masters in Pretoria by his promotion of ethnic nationalism. In particular, he has preserved the image of Qwa Qwa as a tribal society and hence, the supposed existence of significant cultural peculiarities that help to legitimate the South African government's *apartheid* policy.

The tribal structure, and the retention of an ideology of 'tribe' and 'chief' for public consumption, is just a mask that hides the real political character of Qwa Qwa. T.K. Mopeli has created a political structure which nominally allows for a form of parliamentary

11. The 1983 decisions of the Legislative Assembly were implemented without any changes according to the Minister of Education in Qwa Qwa (interview, July 1985). I have not confirmed this information.

12. See footnote 6.

democracy to operate in Qwa Qwa. In practice this is not the case for three basic reasons. Firstly, the 'homeland' system is an imposition on a recalcitrant population. There is no massive popular support for this system which, rather than improving people's quality of life, has caused considerable dislocation and hardship for many people.

Secondly, any political party which seeks to challenge T.K. Mopeli's government faces considerable difficulties in attracting popular support and persuading people that it is a better alternative to the *Dikwankwetha* party. There is simply not much scope for alternative political manifestoes whilst Pretoria holds the political strings and strives, above all else, to implement its own political agenda upon South Africa. Coupled to this is the fact that T.K. Mopeli has compounded the difficulties facing opposition parties by the changes he has made to the electoral constituencies. Most of the electoral constituencies are outside Qwa Qwa, and thus an opposition party would somehow have to win a majority of seats amongst a population whose location indicates its lack of interest in Qwa Qwa.

Thirdly, the political economy of Qwa Qwa operates essentially upon a basis of patronage. T.K. Mopeli's government holds the power to affect directly the lives of most of Qwa Qwa's residents: it is the territory's major employer and it controls industrial development, the distribution of pensions and access to health care. For example, in 1983 the Qwa Qwa government demanded a 'Development Tax' of R10 from every adult citizen. One means by which the government overcame resistance to this tax was by refusing health care at the government hospital to those individuals who could not show that they had paid this tax. In short, having got into power, T.K. Mopeli has all the means and resources to hold his position.

Conclusion

'Tribe' and 'chief' are significant concepts in the political history of Witsieshoek/Qwa Qwa. They do not describe a form of society in the territory. They are ideological resources which have served both the South African state and co-opted local African leaders in the territory. The political uses to which these concepts have been put have several times resulted in their modification, in form and content.

The concepts initially served the colonial governments of the mid-19th century to categorise groups of African refugees from the

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settler wars with Moshoeshoe's Basotho polity. The content of the concepts was shaped by the African need for land, the colonialists' control of the highveld and their propensity to allocate territories to recognisable African groups. In the case of Witsieshoek, the concept of 'tribe' identified three groups of refugees who formed themselves into distinct groups and who negotiated successfully for land on that basis. The concept of 'chief' identified the individual leaders of these groups whose indigenous status was both affirmed by their successful negotiations and endorsed by colonial identification and government of each group by reference to their respective leaders.

In coming to terms with the political and economic implications of residence in a defined territory under colonial domination, African chiefs participated in a dialectical relationship with the colonial overlords. It was that relationship which defined the parameters of a model of government, the tribal paradigm. 'Tribe', as a category based upon group residence in a defined territory, was elaborated to the extent of the division of Witsieshoek into two distinct tribal areas. 'Chief', as a political office based upon the control of access to and use of land, was elaborated into a hierarchy of political authority: a paramount chief of the tribal area as a whole and subordinate authorities of territorial subdivisions of that area. This hierarchy, the chieftainship, was further elaborated by the 'Bakoena' paramount chief's adaptation of Moshoeshoe's kinship-based model of authority. The result was a hierarchy in the 'Bakoena' tribal area which resembled a lineage structure of authority.

The agricultural economic base and the colonial limitation of African authority to community affairs within the reserve influenced the creation of an insular model of government. Out of this came the colonial perception of tribal society as parochial in its concerns. The breakdown of the agricultural economy in the reserve highlighted the artificiality of this perspective and strained popular legitimacy of the tribal paradigm.

Following the implementation of *apartheid* policies in the 1950s, the concepts of 'tribe' and 'chief' were transformed. Separate Development legislation employed a simplistic conception of the tribal model. This coincided with the structure of authority in the 'Batlokoa' tribal area. As a result, the 'Batlokoa' authorities accommodated easily to the legislators' intention to reduce the political significance of tribal offices and to transform the incumbents into civil servants of a modern state bureaucracy. The legislation promised a shift in the balance of power from the historically dominant 'Bakoena' authorities towards the historically subordinate 'Batlokoa' authorities.

In reaction to this challenge, the 'Bakoena' authorities manipulated two conventions about African society: first, that 'tribes' have a primordial attachment to defined territories and to particular traditions; and second, that kinship in general and lineages in particular are a fundamental basis of African social structure. Such manipulation impressed upon the South African government the historical eminence of the 'Bakoena' authorities in Witsieshoek. In turn, this led to legislation which re-defined the political structure of the new 'homeland' in favour of the 'Bakoena' authorities.

The concepts of 'tribe' and 'chief' have once again been transformed in the most recent political developments in Qwa Qwa. They have become economically irrelevant to the majority of Qwa Qwa's residents. Given the rate of population growth in the territory, the collapse of the agricultural economy and the longstanding need for wage employment, the material basis of these concepts has disappeared. Nevertheless, T.K. Mopeli's government has codified the tribal structure in the image of its supposed colonial form, but tribal institutions retain only a vestige of their former content.

'Tribe' and 'chief', however, remain significant as ideological constructs to serve both the South African state and T.K. Mopeli's hold over the Qwa Qwa administration. Within Qwa Qwa, T.K. Mopeli has used the concepts to channel opposition, for those people who would use the tribal structure to gain political power, into political insignificance. For the South African government, retention of these concepts serves its efforts to legitimate *apartheid* and to channel rural African politics along prescribed lines. In short, the presentation of Qwa Qwa as a 'tribal' society masks the nature of political process in the territory in particular, and of the 'homeland' system in general. That perhaps, is the most important function of the concepts for a South African government committed to justification of *apartheid*.

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