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‘Women and emancipatory politics in the former Lebowa bantustan of South Africa, 1940s to present’

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Social Science and Humanities of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa, for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (History).

11 April 2023

Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is solely my own work and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it at any university for a degree. The copyright of this thesis rests with the author.

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Sarah Lynn Bruchhausen

11 April 2023

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Abstract

This thesis provides a gendered and subaltern historical perspective of women's emancipatory politics in the former Lebowa bantustan of South Africa from the late-colonial period of segregation (1940s) to the post-apartheid present (2022). It begins with an examination of the popular uprisings during the period of the 1940s to the early-1960s in which black women championed radical insurgent struggles against colonial-cum-apartheid processes of land dispossession, enclosure of the commons, excessive taxation, and the criminalisation of women's subsistence lifestyles. Attention then shifts to the intensely repressive period in the aftermath of these rural uprisings and the making of the Lebowa bantustan during the 1960s and 1970s. In this period, women's emancipatory praxes were drastically constrained and their political resistance took on more diffused and less organised forms. A popular expression of emancipatory politics during this period was the creation of different local women-made grassroots organisations engaged in collective praxes of care-giving, mutual aid, and community development, aimed at creating life-affirming projects and dignified ways of living, under harsh socio-spatial and political constraints. These rural women's grassroots organisations developed in response to the growing crisis of social reproduction in Lebowa's villages during the 1970s and were eclipsed by more militant modes of resistance in the insurrectionary climate of the 1980s. A younger generation of women, involved as comrades in the youth and labour movements, came to the fore as protagonists of the popular struggle for freedom in Lebowa, and engaged in certain aspects of the longer history of black women's struggles for self-determination and rights to the commons in rural South Africa. Lastly, this thesis considers the 1994 transition to democracy and the subsequent post-apartheid era in today's Limpopo Province. Using the Makotse Women's Club as a case study, it argues that grassroots women's organisations presently engaged in the praxis of a radical politics of care in villages of the former Lebowa bantustan are the most recent expression of an emancipatory mode of politics in rural South Africa with a long and rich history that stretches back to the radical uprisings of the mid-twentieth century. Overall, the history presented in this thesis suggests that the creation of autonomous spaces of the common and the defence of subsistence lifestyles has been, and continues to be, a defining characteristic of rural women's emancipatory politics in the former bantustans of South Africa.

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List of Acronyms

AbM	Abahlali baseMjondolo
AFCWU	African Food and Canning Workers' Union
ANC	African National Congress
APF	Anti-Privatisation Forum
AZASM	Azanian Students' Movement
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
AZASO	Azanian Students' Organisation
BAD	Bantu Administration Department
BAC	Bantu Affairs Commissioner
BASA	Black Academic Staff Association
BAYO	Batlokwa Youth Organisation
BC	Black Consciousness
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BLA	Black Lawyers' Association
BLAGWU	Black General Workers' Union
CAB	Community Advice Bureau
CBAC	Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner
CCAWUSA	Commercial Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa
CNDCs	Community Nutritional Distribution Centres
Contralesa	Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
CP	Conservative Party
EPWP	Extended Public Works Programme
FOSATU	Federation of South African Trade Unions
GWU	General Workers' Union
HARWU	Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union
LAC	Lebowa Agricultural Corporation
LDC	Lebowa Development Corporation
LTC	Lebowa Transport Company

MAFEYCO	Mafefe Youth Congress
MAJYCO	Maja Youth Congress
MAO	Mokerong Advice Office
MAYCO	Manganeng Youth Congress
MAYCO	Mankweng Youth Congress
MAYO	Mahwelereng Youth Organisation
MAWU	Metal and Allied Workers' Union
MPHAEYCO	Mphahlele Youth Congress
MWC	Makotse Women's Club
NAD	Native Affairs Department
NP	National Party
NTAO	Northern Transvaal Advice Office
NTCC	Northern Transvaal Council of Churches
NOTPECO	Northern Transvaal People's Congress
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PFDC	Provincial Food Distribution Centre
RAWU	Retail and Allied Workers' Union
SACCAWU	South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADF	South African Defence Force
SANT	South African Native Trust
SASM	South African Students' Movement
SASO	South African Students' Organisation
SAP	South African Police
SAYCO	South African Youth Congress
SEYO	Sekhukhune Youth Organisation
SEYCO	Seshego Youth Congress
SRWA	Sekhukhune Rural Women's Association
STEYCO	Steelpoort Youth Congress
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
UDF	United Democratic Front

UMMAWOSA	United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa
WASA	Writers' Association of South Africa
ZEYCO	Zebediela Youth Congress

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The South African pseudo-states known as bantustans or homelands were the backbone of separate development and the migrant labour system – two foundational pillars of the apartheid regime. The popular struggles for freedom which took place within the villages and townships of the bantustans were not only a decisive factor in their ultimate dissolution in 1994; they, like the bantustan structures themselves, have also variously shaped the nature of the post-apartheid political order. This is especially the case in terms of local government and everyday life in rural areas where around fifty percent of South Africans continue to reside – the majority of whom are poor and working class or unemployed black women.[1] Despite a robust body of academic literature on the bantustans and their legacies, however, South African historiography and the historiography of the national liberation struggle in particular, has been overwhelmingly urban-centric in its analysis of black politics in the apartheid era and in contemporary South Africa.[2] This is true even of histories written from a feminist or gender perspective which, not without exception, have tended to focus more on the experiences of women in urban contexts than rural ones, despite the fact that during apartheid the majority of women lived and struggled for freedom in the rural bantustans.[3]

Over the last decade in the South African academy there has been a renewed interest in the histories of the bantustans and their significance for present day South African politics and society. A number of scholars – particularly from the disciplines of Anthropology and History – have engaged directly with questions pertaining to the present realities unfolding in

[1] Thembela Kepe and Lungisile Ntsebeza, eds., *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2012), p. 5.

[2] For an overview and critique of the epistemological marginalisation of the rural in contemporary South African knowledge production see, Kepe and Ntsebeza, *Rural Resistance*, pp. 4-9.

[3] See for example, Lato Ntwape, 'A historiography of South African women's history from c.1990: A survey of monographs, anthologies and journal articles' (MHCS thesis, University of Pretoria, 2016), pp. 124-125. The urban bias in South African women's history is also seen the two key compilations within its historiography. These are, Cheryl Walker, ed., *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990); and, Nomboniso Gasa, ed., *Women in South African History: Basus'iimbokodo, Bawel'imilamho/They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007). Like the South African Democratic Education Trust (SADET) *Road to Democracy* series, both edited collections have far more chapters dealing with the histories of urban spaces than they do on rural contexts. See, SADET, eds., *The road to democracy in South Africa, Volume 1 (1960-1970)*. Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004.

the former bantustans and the historical processes informing these realities.[4] This noticeable academic interest in the histories of the bantustans, particularly those formally situated in the present-day North West, Limpopo and Mpumalanga Provinces, is related to rapidly changing conceptions and practices of land, labour, capital, 'custom' and governance within these spaces. As privately owned mining companies increasingly attempt to gain a foothold in mineral rich land, much of which falls within former bantustan areas, the institution of traditional leadership and post-apartheid local governance bodies have entangled themselves in new webs of power, capital, labour and patronage which have deep roots in locally-specific histories of struggle, repression and compromise which in many cases even pre-date the advent of the apartheid regime and its bantustan project.[5]

As such, scholars continue to investigate and theorise the significance of what many call 'the bantustan legacy' and its salience in post-apartheid South Africa. Yet, as William Beinart has observed, research which has recently been conducted on the former bantustans continues to be dominated by analytical lenses which are primarily concerned with apartheid's 'homeland policy' and the structural legacies of the bantustans in the present post-apartheid administration.[6] My thesis builds on this emerging scholarship and opens up new lines of enquiry by exploring the history of women's struggles for freedom in the rural spaces of the former Lebowa bantustan from the 1940s until the present (2022). In so doing, I aim to contribute to both South African historiography and contemporary theoretical debates concerning emancipatory politics by bringing the often-neglected experiences of marginalised historical actors to the fore of my analysis of popular struggles for freedom in South Africa.

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[4] See, for example, Steffen Jensen and Olaf Zanker, eds., 'Homelands as Frontiers: Apartheid's Loose Ends', *Journal of Southern African Studies (JSAS) Special Issue*, 41 5 (2015); Laura Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo: Differentiation, Stratification and Class Formation in South Africa, 1972 – 2009' (PhD thesis, New York University, 2020); and, Shireen Ally and Arianna Lissoni, eds., *New Histories of South Africa's Apartheid-Era Bantustans* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017). In addition to the above references, prominent research units such as the Wits History Workshop, the Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Reflection (MISTRA), the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI), and the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WISER), have all been involved in variously focused research projects concerning the histories and contemporary political landscapes of the former bantustans in recent years.

[5] Laura Phillips, Arianna Lissoni, and Ivor Chipkin, 'Bantustans Are Dead – Long Live the Bantustans', *Mail & Guardian,* (11 July, 2014). Accessed online at: https://mg.co.za/article/2014-07-10-bantustans-are-dead-long-live-the-bantustans.

[6] William Beinart, 'Beyond "Homelands": Some Ideas about the History of African Rural Areas in South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 64 1 (2012), p. 13.

At the core of my thesis is an exploration of how women in the rural spaces of the South African bantustans – with Lebowa as my case study – have experienced and engaged in praxes of emancipatory politics since the mid-twentieth century.[7] I am interested in the forms that emancipatory politics have taken in this historical context and the ideas of freedom that informed them. By critically engaging with a diverse range of archival and oral history sources my thesis adopts a combined gender and subaltern perspective focused on ordinary rural women, their everyday life, and collective struggles for freedom. What women's political agency and collective activism has looked like historically, and in practice, during different moments of the South African past, within the spatial context of Lebowa, is the question at the heart of my thesis. In answering this question, my thesis describes and analyses various forms and praxes of resistance by women in Lebowa which emerged from my archival and oral history research. However, due to the epistemic marginalisation and silencing of women in state archival sources and mainstream academic discourses, my thesis does not amount to a definitive or comprehensive history of women's emancipatory politics in Lebowa. Instead, it aims to make a rigorous and critical contribution to the burgeoning historiography of the Lebowa bantustan and on-going scholarly discussions about what constitutes politics, political space, and possibilities for radical change today in relation to and in conversation with past experiences of struggle, and their narration.

Defining emancipatory politics, everyday life and resistance

My thesis seeks to uncover a previously understudied subaltern history of the former Lebowa bantustan, through an examination of emancipatory politics as practiced by rural women. Black women in rural contexts, as a marginalized group within both national liberation histories and South African historiography more broadly, provide a unique perspective on the

[7] As a result of the racially segregationist production of space in South Africa since the advent of colonial conquest and the subsequent passing of the 1913 and 1936 Native Land Acts, women living in the rural villages and townships of the bantustans during the apartheid era were all black Africans (with very few exceptions). It is necessary to stress, here at the outset and at several points throughout the thesis, the central importance of race – and experiences of anti-black racism – as well as class and ethnicity in shaping women's everyday lives and struggles for freedom in Lebowa during different moments since the 1940s. In these instances, I explicitly refer to identity categories, such as black (or 'African' when quoting directly from secondary sources) and working class, in describing individuals or groups of women in Lebowa and analysing aspects of their past experiences and struggles for freedom. However, in general throughout my thesis, I do not explicitly use race, class, or ethnicity identity markers and instead prefer to use the single word and gendered identity category 'women' when referring to the primary historical subjects of my study.

question of emancipation. By analysing their historical and current praxes of emancipatory politics, my thesis aims to contribute to new theories of universal human emancipation that are informed by the particularities of historical subaltern experiences as well as those of our present time and social contexts. Through this examination, it becomes evident that universal principles of emancipatory politics, such as equality, dignity, and justice, have been central to women's conceptions of freedom and praxes of resistance in the former Lebowa bantustan during and after the anti-apartheid struggle. These universal principles were worked out collectively in struggles which were multiscalar, often dovetailing or connecting directly with national and even international dimensions of the South African national liberation struggle, but which were firmly based in the local and which were expressed in a wide range of praxes aimed at positively and radically transforming the conditions and experience of everyday life in rural communities.

The South African national liberation struggle holds a special place in world history as one of the defining moral and political events of the twentieth century.[8] In political theory, ranging from liberal to Marxist perspectives, the South African liberation struggle – or, at least, aspects thereof – is lauded as an historical example of popular politics overcoming an authoritarian regime and reconfiguring state power in line with democratic principles. As such, it stands alongside other world historical events such as the Haitian Revolution, the Paris Commune, the anti-colonial struggles in Africa, May 1968, and the so-called 'Arab Spring', as an example of emancipatory politics.[9] At the core of the South African national liberation struggle were the principles of equality and non-discrimination – both foundational concepts of radical theories of universal human emancipation – worked out collectively in struggle against the apartheid regime. When, in 1994, the African National Congress (ANC) came into

[8] Saul Dubow, 'Placing "Race" in South African History'. In William Lamont, ed., *Historical Controversies and Historians* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 65.

[9] For a discussion of the significance of the South African national liberation struggle for contemporary theorisations of universal human emancipation see, Michael Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa: Towards a Theory of Emancipatory Politics* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2018). For an analysis of the emancipatory aspects of the 1984 Vaal uprising in South Africa, which draws on the work of Neocosmos, see, Franziska Rueedi, *The Vaal Uprising of 1984 & the Struggle for Freedom in South Africa* (New York: James Curry, 2021). On the Haitian Revolution as an emancipatory event see, CLR James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989). On the emancipatory content of the events of May 1968 in France and elsewhere see, Kirstin Ross, *May '68 and its Afterlives* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002). And, on the emancipatory aspects of the Paris Commune and the events in North Africa known as the 'Arab Spring' see, Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History: Times of riots and Uprisings* (London and New York: Verso, 2012).

state power, it did so off the back of its election campaign promise to 'create a better life for all South Africans' and Nelson Mandela's assurances that 'Equality is for everybody'.[10] This entailed more than just establishing single citizenship for all South Africans, irrespective of race, which had been the primary identifier under apartheid and colonial governance. It also necessitated the abolishment of the bantustans, along with the various forms of ethno-nationalism that had taken root in these spaces under the system of separate development. In their place, an inclusive post-apartheid nationalism and a pluralistic South African state were established. However, the history of the South African national liberation struggle cannot be reduced to a struggle for state power. To do so misses the point that the goal of radically transforming everyday life in local spaces, such as villages, townships, and workplaces, according to universal emancipatory political principles was as much a part of the popular struggle for freedom as were the efforts to capture and transform state power at the national level.[11]

A leading theorist of emancipatory politics in South Africa, Michael Neocosmos, argues that since the 1990s there has been a growing inability on the part of academics in the humanities and social sciences to comprehend an alternative vision of emancipation which could challenge that provided by neo-liberalism.[12] Since neo-liberal capitalism has only been able to provide an emancipatory vision for 'a small oligarchy of wealthy rulers' and not for all people, and because its Marxist historical alternative (in its orthodox Communist Party-centred form) has been tainted by its past association with authoritarian states, Neocosmos claims that today 'there seems to be little in terms of an egalitarian alternative available'.[13] One of the nefarious consequences of this inability to conceive of an alternative vision of emancipatory politics has been the creation of a gulf between the intellectual concerns of social scientists and humanities scholars, on the one hand, and the lived experiences of ordinary people in the global South, on the other. This state of affairs is very different to that which existed in parts of South Africa during the 1980s, for example, whereby many

[10] Nelson Mandela quoted in Jacklyn Cock, 'Engendering Gay and Lesbian Rights: The Equality Clause in the South African Constitution', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 26 1 (2003), p. 43.
[11] A recent articulation of this argument made in reference to the popular anti-apartheid struggles that took place in the Vaal townships during the 1980s is provided in, Rueedi, *The Vaal Uprising of 1984*, p. 19.
[12] Michael Neocosmos, 'Statement of Purpose for UHURU: Unit for the Humanities at Rhodes University' (unpublished paper, Rhodes University, 2014).
[13] Michael Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa: Towards a Theory of Emancipatory Politics* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2018), p. xv.

academics were intimately involved, both intellectually and often practically, in various radical formations such as trade unions, underground national liberation organisations, as well as student and youth movements, driving popular struggles in spaces outside of the universities in South Africa.[14] Thus, for Neocosmos, one of the most important challenges facing social scientists and humanities scholars in South Africa, and across the world, today lies in reforging links between the intellectual concerns of the humanities and actually existing popular struggles for freedom, both past and present, and from that basis begin the urgent task of conceptualising, understanding and articulating an alternative vision of human emancipation that is truly universal.[15] I argue that one of the greatest values of historical analysis is its ability to reveal, in the events of the past, possibilities for the present and future – not least in regard to the question of emancipatory politics.

The idea that historical understanding is important for social and political theory is far from new. In *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity*, Mahmood Mamdani argues that 'the formulation of alternative historiography' is an urgent and necessary requirement for the recognition and creation of 'an alternative political practice, one that would create a form of citizenship adequate to building an inclusive political community' in present day South Africa.[16] More recently, Ato Sekyi-Otu has highlighted the importance of gender-sensitive, subaltern understandings of African history and present day realities for his theory of 'left universalism'.[17] He asserts that left universalism is the most appropriate theoretical framework with which to identify and analyse diverse experiences of 'egalitarian justice' as

[14] Some academics in South African universities who played active roles in the emerging trade union movement and associated organisations in the 1970s and 1980s, include for example: Phil Bonner, Ari Sitas, Eddie Webster, Johan Maree, Steven Friedman, Rob Lambert, David Lewis, and Sakhela Buhlungu. See, Nichole Ulrich, 'Only the Workers Can Free the Workers: The origin of the workers' control tradition and the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (TUACC), 1970-1979', (MA thesis, Wits University, 2007), p.14. For additional studies demonstrating aspects of the relationship between academics and the radical trade union movement in South Africa during the 1970s and 1980s see, for example, David Hemson, Martin Legassick and Nicole Ulrich, 'White activists and the revival of the workers' movement' in SADET, eds., *The road to democracy in South Africa, Volume 2 (1970-1980)* (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2006); and, Jabulani Sithole and Sifiso Ndlovu, 'The revival of the labour movement, 1970-1980' in SADET, eds., *The road to democracy in South Africa, Volume 2 (1970-1980)*. (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2006). Also see, Martin Legassick, 'Debating the revival of the worker's movement in the 1970s: The South African Democracy Education Trust and post-apartheid patriotic history', *Kronos*, 34 1, Making Histories (2008), pp. 240-266; and, Jabulani Sithole, 'Contestations over knowledge production or ideological bullying?: A response to Legassick on the workers' movement', *Kronos*, 35 1 (2009), pp. 222-241.

[15] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa*, p. 16.

[16] Mahmood Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as Political Identity* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2013), p. 106.

[17] Ato Sekyi-Otu, *Left Universalism, Africacentric Essays* (New York and London: Routledge, 2019).

'democratic sharing' – the categorical imperative of African communism.[18] Everyday 'ethical acts of democratic sharing' are, according to Sekyi-Otu, the most popular expressions of emancipatory politics on the African continent. Yet they are seldom considered as important in academic studies of transformative political agency and emancipatory politics.[19] As Sekyi-Otu argues, in his characteristically poetic style of philosophical writing,

> We can best honour the inheritance our living ancestors willed to us by fashioning an insurgent and redemptory enterprise that is occasioned by the exigencies of our time, attuned to the speech of the native daughter, partisan towards the claims of the dispossessed and the destitute of the land and, ultimately, conceived in the recurring question of "human things".[20]

While Neocosmos remains deeply sceptical about the prospects of historical analysis ever being epistemologically capable of producing historical accounts of emancipatory politics, by drawing on the insights of the Subaltern Studies collective, the extensive (as well as uneven and contested) tradition of South African social history, and my own research, in this thesis I make an attempt to provide such an account of lived experiences of emancipatory politics in the Lebowa bantustan during the anti-apartheid struggle.[21]

As well as Neocosmos, another theorist of emancipation which I draw from in this thesis is Jacque Rancière. I take Rancière's broad definition of emancipation as a point of departure. According to Rancière:

> Emancipation is the way out of a situation of minority. A situation of minority is a situation in which you have to be guided because following the path with your own sense of direction would lead you astray… emancipation can only mean the autonomous growth of the space of the common created by the free association of men and women implementing the egalitarian principle.[22]

Rancière's egalitarian principle can be understood as the affirmation of equality amongst all people as a point of departure for emancipatory politics and not a goal to be attained once

[18] *Ibid*, pp. 38 and 118.
[19] *Ibid*, p. 118.
[20] *Ibid*, p. 38.
[21] For Necosmos's critique of historical analysis see, Michael Neocosmos, 'Are Those-Who-Do-Not-Count Capable of Reason? Thinking Political Subjectivity in the (Neo-)Colonial World and the limits of history', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 47 5 (2012), pp. 530-547.
[22] Jacques Rancière, 'Communists Without Communism', in C Douzinas and S Zizek, eds., *The Idea of Communism* (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 168 and 176.

power has been obtained.[23] Implicit to the principle, is the idea that all 'people think' – a recognition of the equal humanity and intellectual capacity of everyone and anyone. As Neocosmos explains by drawing on the 'nominal anthropology' of Sylvain Lazarus, the premise for thinking politics today must be that 'people think' and that 'the foundational axiom of the thought of emancipatory politics must be that people are capable of thinking a different 'possible' – in other words, 'what could be' – in the present'.[24] Quoting directly from philosopher Alain Badiou, Neocosmos argues that,

> "[T]o say 'people think' is to say that they are capable, under a name, of prescribing a possible which is irreducible to the repetition or continuation of what exists" […] They are, in other words, capable of reason, of thinking beyond their social location and conditions, of thinking an excess beyond the simply given extant of the social division of labour and its corresponding social identities.[25]

The egalitarian principle is, for this thesis, the most significant aspect of Rancière's theorisation of human emancipation. It is, I argue, a universal principle of emancipatory politics which can be traced in the historical accounts of popular struggles for freedom waged by women in the Lebowa bantustan which are presented in this thesis. Another characteristic feature of emancipation, as understood by Rancière, which speaks directly to the history of rural contentious politics with which my research is concerned, is the featuring of a prescriptive or generative aspect of politics in which people, whilst struggling against the forces of oppression, also struggle for creating an alternative form of political community and experiences of everyday life. Importantly, for Rancière, the 'autonomous growth of the space of the common' – being both subjective and material – is dependent on people choosing, without being coerced or intimidated, to join together and act according to the egalitarian principle in their collective struggles for freedom.[26]

Rancière's definition of emancipation is extremely useful for its open-endedness and ability to be stretched to include a wide range of subjects, formations, events, and moments as potentially emancipatory. As Ernest Wamba-dia-Wamba articulates in the foreword of *Thinking Freedom in Africa*: 'The idea that "people think and thinking is a relationship of

[23] Rancière, 'Communists Without Communism', pp. 176-177.
[24] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa*, p. 27.
[25] *Ibid*, p. 27.
[26] Rancière, 'Communists Without Communism', p. 168.

reality" – or put slightly differently that "thinking is real and all people think" – this idea makes it possible for the thought of silenced categories of people – the damned of the world – to be studied'.[27] Furthermore, Rancière's definition of emancipation is not so malleable that it cannot be used to reasonably exclude certain phenomena from the category of emancipatory politics. For instance, Rancière argues that emancipation is not something which can be given to a person or group of people by some external agent. In this way Rancière shared with others, such as Frantz Fanon, the idea that emancipation is the result of autonomous processes of collective becoming in which people think and act in ways which defy their social location of minority (that which makes them subaltern), and constitute themselves as the makers of their own destinies and histories.[28] This is a crucial insight, and one which speaks directly to the political significance of the historian's task of uncovering and analysing past instances in which such autonomous processes of popular political subjectification and emancipatory praxes were developed by subaltern groups as self-conscious political agents of their own struggles for freedom, rather than as un-thinking subjects acting under the tutelage or orders of outsiders or enlightened experts.[29] This is an important formulation that allows, among others, identifying nascent and ephemeral emancipatory praxes that may not fully subscribe to a blue-print of emancipation.

Julian Brown and Stuart Wilson have explicitly drawn upon Rancière's theorisations about the nature of politics and equality in their work on emancipatory political struggles in post-apartheid South Africa. Brown and Wilson invoke Rancière's egalitarian principle in relation to, what they describe as, a conflict between 'citizen and state' which took place in the northern Free State Province in the early 2000s.[30] The specific conflict they look at in their study was a civic struggle that involved ordinary citizens organising themselves collectively to relocate, improve, and prevent the state from closing-down the BopaSetjhaba Primary School.[31] The dispute started in 2001 and was only concluded in 2011 when the school and

[27] Ernest Wamba dia Wamba, 'Foreword' in Michael Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa: Towards a Theory of Emancipatory Politics* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2018), p. x.
[28] See, for example, Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), p. 310.
[29] Rancière, 'Communists Without Communism', p. 168.
[30] Julian Brown and Stuart Wilson, 'A Presumed Equality: The Relationship between State and Citizens in Post-Apartheid South Africa' *African Studies*, 72 1 (2013), p. 86; also see, Julian Brown, *South Africa's Insurgent Citizens: On Dissent and the Possibility of Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2015).
[31] Brown and Wilson, 'A presumed equality', p. 87.

its supporters won a protracted legal and bureaucratic struggle against the South African state. Drawing on the political philosophy of Rancière, Brown and Wilson argued:

> the school's presumption of equality saw it take bold steps, including engagement of lawyers and the interference with bureaucratic process to insist that they [state authorities] conform to the principles of legality, equality and fairness. These steps, and the presumptions underlying them, ultimately saw BopaSetjhaba succeed in obtaining its own buildings. Reasoning from the case, we argue that presence or absence of a presumed equality may be fundamental to understanding the local base of civic struggle.[32]

The work of Brown and Wilson is an important demonstration of the merits of placing empirically-grounded research of local South African experiences in conversation with abstract and often ahistorical theorisations of universal emancipatory politics. It is Rancière's ideas regarding the self-conscious and deliberate movement out of a situation of minority, the implementation of the egalitarian principle, and the willing creation of an 'autonomous space of the common', which I critically engage as useful concepts for understanding the historical manifestations of emancipatory politics discussed in this thesis.

In addition to the Rancièrian definition of emancipation detailed above, throughout this thesis I also draw explicitly on certain useful aspects of Neocosmos' theorisations of emancipatory politics discussed at length in his book *Thinking Freedom in Africa*. Neocosmos argues that praxes (or in his preferred term 'thought-practices') of emancipatory politics are always necessarily characterised by an 'excessive political subjectivity' – a subjectivity or consciousness which does not simply 'reflect' or 'express' the social categories assigned to people: such as workers, students, parents, 'tribesmen', women, and so on – but which transcended these social-spatial identity categories and developed a 'universal subjectivity beyond interest' – namely, equality.[33] According to Neocosmos, the more political subjectivities begin to exceed identity – as when, for example, students engage in workers' struggles, or when workers' go on strike not just over interest-based issues of wages or workers control but in solidarity with broader collective struggles for freedom taking place beyond their workplaces, or when men fight alongside women against patriarchal systems of rule and misogynistic societal norms – the more possibility there is for popular struggles to

[32] *Ibid*, p. 87.
[33] Neocosmos, *Thinking freedom in Africa*, pp. 327-333.

take on an emancipatory content, although this of course is not guaranteed.[34] Neocosmos' concept of political excess is useful for understanding the various multi-scalar, diversly constituted, and radical labour-community alliances that shaped popular political landscapes in South Africa's urban and rural townships during the 1980s.

Drawing on the theorisations of Neocosmos, my thesis adopts a broad understanding that historical manifestations of emancipatory politics are most often discontinuously sequential, temporally fleeting, spatially limited and only seldom take the form of a sustained struggle for state power.[35] The thought and practice of universal emancipatory politics in South Africa, therefore, must be understood as having a historical basis which is wider than the national liberation struggle and its associated historiography. This is because emancipation has a political existence which is not inherently tied to the nation-state form and its subjectivities. To comprehend the notion of universal human emancipation and analyse past instances of emancipatory politics in subaltern struggles, such as those mentioned in this thesis, it is crucial to associate emancipatory politics with everyday life rather than state power. The significance of this perspective lies in the fact that the aspiration to seize state power at the national level, or to be incorporated into current modes of state governance and citizenship, does not wholly capture the collective conceptions and practices of freedom among marginalized communities, such as rural women in South Africa.

There is arguably no other scholar, past or present, who has dedicated more thought and writing to the idea of everyday life, and a critique thereof, than French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre. Lefebvre suggested that the concept of everyday life has a dual meaning: it means, simultaneously, the mundane (the everyday) and the repetitive (what happens every day).[36] The mundane quality of daily existence for ordinary people is not, according to Lefebvre, an inevitable, natural, or a-political phenomenon. In fact this

[34] The Marikana strike and massacre of August 2012 is a useful example with which to show the way in which Neocosmos' theory of expressive/excessive dialectic is brought to bear on historical events of popular resistance politics. The Marikana event was constituted, as all political events are, by both expressive politics (a wage demand for R12 500) and excessive politics (the prescription that workers could organise themselves independently of trade union and state representation). It was this latter excessive aspect of the politics of the Marikana mine workers which brought them into a bitter conflict with the South African police which resulted in the killing of 34 people. See, Neocosmos, 'Statement of purpose for UHURU', p. 4; and, Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa*, pp. 332-345.

[35] Neocosmos, 'Statement of purpose for UHURU', p. 19.

[36] Henry Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. xv.

'mundaneness' is a part and a result of the 'colonization of everyday life' – which Lefebvre describes as the existential phenomenon of maximum alienation under global conditions of neoliberal capitalism.[37] Lefebvre observes that the mundane is counter-revolutionary phenomena and argues that its dominance over everyday life is the working of capital in favour of the capitalist system and not the social reproduction of humanity.[38] The phenomenon of repetition, on the other hand, is understood as that which always necessarily produces differences. For Lefebvre, 'differences induced or produced by repetitions constitute the thread of time' and hold the potential to transform the rhythms of everyday life.[39] When both of these concepts, the mundane and the repetitive, are placed in a triadic dialectical relation along with the corporeal (the human body as lived in specific conjunctures of space-time), in an analysis of the intimate details of everyday life, Lefebvre argues that we discover that the 'most extraordinary things are also the most everyday' and that conceptions and praxes of politics are only emancipatory when they relate directly to ordinary peoples' lived experience at the level of the everyday.[40]

Lefebvre is most useful for his concern with 'the contrast between the capitalist system and the daily lives of individuals' and his conception of the everyday as a level of experience and analysis which is often neglected by scholars who have focused too exclusively on the spaces of production and the linear time of capital – as opposed to spaces of creation and the cyclical time of nature, the cosmos, and the unfolding of human experience therein – in their Marxist analyses of revolutionary politics.[41] Lefebvre provides some key terms and concepts such as 'colonization/domination' of everyday life – meaning the contradictory conjunctures between 'maximum alienation' and 'relative disalienation' experienced on a daily basis by ordinary people – and the production of space, amongst others. The idea of

[37] Stefan Kipfer and Kanishka Goonewardena, 'Urban Marxism and the Post-colonial Question: Henri Lefebvre and "Colonisation"', *Historical Materialism*, 76 6 (2013), p. 83.
[38] *Ibid*, p. 91.
[39] Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis*, p. 8.
[40] Henry Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life: Volume 1* (London: Verso, 1991).
[41] Stuart Elden, 'Introduction', in Henry Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (New York: Continuum, 2004), p. xi. Lefebvre argues that the dominant mode of temporal organisation in modern capitalist societies is linear time which is oriented, like the irreversible flow of clock time, toward the maximisation of profit and the reduction of every aspect of the human experience to a series of disconnected moments. Cyclical time, in contrast, is characterised by repetitions, patterns and the unfolding of natural processes on a cosmic scale, as well as seasons and the cycle of day and night. These cyclical modes of time are, according to Lefebvre, more closely aligned to the universal human experience of lived time and the cycles of human life. See, Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*.

everyday life as a level of reality and the relational idea of the production of space, adopted and adapted from Lefebvre, are conceptual tools deployed regularly throughout this thesis in its attempt to understand and articulate the historical characteristics and theoretical significance of women's subaltern struggles for freedom in the former Lebowa bantustan.

However, it is important to note that feminist scholars and historians such as Silvia Federici and Peter Linebaugh have criticised Lefebvre and the broader scholarship on the critique of everyday life for hiding 'the unpaid, endless work of women' in the (re)production of everyday life.[42] I argue that, as with the work of Neocosmos but perhaps to an even greater degree, one of the greatest downfalls of Lefebvre's work on the concept of everyday life provided in his volumes on the *Critique of Everyday Life*, as well as in his posthumously published study *Rhythmanalysis*, is the extent to which it is kept in the realm of theoretical abstraction and seldom presented and tested within the context of grounded empirical research of concrete situations – be they historical or contemporary. My own study aims to do precisely what I accuse Lefebvre and Neocosmos of not doing: taking seriously rural women's lived experiences of emancipatory politics and showing what their struggles to transform everyday life have looked like in practice from a subaltern historical perspective.

Unlike Lefebvre, Asef Bayat does not deal with the concept of everyday life in an abstract philosophical sense but in empirically concrete situations. At the core of Bayat's work is the attempt to understand the politics of the urban subaltern in the cities of so-called 'developing' countries in the Global South.[43] The concepts of the everyday, and daily life, feature prominently in his work precisely because of their value in this regard. In a paper entitled, 'From "Dangerous Classes" to "Quiet Rebels": Politics of the Urban Subaltern in the Global South', Bayat explores and critiques the ways in which the concept of the everyday has featured in scholarship dealing with the subject of urban subaltern politics and resistance.[44] Bayat explains that the overarching problem relates to the question of 'how to conceptualize resistance, its relation to power, domination and submission'.[45] He argues that 'many

[42] Peter Linebaugh, 'Foreword'. In Silvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland: PM Press, 2019), p. xvi.
[43] Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).
[44] Asef Bayat, 'From "Dangerous Classes" to "Quiet Rebels": Politics of the Urban Subaltern in the Global South', *International Sociology*, 15 3 (2000), pp. 533–557.
[45] *Ibid*, p. 542.

resistance writers tend to confuse an awareness about oppression with acts of resistance with it' despite distinctions drawn between, for example, 'real resistance' – organised, systematic, overt acts with revolutionary outcomes – and 'token resistance' – meaning unorganised acts, accommodated with existing power structures, without any revolutionary outcomes.[46]

A further problem with the paradigm of 'everyday resistance' (closely associated with the theorisations of political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott) identified by Bayat is a missing distinction between defensive and generative forms of politics. Put simply, Bayat asks the question: 'Does resistance mean defending an already achieved gain (in Scott's terms denying claims made by dominant groups over the subordinate ones) or making fresh demands (to 'advance its own claims')'.[47] Bayat claims that in most scholarship on resistance this important distinction is missing. Considering this omission, he developed the concept of 'encroachment' to distinguish generative and excessive (meaning in excess of what already exists) forms of politics from more defensive and expressive (meaning expressive of what already exists) forms. His concept of encroachment is central to his theory of 'the quiet encroachment of the ordinary' which he describes as 'non-collective but prolonged direct action by individuals and families', or the silent, protracted but pervasive advancement of ordinary people on the propertied and powerful classes, 'in a quiet and unassuming illegal manner', in order to defend and create ways to live a dignified life.[48] According to Bayat, processes of 'the quiet encroachment of the ordinary' by subaltern groups in the Global South are as politically significant as organised modes of collective subaltern resistance which are more fleeting and less common. Furthermore, Bayat argues that 'encroachment' by subaltern groups often contains both defensive and generative modes of resistance politics. Bayat explains that,

> the vehicles through which ordinary people change their societies are not simply audible mass protests or revolutions, even though they represent an aspect of popular mobilization; rather, people resort more widely to what I will elaborate as "nonmovements" – the collective endeavours of millions of noncollective actors, carried out in the main squares, back streets, courthouses, or communities.[49]

[46] *Ibid*, pp. 542-523.
[47] *Ibid*, p. 543.
[48] *Ibid*, p. 544.
[49] Bayat, *Life as politics*, p. xi.

The slow encroachment of what, drawing on Bayat, I call modes of nonmovement subaltern politics that are highly familiar in a post-apartheid South African context include, for example, illegal electricity connections and the sabotage of prepaid water meters. These are on-going expressions of subaltern struggle against the commodification of the basic necessities of everyday life in many of South Africa's townships which reflect Bayat's concept of encroachment but which also sometimes contain elements of organised social movement politics, such as in the case of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee (SECC).[50] Similarly, in my thesis, I explore historical expressions of women's emancipatory politics and everyday struggles for freedom in Lebowa which often contained aspects of both the encroachment of the ordinary (such as when large numbers of women from Lebowa joined the migrant labour system from the late-1960s) and more organised modes of resistance politics (such as when they participated in trade unions and youth movements in Lebowa during the 1980s) in different places and periods.

The significance of Bayat's critique of the 'everyday resistance' theory is that it points not only to the value of using historically-grounded empirical research from the Global South to inform theoretical debates on politics but, also, to the dangers of simply transplanting general and abstract conceptual categories to specific and concrete historical manifestations of popular and subaltern politics in colonial contexts such as apartheid South Africa. By adopting a subaltern perspective which prioritises concepts that emerge from the narratives of historical events themselves, rather than simply taking a concept from Marx or Foucault or Fanon and applying it in a top-down way to the past, we can get a deeper understanding of 'the consciousness and action of insurgent subjects, the people who are actually moving and changing history'.[51]

A subaltern and gender perspective of emancipatory politics in South Africa

It is important to clarify here at the outset that in this thesis I do not rely on a conception of women living in the rural areas of the former Lebowa bantustan at any moment in time as a

[50] See, Prishani Naidoo and Ahmed Veriava, 'From local to global (and back again?): Anti-commodification struggles of the Soweto Electricity Crisis Committee' in D McDonald, ed., *Electric Capitalism: Recolonising Africa on the power grid* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2009), pp. 321-337.
[51] Marcus Rediker, 'A Motley Crew for our times?: Multiracial mobs, history from below and the memory of struggle', *Radical Philosophy,* 207 (2020), pp. 93-100.

kind of homogenous and unified 'subaltern subject'.[52] Such a perspective would be problematic as it would fail to grasp the complex cleavages – in terms of class, generation, religion, ethnicity, marital status, association with the chieftainship, and so on – which informed the multiple positions black women occupied in both rural and urban societal contexts of Lebowa and the ways in which these positions have shifted over time. Following from the theorisations of the Subaltern Studies Collective, I consider the term subaltern as referring to an epistemic relation of marginality, expressed in spatial, identitarian and material manifestations.[53] I also draw conceptually on the associated understanding of gender, with Subaltern Studies, as more than a simple biological marker of difference but as a social construct characterised by a complex and intersectional system of norms, meanings, and symbols that are produced and reproduced through cultural and institutional discourses and practices.[54]

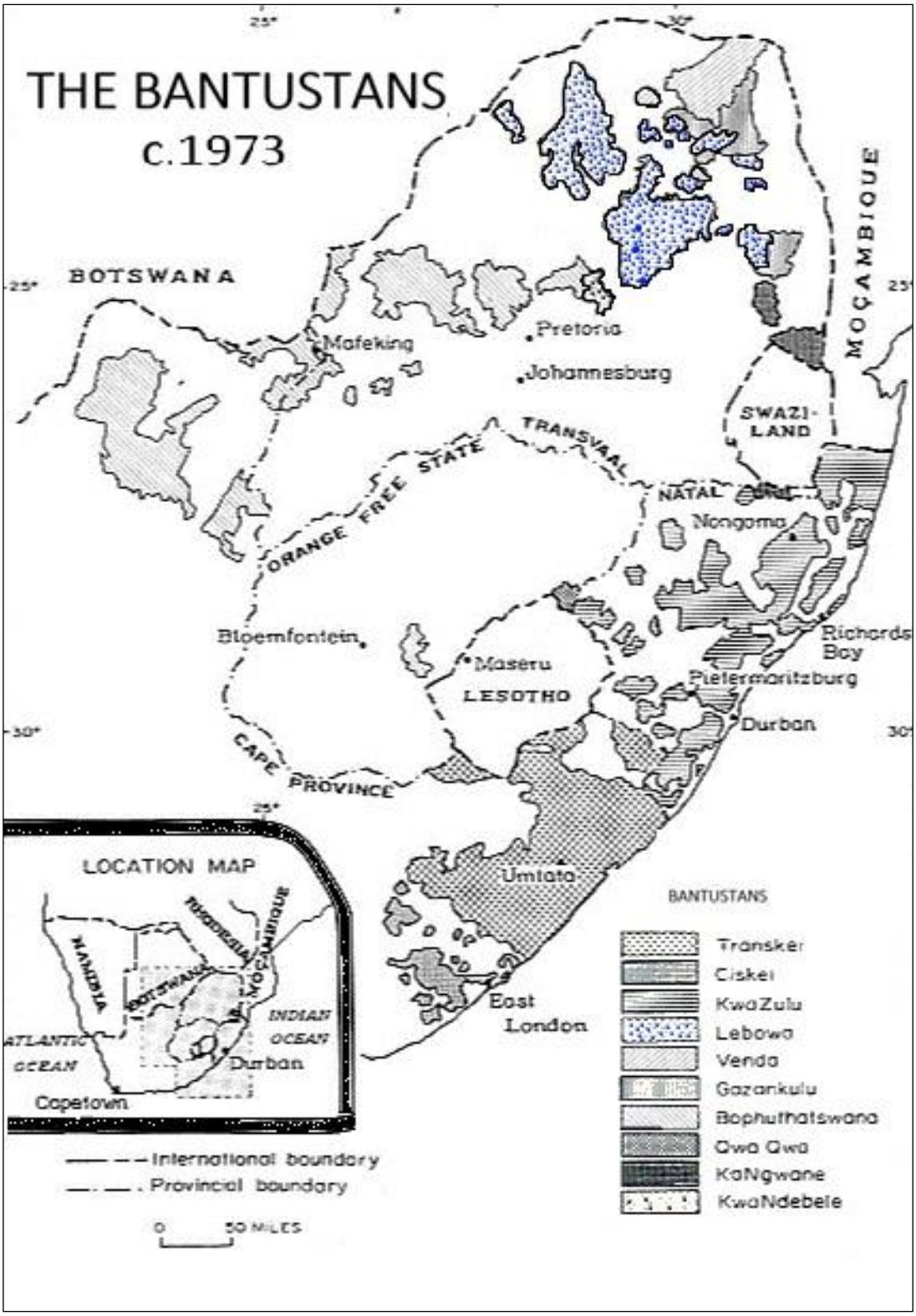
My thesis is concerned with investigating historical manifestations of subaltern political praxes by adopting a gender lens that prioritises the lived experiences of women in rural contexts. According to sociologist and feminist scholar Jacklyn Cock, 'a *gender lens* recognises gender as a significant social relation which structures our experience and shapes the world so that women and men have distinctive and specific experiences and develop different understandings and aspirations. In other words, all experience is gendered'.[55] What constitutes a political struggle as 'subaltern', for the purposes of my thesis, is when it is conceived of and manifest in practice through the collective efforts of ordinary people (not considered as an homogenous mass) acting primarily from outside of the formal institutions, channels, and modes of politics sanctioned by the state and civil society – which founding subaltern studies scholar Ranajit Guha calls the 'official domain' of 'elite politics'.[56]

[52] For a useful conversation on the contribution of writers from the Subaltern Studies Collective to the notion of subaltern as a gender perspective see, Antonia Navarro Tejero, 'Telling (Her)story: An overview of Subaltern Studies', *Feminismo/s*, 4 (2004), pp. 85-96.
[53] Ranajit Guha, ed., *A Subaltern Studies Reader*. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. xvi.
[54] Jeane C. Peracullo, 'Sally Haslanger and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak on the Possibility of Metaphysics of Resistance and its Implications for Postcolonial Feminist Theologizing', *Feminist Theology*, 28 2 (2020), pp. 130-146.
[55] Jacklyn Cock and Alison Bernstein, 'Struggles around "Needs" and "Rights" in South Africa', *NWSA Journal*, 13 3 (2001), p. 140.
[56] Guha, *A Subaltern Studies Reader*, p. xvi.

However, subaltern politics does not always function completely outside of or at a distance from individuals, organisations, ideologies, and institutions which operate within the so-called formal domains of politics. In fact the existing historiography dealing with popular politics and the liberation struggle in Lebowa (and South Africa's countryside more generally) demonstrates that there existed a nexus between the rural and the urban, local struggles for control over everyday life and the national liberation struggle, the Congress movement and the chieftaincy, as well as subaltern and elite domains of politics more generally.[57] As such it would be unhelpful to adopt a notion of 'subaltern' which excludes more than includes; which fails to recognise the nuanced conjunctures amongst various praxes and forms of popular politics; and which does not account for human beings' equally held capacity to think and practice politics in unexpected ways and for unexpected reasons which defy their socio-political location.

Adopting a flexible and inclusive notion of subaltern as a perspective that prioritises praxes of resistance and politics that display excessive subjectivities and conceptions of freedom, on the other hand, is useful and appropriate as a point of departure for analysing women's past experiences of emancipatory politics in the former Lebowa bantustan. My thesis takes up the challenge of thinking emancipatory politics from a subaltern historical perspective which is sensitive to the importance of gender, power (including my own positionality), class, ethnicity, race, as well as the sometimes-unexpected identity categories, political subjectivities, and other factors which variously shape experiences of popular politics and everyday life in different ways for different people in different places.[58]

[57] See for example: Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*; and, van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*.
[58] Gayatri Spivak, 'Gayatri Spivak on the Politics of the Subaltern (An Interview with Howard Winant)', *Socialist Review*, 3 (1990), p. 90.



Map 1: The South African Bantustans, c.1973. Adapted from J Butler, R Rotburg and J Adams, *The Black Homelands of South Africa: The Political and Economic Development of Bophuthatswana and KwaZulu* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

Bantustan historiography

As mentioned at the outset of this introductory chapter, in the last decade or so there has been a renewed academic interest in the histories of bantustans and their contemporary significance in post-apartheid South Africa. This emerging body of scholarly literature was brought together, and distinguished from earlier writings on the bantustans, at the 'Let's talk about Bantustans' conference at Wits University held in 2011 by the South African Research Chair in Local Histories and Present Realities and the Wits History Workshop. The conference sought to deal broadly with the historical and contemporary nature and significance of the former bantustans in the northern interior of South Africa – Gazankulu, Lebowa, KwaNdebele, Venda, KaNgwane, Bophutatswana and QuaQua – which had received less scholarly attention than the more developed bantustans of the coastal provinces – KwaZulu, Transkei and Ciskei. The name of the conference, and the associated special issue, was taken from the title of an essay written by Steve Biko of the Black Consciousness Movement in 1972 in which he famously declared that 'the bantustans are the greatest single fraud ever invented by white politicians'.[59] In the same year, Harold Wolpe – a member of the banned South African Communist Party – published an paper entitled 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa' which, unlike Biko's essay, is widely considered a foundational text in South African bantustan historiography.[60]

In his Marxist analysis of apartheid, Wolpe famously brought the relationship between the state and capitalism to the fore and, in so doing, argued that the principle aim of 'homeland' policy was to ensure the constant supply of cheap black migrant labour for the mines and white owned industries in South Africa.[61] White capitalists, particularly mine owners, subsidized their industries significantly by paying their black migrant workers extremely low wages based on the assumption that the pre-capitalist modes of production in

[59] It is worth noting, as the editors of the special issue do, that despite the fact that Biko's essay title was adopted as the overarching title for this project, neither the conference nor the papers presented in the special issue provided a serious engagement with the critiques and theorizations of the bantustans from activists of the Black Consciousness Movement such as that provided in Biko's 1972 article. See, Ally and Lissoni, 'Preface', pp. xi-xiv.
[60] Laura Philips, 'History of South Africa's Bantustans', *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of African History*, (2017). Accessed online at: http://africanhistory.oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/arcefore/9780190277734.001.0001/acrefore-9780190277734-e-80.
[61] Harold Wolpe, 'Capitalism and Cheap Labour-Power in South Africa: From Segregation to Apartheid', *Economy and Society*, 1 4 (1972), pp. 425-456.

the native reserves would be responsible for the social reproduction of this labour force. Wolpe argued that under the auspices of the National Party (NP) regime, which ushered in the transition from segregation to apartheid, mechanisms such as the influx control and bantustan policies were initiated in order to bolster this migrant labour system and to prevent black workers from settling in white South Africa. Both Beinart and Phillips observe that it was the debates sparked by Wolpe's 1972 cheap labour thesis which brought the bantustans to the fore as critical areas of study for radical historians and social scientists. Beinart argues that, '[a]lthough Wolpe's seminal article, connecting the main thrust of 'homeland' policy with the expansion of cheap migrant labour, has been much debated and criticized, its central thrust remains embedded in the literature'[62].

Following from Wolpe, some of the earliest and most developed debates in bantustan historiography centred on issues such as the question of the legitimacy of the 'homelands' and their role within the larger apartheid project as either reservoirs of cheap black labour or as the dumping grounds of South Africa's surplus urban black population, or both – as most historians now agree.[63] According to Phillips, the centrality of Wolpe's thesis in bantustan studies 'allowed a generation of scholars to present the bantustans exclusively through their relationship to the South African state'[64]. This observation is also echoed by Laura Evans who identifies Roger Southall, Duncan Innes and Dan O'Meara, as three key contributors to the structuralist school of South African historiography in the 1970s and 1980s. Evans argues that,

> In their endeavours to highlight the functions served by the homelands system to South African capitalism, these [structuralist] accounts overlooked the agency of African people in shaping state institutions and governance and in stretching the limits of official power, not only through active resistance but through a variety of other modes of engagement.[65]

Evans explains that Wolpe's 'cheap labour thesis', Martin Legassick's early-1970s class-based critiques of liberal analyses of the bantustans, and the structuralist perspectives offered by orthodox Marxist historians such as Southall, were initially embraced by many scholars in the

[62] Beinart, 'Beyond 'Homelands', p. 13.
[63] See Stanley Greenburg, *Legitimatising the Illegitimate: State, Markets, and Resistance in South Africa*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).
[64] Philips, 'History of South Africa's Bantustans'.
[65] Laura Evans, 'South Africa's Bantustans and the Dynamics of 'Decolonisation': Reflections on Writing Histories of the Homelands' in *South African Historical Journal*, 64 1 (2012), p. 126.

1970s and 1980s.[66] However, in the late-1980s and 1990s, a group of radical historians, sociologists, and anthropologists soon began to criticize these frameworks for their lack of consideration for the politics, histories, and lived experiences of those who lived in the bantustans. Peter Delius and Belinda Bozzoli's introduction to the winter 1990 issue of *Radical History Review* provides a comprehensive overview of this critique.[67] They argue that despite advocating for democratic politics over Stalinism, the South African structuralist school failed to adequately account for the agency of subordinated and subaltern groups in shaping the state and neglected issues of subjectivity and lived experience in everyday life.[68] In response, the authors drew attention to previously neglected issues such as African agency, gender, class, ethnic identity formation, and various forms of anti-apartheid resistance politics. In so doing, this younger generation of social historians in the late-1980s and 1990s challenged their more structuralist colleagues' top-down perspectives that had been heavily influenced by Althusserian/Poulantzian ideas.[69]

Guided by an overarching concern for producing 'history from below' perspectives social historians in the 1980s and 1990s such as Helen Bradford, Belinda Bozzoli, Timothy Keegan, Phil Bonner and William Beinart, among many others, came to make a significant contribution to the historiography of the bantustans by taking seriously the politics and experiences of 'ordinary people' – non-elite actors – in the creation, functioning, and destruction of the bantustans as well as their (individual and collective) relationships with the state and rural elites. Some of the most robust parts of 1970s and 1980s bantustan historiography are the studies of the popular rural uprisings against the introduction of Bantu Authorities and betterment during the mid-twentieth century. Some of the earliest studies by Matthew Chaskalson, Tom Lodge, and Baruch Hirson show that throughout the 1940s and 1950s, popular resistance praxes – of varying scale and levels of duration, intensity, and frequency – proliferated across all the reserve areas in South Africa.

[66] Mike Morris, 'Social History and the Transition to Capitalism in the South African Countryside', *Review of African Political Economy*, 41 (1988), p. 60.
[67] Peter Delius and Belinda Bozzoli, 'Editors' Introduction: Radical History and South African Society', in Peter Delius and Belinda Bozzoli, eds., *Radical History Review*, 46 7 (Winter 1990), pp. 24-25.
[68] *Ibid*, pp. 24 -25.
[69] *Ibid*, p. 25.

These early Marxist studies of the 1940s to 1960s period of widespread rural resistance in South Africa are seldom mentioned in more recent bantustan historiography. In this thesis, however, these studies have been important secondary sources informing my gender and subaltern analysis of women's emancipatory praxes during this period which preceded the making of the bantustans. Similarly to my thesis, this scholarship shows that in the rural uprisings of the 1940s and 1950s, 'fences were broken down, stock cards and land certificates burnt, erosion banks destroyed, culls restricted, restrictions on firewood ignored and relocations opposed'.[70] It also shows that the institution and agents of chiefly rule played a central, albeit highly varied, role in these popular anti-colonial and anti-apartheid struggles for freedom in rural South Africa.[71] On the one hand, for example, there is the historical event of the Mpondo revolts (1957-1961) in which emancipatory struggles for land and commons were fought in direct opposition to both the institution and agents of the chieftaincy.[72] On the other hand, there are the Pietersburg (1943), Witzieshoek (1951), Sekhukhune (1958), and Marico/Zeerust (1957) uprisings of the same period, in which some chiefs played important supportive roles in popular struggles for freedom. By the early-1960s, this literature shows that these popular rural uprisings, as well as the local movements that had sustained them, had been defeated by apartheid state repression and the system of Bantu/Tribal Authorities was grafted onto the institution of chiefly rule throughout rural South Africa. From the mid-1960s onward, as Lungisile Ntsebeza argues, 'in so far as traditional authorities were part of apartheid government structures under Bantu Authorities, they could not avoid being targets of struggles for freedom in rural communities.'[73] The scholarship suggests, in general, that from the mid-1960s onward, the chieftaincy no longer acted as a supportive vehicle for popular struggles for freedom in rural South Africa as it had done on several occasions, and in many different places, in earlier decades.

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[70] Matthew Chaskalson, 'Rural resistance in the 1940s and 1950s', *Africa Perspective*, 1 5-6 (1986), p. 48. Also see, Tom Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), pp. 47-57; and Baruch Hirson, 'Rural revolt in South Africa, 1937-1951', *Institute of Commonwealth Studies Collected Seminar Papers*, 21 (1977), pp. 115-132.

[71] See for example, Govan Mbeki, *South Africa: The peasants' revolt*. (Middlesex: Penguin, 1964); Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996); Kepe and Ntsebeza, *Rural Resistance*; Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1997)

[72] Sarah Bruchhausen, 'Emancipatory Politics and the Mpondo revolts', (MA thesis, Rhodes University, 2016); Kepe and Ntsebeza, *Rural Resistance*.

[73] Lungisile Ntsebeza, 'The Structures and Struggles of Rural Local Government in South Africa: The case study of traditional authorities in the Eastern Cape' (PhD thesis, Rhodes University, 2002), p. ii.

Other well-developed topics within the post-structuralist bantustan literature, in addition to the studies of the oppressive nature of chiefly rule under Bantu Authorities discussed above, include historical analyses of the bantustan system's destabilisation and refashioning of patriarchal hierarchies in rural societies, the apartheid state's construction of ethnic identities in the bantustans, as well as the processes of class differentiation and stratification entailed in the making and unmaking of the bantustans.[74] However, like their more structuralist forerunners, these social historians became the target of significant critique during the late 1980s once the tradition of social history had gained a dominant status within South African academy. Evans explains that scholars such as Mike Morris accused South African social history of being 'anti-theoretical' and 'anti-analytical' in its approach to the production of historical knowledge.[75] By highlighting the significance of oral history sources and methods of analysis that premise the 'voices' and experiences of ordinary people, Morris argued that social historians,

> reduce the role of the 'social scientist', of the Marxist historian, of historical materialism, to the simple recorder of the life experiences and perceptions of the experienced reality of one's 'chosen people' – the subjects of one's study. Theoretical training and analytic reflection are discarded in favour of the best method of experiential reflection. The good historian is simply he or she who reflects the 'experience' from below the best.[76]

[74] For some key texts written in the 1980s and 1990s which explore themes of class formation and the institution of chiefly rule in the bantustans see, for example, William Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982); William Beinart, 'Chieftaincy and the Concept of Articulation: South Africa, c. 1900-1950', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 19 (1985), pp. 91-98; William Beinart and Colin Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* (London: James Currey, 1987); and Barry Streek and Richard Wickstead, *Render Unto Kaiser: A Transkei Dossier* (Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1981). For studies on the relationship between colonial-cum-apartheid processes of land dispossession and the formation of ethnically-chauvinistic and patriarchal identities in the emerging bantustans see, for example, Peter Delius, 'The Ndzundza Ndebele: Indenture and the Making of Ethnic Identity', in Phil Bonner, Isabel Hofmeyr, Deborah James and Tom Lodge, eds., *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989), pp. 227-258; and, Deborah James, 'A Question of Ethnicity: Ndzundza Ndebele in a Lebowa Village', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16 1 (1990), pp. 33-45. For a study of changing gender relations and patriarchal hierarchies in rural societies and households in the bantustans see, for example, Shula Marks, 'Natal, the Zulu Family and the Ideology of Segregation', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4 2 (1978), pp. 172-194; Belinda Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Migrancy and Life Strategy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (London: James Currey, 1991); and Anne Mager, *Gender and the Making of a South African Bantustan: A Social History of the Ciskei, 1945-1959* (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

[75] Evans, 'South Africa's Bantustans', p. 126.

[76] Morris, 'Social History and Capitalist Transition', pp. 64-65.

The above claim made by Morris is in many ways an overstated and unfair sweeping characterization of the diverse and multifaceted historical discourse that is South African social history. However, it is necessary to mention because it shares much in common with more recent critiques which have been levelled against the discipline of History by political theorists, such as Michael Neocosmos, who questions the ability of social historians to recognise and account for past manifestations of emancipatory politics.[77] It is also important to take note of some of the other critiques of South African social history raised by scholars in the late-1980s that continue to resonate with contemporary debates concerning transformative human agency and historical knowledge production. For example, Martin Murray argued that social historians wrongly assumed high levels of social cohesion amongst rural peoples (neglecting cleavages caused by class and gender divisions) and, because of this assumption, they problematically overstated the 'resilience of popular struggles to "resist" the advance of agrarian capitalism'[78]. Murray goes on to accuse these social historians of misrepresenting all forms of rural resistance as 'inherently "anti-capitalist" and "anti-colonial" expressions of the popular will'[79]. While this critique does not apply to the works on the bantustans produced by most social historians in the last two decades of the 20th century – accusing Bradford or Delius, for example, of neglecting the significance of class and gender would be ridiculous – it does point to what Phillips identifies as the tendency of scholars of the bantustans 'to write about South Africa either in terms of resistance or collaboration'[80].

The resistance versus collaboration dichotomy remained a central pillar of bantustan historiography in the early-2000s when a new wave of policy-centred scholarship emerged which was largely focused on levelling critiques against the institution of chiefly rule, customary law, and communal land tenure systems in the former bantustans of post-apartheid South Africa. This literature was developed in response to policies and laws passed by the South African government, during and since the CODESA negotiations of the early-1990s, which scholars such as Lungisile Ntsebeza, Barbara Oomen, Jason Conrad Myers, and Aninka Claassens, among others, variously argue have persevered and extended the system

[77] See for example, Neocosmos, 'Those-who-do-not-count', pp. 530-547.
[78] Martin J. Murray, 'The Origins of Agrarian Capitalism in South Africa: A Critique of the "Social History" Perspective', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15 4 (1989), pp. 645-665.
[79] *Ibid*, p. 649.
[80] Delius and Bozzoli, 'Editors' Introduction', p. 25.

of indirect rule and oppressive modes of chiefly rule into the post-apartheid present.[81] Examples of such policies that have been criticized for perpetuating oppressive modes of chiefly rule are the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003, the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004, and more recently the Traditional and Khoi-San Leadership Bill of 2019. Scholars writing from the early-2000s onward have also continued to focus on the role of CONTRALESA and the National House of Traditional Leaders in shaping the current political landscape in South Africa and in pitting rural women's interests against those of chiefs and capital.[82] They have variously criticised these policies and organisations for perpetuating the subordination of women in traditional leadership structures and the marginalisation of women in the public decision-making processes regarding the allocation and management of communal land – two nefarious legacies of the grafting of the system of Bantu Authorities onto chiefly modes of local governance during the apartheid era.[83]

There are vastly different perspectives on traditional authorities and democracy offered within this critical scholarship on land and governance in post-apartheid rural South Africa. As Steffen Jensen and Olaf Zenker have observed, for example, 'Where Oomen sees pros and cons in relation to chiefs, Ntsebeza is uncompromising and sees no benefits in preserving chiefly authority'.[84] While this statement gives an accurate indication of the range of perspectives in recent scholarly literature on the chieftaincy it is, I argue, somewhat of an unfair characterisation of Ntsebeza's critique of the institution of traditional authorities. In *Democracy Compromised*, Ntsebeza argues that,

> both the participatory and representative elements of democracy are vital in the post-colonial democratic transition. In this regard, the way in which

[81] See for example, Lungisile Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised: Chiefs and the Politics of the Land in South Africa* (Leiden: Brill, p. 2005); Barabra Oomen, *Chiefs in South Africa: Law, Power, and Culture in the Post-Apartheid Era* (Oxford: James Curry, 2005); Jason Conrad Myers, *Indirect Rule in South Africa: Tradition, Modernity, and the Costuming of Political Power* (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2008); Anika Claassens and Ben Cousins, eds., *Land, Power & Custom: Controversies Generated by South Africa's Communal Land Rights Act* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2008); Anika Claassen, 'Who Told Them We Want This Bill? The Traditional Courts Bill and Rural Women', *Agenda*, 23 82 (2009), pp. 9-22; and, Bernard Mbenga and Andrew Manson, *People of the Dew* (Auckland Park: Jacana, 2010).

[82] See, for example, Jo Beall, Stephen Gelb and Shireen Hassim, 'Fragile Stability: State and Society in Democratic South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 31 4 (2005), pp. 683-700; and, , Robin L. Turner, 'Traditional, Democratic, Accountable? Navigating Citizen-Subjection in Rural South Africa', *Africa Spectrum*, 49 1 (2014), pp. 27-54.

[83] See, for example, Jo Beall, Stephen Gelb and Shireen Hassim, 'Fragile Stability', pp. 692-693.

[84] Steffen Jensen and Olaf Zenker, 'Homelands as Frontiers: Apartheid's Loose Ends – An Introduction', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41 5(2015), p. 950.

> traditional authorities could play a public, political role would be for them to abandon their hereditary status and subject themselves to the process of election by their people. They can bring to the project of post-colonial democracy the participatory element in decision making that traditional systems are renowned about. This conception of democracy, I argue, is proposed not only for rural societies, but for the country as whole, urban and rural.[85]

The above quotation demonstrates that even Ntsebeza does not see the politics of traditional authority as inherently antagonistic to democracy and he does in fact imagine a possible future in which the chieftaincy could exist as a vehicle for the expression of the popular will of the people in South Africa. However, despite the nuances and complexities of the academic debates on traditional authorities, the public debates and mainstream media outputs tend to provide a rather straightforward perspective of chiefs as corrupt and self-serving apartheid-collaborators against whose oppressive modes of local governance few forms of popular resistance are now possible under the so-called 'Bantustan Bills' in the post-apartheid present.[86]

The subaltern histories of emancipatory politics in the former Lebowa bantustan discussed in my thesis have the potential to help move the critique of the 'Bantustan Bills' beyond its current formulation in public historical and contemporary discourses which presents the chieftaincy, customary law, and communal land tenure, as always inherently antagonistic to gender equality and the interests of rural women. My own research suggests that in exceptional moments of emancipatory politics in certain spaces of the former bantustans, during particular and often fleeting periods, rural women have successfully used the institution of chieftaincy to realise their collective rights to land and the commons and, in so doing, reconfigured their socio-political positions of subalternity fostered under chiefly modes of rule since the colonial period. As such my thesis, particularly in the concluding chapter, speaks directly to this body of literature in bantustan historiography and argues that

[85] Ntsebeza, *Democracy Compromised*, p. 35.
[86] See, for example, Aninka Claassens, '1913 Land Act: Bantustans left untransformed', *Mail and Guardian*, (14 June 2013). Accessed online at: https://mg.co.za/article/2013-06-14-00-1913-land-act-bantustans-left-untransformed/; Aninka Claassens, '"Bantustan Bills" trample on the rights of rural people', *Daily Maverick*, (4 November 2019). Accessed online at: https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2019-11-04-bantustan-bills-trample-on-the-rights-of-rural-people/; and, Aninka Claassens, '"It's Not Easy to Challenge a Chief": Lessons from Rakwadi', in *PLAAS Research Report No.9* (Cape Town: PLAAS, 2001).

women's subaltern histories of emancipatory politics should be given more attention by scholars and policymakers engaged in debates about the 'Bantustan Bills' and land reform in post-apartheid South Africa.[87] As mentioned earlier with reference to Beinart's observations, this body of literature is characterised by a 'top-down' inclined perspective, in which the state and its policies take centre-stage as the agent of social and political change, and thus it shares many of the limitations of the earlier structuralists identified and critiqued by social historians in the 1980s and 1990s.[88]

Moving beyond a state-centric perspective and conceptually problematizing, unpacking, stretching and in some cases completely collapsing the epistemologically dominant binary of resistance versus collaboration is a characteristic feature, and a recurring concern, of the most recent scholarly literature on the former bantustans in which my thesis is situated. Included in this new scholarship on the bantustans are scholars such as Ally, Lissoni, Phillips, Evans, and Lekgoathi, to name just a few. My thesis builds upon this new scholarship while also placing itself into conversation with earlier studies in bantustan historiography by scholars such as Delius, Ineke van Kessel, Essy Letsoalo and Deborah James.[89] Although seldomly focusing their respective analytic lenses on the experiences of women in a sustained manner (with the exception of James), these studies provide insights into the subject of women's emancipatory praxes and struggles for freedom in the former Lebowa bantustan.[90] Furthermore, these scholars also make important claims regarding the gendered nature of the bantustan project (and collective resistance against it) in Lebowa, from a range of analytical perspectives. Of particular importance for the arguments made in my thesis regarding the forms and content of rural women's emancipatory praxes during

[87] Claassens, 'Bantustan Bills'.
[88] Beinart, 'Beyond Homelands', p. 13.
[89] The two key texts by Peter Delius are, *A Lion amongst the Cattle,* and, *The Land Belongs to Us*. Also see, van Kessel, *Beyond our Wildest Dreams*; Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, 'Ethnicity and Identity: Struggle and Contestation in the Making of the Northern Transvaal Ndebele, ca. 1860-2005', (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2006); Essy Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies in Rural Lebowa: A Study in the Geography of Poverty', (MA Thesis, Wits University, 1982); Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo'; Deborah James, 'Women Use their Strength in the House': Savings Clubs in an Mpumalanga Village', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41 5 (2015), pp. 1035-1052; Deborah James, 'Sister, spouse, lazy woman: Commentaries on domestic predicaments by Kiba performers from the Northern Transvaal', in D Brown, ed., *Oral Literature and Performance in South Africa*, (Oxford: James Currey, 1990), pp. 176-194.
[90] For example, see, James, 'Women use their strength', pp. 1035-1052; and, James, 'Sister, spouse, lazy woman', pp. 176-194.

periods of large-scale rural uprisings in Lebowa in the 1950s and 1980s, are the respective works of social historians Delius and van Kessel.

Delius' work represents the most extensive and sustained academic enquiry into the history of the north-eastern Transvaal and what became Lebowa.[91] He charts the major political upheavals and socio-political transformations in the region, with a specific focus on the Pedi polity in Ga-Sekhukhune (also known as Sekhukhuneland), from the early nineteenth century up until the end of the twentieth century.[92] In *A Lion Amongst the Cattle* Delius explores the history of the first and second Sekhukhune uprisings in the late-1950s and mid-1980s, respectively, as part of a wider analysis of the social history of Ga-Sekhukhune in the twentieth century. He argues that the destabilisation and transformation of generational and gender hierarchies in rural societies, associated with the making of the bantustans and resistance against them, were defining elements of both uprisings. In making this argument with reference to the first Sekhukhune uprising, Delius shows how a younger generation of male migrant workers with close links to the ANC, Communist Party and radical trade unions operating in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging (PWV) region, challenged existing generational hierarchies in order to democratise the Pedi chieftaincy from below and use the institution as a tool of resistance against the imposition of Bantu Authorities and betterment during the 1950s.

Delius' analysis of the first uprising focuses primarily on the experiences of the male-dominated Sebatakgomo and Khuduthamaga migrant worker organisations and the chieftaincy. His study of the political forms and practices of the rural youth movement in Ga-Sekhukhune during the mid-1980s uprising is equally male-centred. This is not only a reflection of the highly skewed gender composition of the 1980s South African youth movement in general, but also a result of Delius' specific focus on the praxis of witchcraft killings (in which female comrades seldom participated), which is treated in wider bantustan

[91] Key texts from Delius on the history of popular resistance in the rural Northern Transvaal during the apartheid era in addition to *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, see for example, Delius, 'Migrant Organization, the ANC and the Sekhukhune revolt', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 15 4 (1989), pp. 581-615; 'Sebatakgomo and the Zoutpansberg Balemi Association: The ANC, the Communist Party and rural organization, 1939-55', *Journal of African History*, 34 2 (1993), pp. 293-313; 'The Tortoise and the Spear: Popular Political Culture and Violence in the Sekhukhune Revolt of 1958' (Wits History Workshop seminar paper, 1994); and, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt: Sekhukhune 1950-1987', *Transformation*, 13 (1990), pp. 2-26.
[92] Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us*.

historiography as a defining feature of the politics of the rural youth movement in Lebowa.[93] By focusing on aspects of the rural youth movement in which female comrades were subordinate or absent without giving similar attention to those spaces and modes of politics in which they did participate, sometimes even as equals, alongside their young male counterparts, Delius' analysis tends towards androcentrism. As such, his historical analyses of the Sekhukhune uprisings, as well as the two and a half decades of political resistance between these two events, is much more about the political movements and experiences of men than it is about those of women.

However, as a result of Delius' sensitivity to gender, his analyses of the changing political economy and political resistance landscapes in Lebowa throughout the twentieth century have yielded invaluable insights into the structural and materialist constraints rural women faced in the Lebowa bantustan. Of particular significance in this regard is Delius's argument that the most important change in the rural economy of Lebowa from the late-1960s onward was 'the beginnings of large-scale female labour migrancy' – a process fuelled by the imposition of Bantu Authorities and betterment as well as the subsequent expansion of formal schooling in Lebowa.[94] Building on Delius and the wider literature, my thesis explores how transformations in the political economy of Lebowa had a determining effect in shaping modes of women's emancipatory politics during different periods.

Ineke van Kessel's analysis of the role of the UDF during the mid-1980s moment of rural resistance in Lebowa is, similarly to Delius, focused on the male-dominated political formations and praxes of the rural youth movement in Ga-Sekhukhune. van Kessel also provides some very important observations regarding women's experiences of popular struggles for freedom in Lebowa despite her somewhat androcentric perspective. For example, she argues that,

> Girls were not totally absent from youth organisation in Sekhukhuneland, but this movement was strongly dominated by male youth… The struggle was not an empowering experience for BaPedi mothers: they feared their children. Girls might have felt attracted to the youth movement, which provided an

[93] See, for example, Isaac Niehaus, 'Witchcraft and the South African Bantustans: Evidence from Bushbuckridge', *South African Historical Journal*, 64 1 (2012), pp. 41-58; and, Isaac Niehaus, 'Witchhunting and Political Legitimacy: Continuity and Change in Green Valley, Lebowa, 1930-91.', *Africa*, 63 4 (1993), pp. 498-53

[94] *Ibid*, p.148.

> escape from parental control, but they played a subordinate role. Nonetheless, through the link up with the wider world, notions of women's liberation trickled down to Sekhukhuneland.[95]

Other scholars, such as Phillips and Letsoalo, also offer important reflections on gendered aspects of some of the most spectacular moments and spaces of rural resistance, as well as ordinary people's less spectacular everyday struggles for survival and dignity, that unfolded in Lebowa during the second half of the twentieth century. Phillips, for example, explores the ways in which class and gender shaped popular participation in the civil servant strikes and civic protests in Lebowa's townships during the 1990s. Social geographer Letsoalo's study of changing survival strategies in the Lebowa bantustan, on the other hand, provides insights into rural women's everyday praxes of resistance in Lebowa during the late-1960s and 1970s. This was the period in which previously active modes of organised popular resistance were severely constrained and curtailed by the apartheid state, forcing the national liberation movement underground, and creating the conditions of possibility and necessity for the radical labour and youth movements to emerge and provide new organisational impetus to the popular struggle for freedom in South Africa.[96]

In considering the political significance of women's everyday associational life in Lebowa from the 1970s onwards, the work of social anthropologist Deborah James is particularly important. James has written extensively about women's associational life in villages of the former Lebowa bantustan currently situated in the Mpumalanga Province. The main thrust of her investigation focuses on a variety of women-made savings clubs and the ways in which they have been shaped by the political economies of the former bantustans in the late-apartheid and post-apartheid periods.[97] James argues that one of the major transformations in women's savings clubs has been the diversification of their memberships that has resulted, primarily, from the gendered process of class differentiation and stratification amongst women in rural societies that was accelerated with the expansion of

[95] van Kessel, *Beyond our Wildest Dreams*, p. 296.

[96] Delius' work is important for understanding the making of the ANC underground in Lebowa during the 1970s, however, there is little in his study about the various experiences of rural women in supporting and participating in this sphere of the national liberation struggle. See, Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle,* pp. 140 – 171.

[97] See, for example, Deborah James, 'Money-Go-Round: Personal Economies of Wealth, Aspiration and Indebtedness', *Africa*, 82 1 (2012), pp. 20-40; James, 'Women use their strength', pp. 1035-1052; and, James, 'Sister, spouse, lazy woman', pp. 176-194;

public employment and the introduction of grant systems in the early-1990s. As such, James asserts that we should understand rural women's savings clubs as,

> More than simply 'loose ends' of apartheid's homeland system, women's savings clubs are being woven together into new fabrics of intensified solidarity. But not everyone can benefit equally from these sociable arrangements. Clubs occupy a point of intersection between two trends. One comprises modern roles and concerns associated with upward mobility in democratic South Africa. The other is evident in pockets of apparent informality and customary mutuality, where egalitarian sociability predominates. Setting out an arena linked to, but discrete from, that of capitalism, the clubs help members alternately accommodate and defy capitalism's imperatives, while also fending off demands made by poorer relatives, neighbours, and those with too few resources to belong to clubs.[98]

My own investigation of women's associational life in villages of the former Lebowa bantustan, presently situated in the Limpopo Province during the post-apartheid era, draws on James's findings and moves beyond them by drawing attention to a specific mode of women's grassroots organisation, exemplified by the Makotse Women's Club (MWC), that is radically inclusive in its political form and practices.

In addition to James, the work of Letsoalo has also been instrumental in shaping the sections of my thesis dealing with the question of rural women's emancipatory politics in the post-apartheid period. Letsoalo's contribution to the post-apartheid land reform debates – grounded in her own substantive historical research into women's survival strategies in Lebowa – informs the concluding chapter of my thesis where I discuss the theoretical significance of rural women's subaltern histories of emancipatory politics for contemporary South African politics. Put briefly, Letsoalo takes a position on the land debate that is distinct from the liberal perspective which, she suggests, is little more than an affirmation that in post-apartheid South Africa, 'democracy equals the privatisation of land and its administration by anybody, except traditional authorities'.[99] More recently, Advocate Tembeka Ngcukaitobi has made a similar observation that the continued centrality of so-called 'Western-style title

[98] James, 'Women Use Their Strength', p. 1035.

[99] Essy Letsoalo, 'Gender, Land and Economic Justice' *Frank Talk*, 7 (November 2013), p. 6. A similar argument to that made by Letsoalo here is also provided by Ben Cousins. See, for example, Ben Cousins, *Reforming Communal Land Tenure in South Africa – Why Land Titling is not the Answer: Critical Comment on the Communal Land Rights Bill* (Cape Town: PLAAS, 2002).

deeds' and private property rights in the government's land policy, and scholarly debates thereof, remains one of the largest obstacles impeding meaningful land reform in South Africa presently.[100] In *Land Matters*, Ngcukaitobi argues that in order to move scholarship and government policies on land reform in South Africa forward,

> An imaginative, expanded and transformative vision of the Constitution and its statutory progenies is needed. If we take this lesson seriously enough, the 'transformation' of property relations might serve not to entrench the colonial property framework in its imperial guise, as it has so far under the ANC government, but to challenge and confront it. Perhaps we might also think beyond the straitjacket of redistributing land from private hands to private hands. We might also expand our vision to multiple forms of landholding. We might also accept that the primary beneficiaries of land should be those who work it.[101]

My thesis seeks to validate and contribute to this radical position in the contemporary land debates by highlighting the anti-privatisation dimensions of women's emancipatory praxes against betterment in Lebowa during different historical moments since the mid-twentieth century. Additionally, it aims to drive these debates forward by arguing that women's past and present struggles for rights to the commons and their defence of subsistence lifestyles should be given greater consideration in academic and policymaking circles regarding the land question and democracy in post-apartheid South Africa.

(Radical) Feminist scholarship

One of the main contributions made by feminist scholars to bantustan historiography is the study of the changing (political, economic and social) status of black women living under chiefly rule in rural South Africa during different periods of the past and in the present.[102] Much of this literature is centred on studies of rural women's structural subordination and

[100] Tembeka Ngcukaitobi, *Land Matters: South Africa's Failed Land Reforms and the Road Ahead* (Cape Town: Penguin Books, 2021), pp. 221 -222.
[101] *Ibid*, p. 222.
[102] See, for example, Mager, *Gender and the Making*; Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng*; Laura Evans, 'Gender, Generation and the Experiences of Farm Dwellers Resettled in the Ciskei Bantustan, South Africa, c. 1960-1976' *Journal of Agrarian* Change, 13 2 (2013), pp. 213-233. For an excellent overview of this body of literature comprised of various studies of women living under systems of customary law, communal land tenure, and chiefly rule, in different parts of rural South Africa, see Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, 'Gender Relations, Women and Politics among the 'Transvaal Ndebele', ca. 1500s to the early 1900s', in SADET, eds., *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, Volume 9 (2021), pp. 147 – 164.

survival strategies under the legal frameworks, policies, and practices of customary law, communal land tenure systems, and institutions of chiefly rule in different parts of South Africa during the pre-colonial, colonial, apartheid and post-apartheid periods.[103] Lekgoathi argues that a pitfall of the early gender studies approach in South African feminist historiography relates to its understanding, or misunderstanding, of the status of women in pre-colonial African societies. Citing the works of Julia Wells, John Wright, Jeff Guy, and Cheryl Walker, Lekgoathi makes the following observations and critique:

> It is unfortunate that these feminist scholars saw women and gender as interchangeable and failed to understand that men, too, were gendered and that masculinity affected history as well. The idea that gender was a fundamental cleavage in pre-colonial African societies is incorrect and reflects the Eurocentrism of early missionaries arriving in southern Africa, as well as the desire of colonial states to control the narrative of these societies and make the most of group differences to their advantage. The early gender studies approach caricatures the extent to which patriarchy kept women in subordinate positions, subservient to men. Most importantly, by depicting pre-colonial African societies as fixed and timeless, they obscure a wide range of activities performed jointly by men and women. The notion that these societies were 'timeless, unchanging and monolithic' is clearly untrue and ahistorical, yet it has proved to be a very dominant angle through which pre-colonial African societies continue to be comprehended.[104]

Lekgoathi argues that since the early-2000s a new generation of feminist scholars has begun to debunk some of the 'crude imprecisions and misconceptions in accounts based on androcentric versions of history' and 'helped to uncover an abundance of complexity in relations between different social groups in pre-colonial southern African societies'.[105] The majority of this new scholarship is based on studies of Zulu society (although Lekgoathi's focus is on gender relations within Ndebele societies of the Northern Transvaal) and argues that women's lack of rights and access to property, as well as their exclusion from or subordination

[103] See, for example, Mager, *Gender and the Making*; Bozzoli, *Women of Phokeng*; Evans, 'Gender, Generation', pp. 213-233; Claassens, 'It's Not Easy to Challenge a Chief'; Helen Bradford, 'Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and Its Frontier Zones, C. 1806–70', *Journal of African History*, 37 3 (1996), pp. 351-370; and Helen Bradford, 'Peasants, Historians, and Gender: A South African Case Study Revisited, 1850–1886', *History and Theory*, 39 (2000), pp. 86-110.
[104] Lekgoathi, 'Gender, Women and Politics', p. 148.
[105] *Ibid*, p. 148. See for example, Bradford, 'Women, Gender and Colonialism', pp. 351-370.

within the political sphere, was not as extreme as previously suggested.[106] Lekgoathi's critique of early feminist understandings of South African women's status in pre-colonial societies is important because it helps explain how and why patriarchal agents, discourses, and institutions – such as those of chiefly rule – have, in certain moments, been crucial parts of rural women's struggles for freedom; and how and why this point has been previously overlooked in South African feminist historiography.

Nomboniso Gasa argues that an often misunderstood characteristic of South African women's political history during the colonial and apartheid periods, is that when black women entered into relationships with existing forms of patriarchy (be they those of the state or resistance movements), they did so with full consciousness of the links between the immediate object of their struggles (the passes, betterment/rehabilitation schemes, and so on) and their conception and pursuit of freedom which went beyond the realm of the particular and into that of the universal.[107] This insight is one which Gasa accuses feminist historians, Julia Wells and Cheryl Walker, of having neglected in their respective studies of the history of women's resistance in South Africa. Gasa criticises both Wells and Walker for suggesting that women who were politically active in the anti-pass campaigns, and other instances of popular politics in the mid-twentieth century, were not struggling 'consciously for freedom or equality'.[108] Gasa completely rejects this and other feminist perspectives which assume that when women express themselves politically as wives or as mothers, in defence of a notion of the family, they are automatically defending patriarchal dominance over the public sphere of politics and misogynistic power relations in the private domains of their everyday lives.[109] As such Gasa argues that:

> While there may be similarities in patriarchal practices, it is also true that patriarchy takes different forms. There may be numerous ways in which patriarchy is manifested. The response of feminist academics and feminist

[106] See for example, Sifiso Ndlovu, 'A Reassessment of Women's Power in the Zulu Kingdom', in Benedict Carton, John Laband and Jabulani Sithole, eds., *Zulu Identities: Being Zulu, Past and Present* (Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2008); Sean Hanretta, 'Women, Marginality and the Zulu State: Women's Institutions and Power in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History*, 39 1 (1998), pp. 389– 415; and Jennifer Weir, 'Chiefly Women and Women's Leadership in Pre-colonial Southern Africa', in Nomboniso Gasa, ed., *Women in South African History: They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006), pp. 4-20.

[107] Nomboniso Gasa, 'Feminisms, Motherisms, Patriarchies and Women's Voices in the 1950s', in Nomboniso Gasa, ed., *Women in South African History: Basus'iimbokodo, bawel'imilambo/They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007), p. 227.

[108] Gasa, 'Feminisms, Motherisms, Patriarchies', p. 227.

[109] *Ibid*, p. 227.

> academic activists therefore must be informed by this consideration. […] Our starting point is a search for tools, a fine-combing of historical archives and narratives, a fine-tuning of the ear, and the development of a wider non-linear vision that can read backwards, sideways and at all levels at any given point.[110]

As previously noted, Cock warns that adopting a gender lens does not mean simply 'inserting' women's political experiences into already written androcentric historical narratives of the liberation struggle. It means drawing on the conceptual tools and methods developed by radical scholars – by which I mean scholars from the critical traditions of postcolonialism, feminism, subaltern studies, the black radical tradition, and post-structuralist Marxism – and applying them in flexible and adaptable ways to the analysis of historical sources and the construction of new women-centred historical narratives.[111] Of particular significance in this regard are the concepts of 'crisis', 'life-affirming social change', and 'the commons', which I deploy regularly throughout this thesis in understanding women's everyday lives and praxes of emancipatory politics in Lebowa. These concepts have been theorised extensively in the respective works of feminist Marxist scholars Ruth Wilson Gilmore and Silvia Federici.[112] Throughout the chapters of this thesis, each of which is focused on a particular aspect of women's emancipatory politics in Lebowa during specific historical periods, I have attempted to present my findings, that are based on substantive historical analysis, in ways that are theoretically-cogent with the works of both these scholars.[113]

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[110] *Ibid*, pp. 227-228.

[111] These are well-developed critical traditions that often overlap, such as subaltern studies and postcolonialism, but which hold distinguishing characteristics, such as their different definitions and critiques of power, and distinct intellectual genealogies. For sympathetic but critical views of postcolonial theory, postcolonialism, and subaltern studies, see: Fredrick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Fredrick Cooper, 'Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History', *American Historical Review*, 99 5 (1994), pp. 1516-1545; and, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999). For an excellent study of the history and intellectual genealogy of the black radical tradition see, Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[112] See, Ruth Wilson Gilmore, 'Forgotten Places and the Seeds of Grassroots Planning' in C R Hale, ed., *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalising California*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Silvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland: PM Press: 2019); and, Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (New York: Autonomedia, 2004).

[113] This is also in line with the call made by social historian E.P. Thompson for 'more historical *thought*; a greater theoretical self-consciousness as to our own [historical] concepts and procedures; and more effort, by historians, to communicate their findings to others in theoretically-cogent forms'. See, E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory: Or an Orrery of Errors* (London: Merlin Press, 1978), pp. 148-149.

Drawing explicitly on the theorisations of Stuart Hall and Bill Schwarz, Gilmore defines 'crisis' as a situation in which a pre-existing system of social relations is destabilised and no longer functions as a basis for the reproduction of an existing social formation.[114] Placing herself in conversation with Walter Rodney, Franz Fanon, and Edward Soja, Gilmore observes that, crises are 'territorial and multiscalar; they overlap and sometimes interlock' and are expressed as 'institutional and individualized constraints defined by racialization, gender hierarchy, and nationality' within which people live and act politically.[115] Based on her own research, Gilmore argues that 'forgotten places' where prisons have been built in California are underdeveloped peri-urban spaces subject to the 'organised abandonment' of capitalism and neoliberalism.[116] She observes that, forgotten places 'are both symptomatic of and intimately shaped by crisis' and that, as a result, people who live in these spaces are exhausted by 'the daily violence of environmental degradation, racism, underemployment, overwork, shrinking social wages, and the disappearance of whole ways of life *and* those who lived them'.[117] The villages of former bantustans in South Africa, which are the primary focus in my thesis, are rural spaces that generally conform to Gilmore's idea of forgotten places. Although I do not employ the term forgotten places explicitly in my thesis, and prefer to use the more popular idea of subaltern spaces, it does seek to answer the following questions posed by Gilmore in her theorisation of the concept:

> how can people who inhabit forgotten places scale up their activism from intensely localized struggles to something less atomized and therefore possessed of a significant capacity for self-determination? How do they set and fulfil agendas for life-affirming social change—whether by seizing control of the social wage or through other means?[118]

In answering these questions with reference to the history of emancipatory politics in Lebowa, my thesis explores the ways in which women have attempted to 'set and fulfil agendas for life-affirming social change' within the crisis-ridden villages of the former bantustan during different historical periods. In so doing, I show that the defence of the commons (spaces where women engage in daily activities of commoning and relatively

[114] Gilmore, 'Forgotten Places', p. 32.
[115] *Ibid*, pp. 32-36.
[116] *Ibid*, p. 32.
[117] *Ibid*, p. 32.
[118] *Ibid*, p. 36.

autonomous modes of collectivised reproductive labour), as well as the creation of new social relations and spaces of the common, are defining features of rural women's emancipatory politics in South Africa. In this way, the historical analysis presented in my thesis shares much in common with the political theories of Silvia Federici.

Federici is a political theorist and historian who has written extensively on the topics of feminism, the commons, and emancipatory politics. According to Federici, 'commons are not things but social relations' which are,

> defined by the existence of a shared property, in the form of a shared natural or social wealth—lands, waters, forests, systems of knowledge, capacities for care—to be used by all commoners, without any distinction, but which are not for sale. Equal access to the necessary means of (re)production must be the foundation of life in the commons… because the existence of hierarchical relations makes commons vulnerable to enclosures.[119]

Federici argues that women played a crucial role in the historical development of the commons in medieval Europe and that the enclosure of the commons, which occurred in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was a key factor in the development of both capitalism and patriarchal systems of governance.[120] At the same time as the commons were privatized and its resources were commodified, Federici observes, women's labour was devalued and their traditional roles as subsistence farmers and caretakers of rural communities were eroded.[121] Based on these historical observations, Federici argues that the commons, which she defines as autonomous public spaces in which resources are shared and where collective activities of commoning take place, are a crucial site of struggle for feminist and anti-capitalist politics. She asserts that women have historically been, and remain, key participants in commons-based activities such as subsistence agriculture, seed-saving, and communal childcare. These activities have been devalued and exploited by capitalism, which seeks to privatize and monetize all forms of wealth, including the wealth generated through women's unpaid labour in the commons. Based on her Marxist and feminist analysis, Federici

[119] Federici, *Re-enchanting the World*, p. 94.
[120] Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, pp. 12-14.
[121] This point is made forcefully in *Caliban and the Witch*, in which Federici explores the ways in which the witch hunts of the 16th and 17th centuries were used as a tool of patriarchal and capitalist domination in Europe. She argues that these witch hunts were a way of disciplining women considered as threats to patriarchal authority and were a means of breaking down the communal structures and social relations that characterized pre-capitalist societies. See, Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, pp. 85-97.

argues that the reclaiming of the commons is a key strategy for building emancipatory politics capable of challenging and overcoming not only the capitalist system, but also the patriarchal norms and governance institutions that underpin it.[122] She furthermore sees women's struggles for access to and control over the commons as potential catalyst for broader social movements which have the potential to contribute to the emancipatory project of building of more equitable and sustainable societies.[123]

As social historian Peter Linebaugh explains, this argument represents a substantial shift in Federici's Marxist perspective from a primary concern with wages for housewives to a consideration of the politically transformative potential of the commons and a critique of the ways in which the hierarchies of wage labour and unequal power relations continue to tear the commons apart.[124] In her book *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*, Federici states:

> For what the commons in essence stands for is the recognition that life in a Hobbesian world, where one competes against all and prosperity is gained at the expense of others, is not worth living and is a sure recipe for defeat… From a feminist viewpoint, one of the attractions exercised by the idea of the commons is the possibility of overcoming the isolation in which reproductive activities are performed and the separation between the private and the public spheres that has contributed so much to hiding and rationalizing women's exploitation in the family and the home.[125]

Overall, Federici's work highlights the importance of understanding the interconnectedness of gender, the commons, and emancipatory politics, in very similar ways to those suggested in the historical analysis of women's struggles for freedom in the former Lebowa bantustan that I provide in this thesis.

Echoing Federici, my thesis demonstrates that the commons have been and still are an important site and object of women's emancipatory politics in the crisis-ridden villages of

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[122] Silvia Federici, 'From Crisis to Commons: Reproductive Work, Affective Labor and Technology in the Transformation of Everyday Life', in Ernest Schraube and Charlotte Højholt, eds., *Psychology and the Conduct of Everyday Life*, (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 175-187.

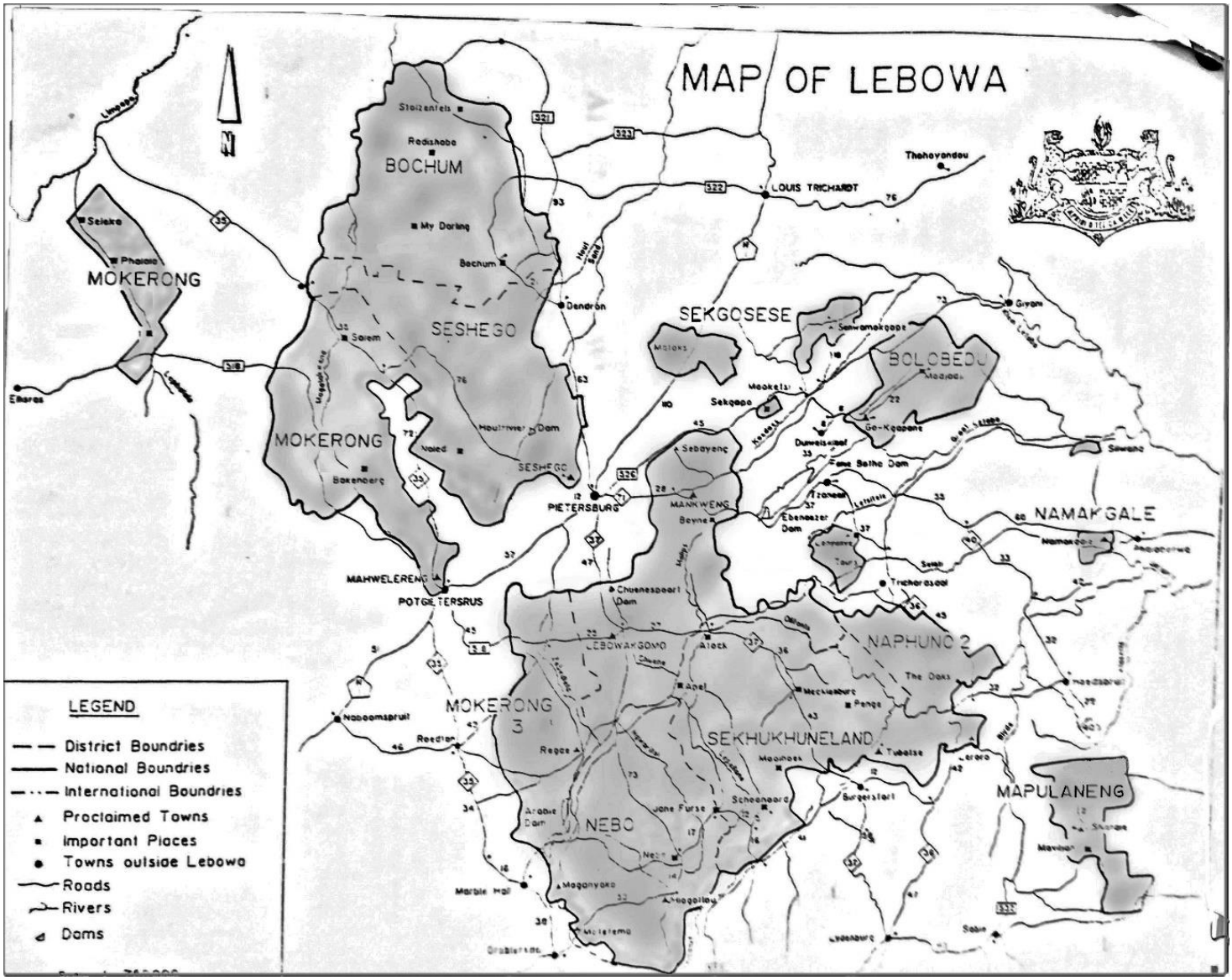
[123] Silvia Federici, 'Feminism and the Politics of the Commons', in Craig Hughes, Stevie Peace and Kevin Van Meter eds., *Uses of a WorldWind, Movement, Movements, and Contemporary Radical Currents in the United States*, (Oaskand: AK Press, 2010), pp. 283-294.

[124] Peter Linebaugh, 'Foreword' in Silvia Federici, *Re-enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (Oakland: PM Press: 2019), p. xiv.

[125] Federici, *Re-enchanting the World*, p. 1.

South Africa's former bantustans. I argue that the histories of rural women's struggle for access to the commons (not just communal arable lands and grazing pastures but also the many other spaces of rural women's everyday collective reproductive work such as river banks, mountains, and forests) should feature more centrally in on-going scholarly debates concerning women's land rights and political status under chiefly rule in post-apartheid rural South Africa. These scholarly debates are currently dominated by a critical liberal perspective which criticises rural women's lack of individual rights to private land ownership and inheritance as well as their subordinate political status under contemporary institutions of traditional authority in many – but not all – villages of the former bantustans.[126] My own research on the post-apartheid era, on the other hand, emphasises the ways in which women in some villages of the former Lebowa bantustan have organised themselves into autonomous grassroots women's associations and, in so doing, successfully secured access to arable land and rights to the commons through local traditional authorities.

[126] Aninka Claassen's work represents the most extensive articulation of what I have identified as the individual rights and private property centred liberal perspective in contemporary scholarship on rural women's rights and struggles for freedom in post-apartheid South Africa. See, for example, Claassens and Cousins, *Land, Power & Custom*; Claassens, 'Who Told Them We Want This Bill?'; Claassens, '1913 Land Act'; Claassens, 'Bantustan Bills'; and Claassens, 'It's Not Easy to Challenge a Chief'. Also see, Oomen, *Chiefs in South Africa*; and Myers, *Indirect Rule in South Africa*.



Map 2: Districts constituting the Lebowa bantustan, c.1994. Adapted from, LPA. LDOH. 21 12/4/2(4), *Reports: Water supplies, business premises, housing and building plans*, 22 April 1994.

Area of Study: The former Lebowa bantustan

Of the ten former South African bantustans that were created during apartheid, Lebowa is one of the least well known in both popular and academic discourses. As Laura Phillips argues, although there is a group of scholars who have given sustained attention to Lebowa, it – along with the Gazankulu, Venda, KaNgwane, KwaNdebele, and Qua-Qua bantustans – has received far less scholarly attention than the remaining Transkei, KwaZulu, Bophuthatswana, and

(albeit to a slightly lesser extent) Ciskei bantustans.[127] The Transkei – the oldest of the bantustans – has been the focus of a significant amount of scholarship, especially on the subject of the chieftaincy and migrant labour.[128] Studies on KwaZulu and Bophuthatswana have been most influential, argues Phillips, in nurturing the hegemonic assumption in contemporary South African historical and political discourses that 'bantustans leaders were antagonistic toward the ANC' during the national liberation struggle.[129] It is seldom acknowledged, Phillips argues, that in bantustans such as Lebowa and KaNgwane, bantustan elites had a close and complicated relationship with the ANC as well as other national liberation organisations.[130] Lebowa is thus, at this very basic level, already an important place to study because it is underrepresented, and therefore little understood, within existing bantustan historiography. In a similar vein to Phillips, but with a shift from elite to subaltern politics, my thesis demonstrates that, because of Lebowa's distinct historical administrative traditions, processes of primitive accumulation (or continuous dispossession) and experiences of proletarianization, ordinary women's praxes of resistance and emancipatory politics, and especially their relationship with the chieftaincy, were sometimes very different to those of women in the coastal bantustans.

The spatial focus of my thesis is locked onto those rural areas of the present Limpopo Province, situated in the north-eastern corner of South Africa, that once constituted the Lebowa bantustan during the apartheid era. The temporal boundaries of my thesis, on the other hand, stretch back to the late-colonial period, prior to the existence of Lebowa, and beyond into the post-apartheid present. My thesis begins in the late-1930s, with the introduction of rehabilitation and betterment on lands which had been purchased by the

[127] Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo', p. 4.
[128] *Ibid*, p. 4. For key studies on the Transkei see, for example, W Beinart, *The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860-1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Tim Gibbs, *Mandela's Kinsmen: Nationalist Elites and Apartheid's First Bantustan* (Oxford: James Currey, 2014); Ivan Evans, *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Jeff Peires, 'The Implosion of Transkei and Ciskei,' *African Affairs*, 91 (1992), pp. 365–87.
[129] Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo', p. 4. For key studies of Bophuthatswana and KwaZulu see, for example, Michael Lawrence and Andrew Manson, 'The "Dog of the Boers": The Rise and Fall of Mangope in Bophuthatswana,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20 3 (1994), pp. 447–61; Gernard Mare and Georgina Hamilton, *An Appetite for Power: Buthelezi's Inkatha and South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); and, Jeffrey Butler, Robert Rotburg and John Adams, *The Black Homelands of South Africa: The Political and Economic Development of Bophuthatswana and KwaZulu* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).
[130] For an excellent study of the close relationship between the ANC and bantustan elites in Lebowa see, Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo'.

South African Native Trust (also known as the Trust) in the Pietersburg district, after the passing of the 1936 Native Land Act. It is important to stress, here at the outset, the particularly gendered nature and effects of the apartheid socio-agriculturalist and spatial policy of betterment which was put into practice in rural South Africa. The implications of betterment for everyday life, I argue in chapter two, can be understood according to three of its relational constituent processes: enclosure, restructuring and extortion. This triadic dialectic of betterment processes all worked to undermine the independence and autonomy enjoyed by black farming communities in Pietersburg and impose rigid colonial-cum-apartheid state control in its place. Women, as the primary subsistence farmers in rural black societies, were dealt a particularly raw deal by the application of betterment regulations under the Trust.

Betterment regulations completely ignored and undermined women's long-standing role as cultivators and, in so doing, then made many of their everyday reproductive labours acts of political resistance to the Trust. Between the early-1940s and early-1960s, popular struggles against betterment (and from 1951 the related system of Bantu Authorities), ranging from everyday praxes of resistance to militant uprisings, became a dominant feature of the political landscape of rural South Africa.[131] Women were, amongst many other things, the main agents of boundary-fence destruction in the anti-betterment struggles of the mid-twentieth century. The fences erected by the Trust got in the way of their daily routes to rivers, forests, pastures, and farmlands – in short, the spaces of rural women's productive and reproductive labour. In so doing, the fences physically and politically undermined women's control over their own labour-time, their ability to access and harvest resources previously held in common, and their collective will to '…plough where we like, as we like'.[132] As I show in chapter two, women were the main protagonists on the anti-betterment struggles fought

[131] For literature dealing with the imposition, resistance against, and implications of betterment in Lebowa see, for example, Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies'; Jo-ann Bekker, '"We will plough where we like." Resistance to the application of Betterment schemes in the Pietersburg area, 1937 – 1946' (Hons thesis, Wits University, 1989); J Yawitch, *Betterment: The myth of homeland agriculture* (Johannesburg: The South African Institute of Race Relations, 1981); Thiathu Nemutanzhela '"We plough because we want food": Exploring narrative structure in the written history and memory of the Zoutpansburg Cultural Association 1941 – 1944' (MA thesis, Wits University, 1995); and, Stefan Schirmer, 'Democracy, culture and removals: The history of "black spot" communities in Lydenburg, 1943-1961', (Wits History Workshop seminar paper, 1994).

[132] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Minutes of the Chief Native Commissioner's meeting at Prospect Trust farm, 15 January 1943. For further reports on women's role in the destruction of Trust and betterment infrastructure such as fences, roads, and agricultural equipment, see, LPA TEMO 1157 2/1/1/7 (1 – 9), Landbou Aangeleenthede Maandelikse Werksverslae, 1964 – 1972.

during both the Pietersburg uprising of 1943 and the even more popular and widespread Sekhukhune uprising in the period 1958 to 1962. This just a glimpse into the insurrectionary and effervescent historical context of rural resistance which my thesis takes as its point of departure in analysing women's conception and praxis of emancipatory politics in the former Lebowa bantustan.

The Lebowa Territorial Authority was established as the Northern Sotho National Unit in 1962, in the immediate aftermath of the Sekhukhune uprising.[133] Ten years later, in 1972, the Lebowa Territorial Authority was elevated to the status of a Legislative Assembly and declared a Self-Governing Territory by Government Proclamation R225. Like a number of other bantustans, Lebowa never attained Pretoria-style independence, and remained a Self-Governing Territory until its final dissolution and reincorporation into a unified South Africa in 1994.[134] By the late-1970s rural societies in Lebowa were experiencing multiple and rapid processes of socio-economic and spatial change stimulated and shaped by three main related factors: the reconfiguration of chiefly rule; forced removals and resettlements; as well as shifts in the local and national contours of the anti-apartheid liberation struggle. As will be shown, during the apartheid era, rural women's associational life was dealt a devastating blow by repressive state policies (both local and national) that made autonomous gatherings by ordinary women in the bantustans – even for seemingly mundane and uncontentious purposes such as savings clubs or church groups – a risky endeavour that had the potential to, and very often actually did, attract the unwanted attention of the Lebowa police, agricultural rangers and chiefly authorities.

In the dramatically changed context of the post-apartheid order, women's associational life is once again a huge part of everyday life and the socio-political landscape of South Africa, especially in poor and working-class rural communities. By extending my analysis of emancipatory politics beyond the 1994 moment it is possible, as feminist scholar Shireen Hassim has argued, 'to detect how shifts in political and economic context have

[133] This was in accordance with Government Notice R224 of 10 August 1962. The Sepedi word 'Lebowa' means 'North' in English.

[134] The four bantustans which attained 'independent' status were known as the 'TBVC States'. These were Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda, and Ciskei. Lebowa, Gazankulu, KwaZulu, QuaQua, KaNgwane, and KwaNdebele, on the other hand, held various statuses of 'autonomy' but never attained Pretoria-style independence.

affected the possibilities for feminist ambitions to be realised' in post-apartheid South Africa.[135] While not all of the diverse forms of rural women's associational life are engaged in modes of politics that can be called emancipatory, I argue with the Makotse Women's Club (MWC) as my case study, that some certainly are; even though their praxes are not easily recognisable as either resistance or contentious politics vis-à-vis the state.

Sources and method

In addition to the secondary literature already discussed, the historical narratives and arguments presented in my thesis have been crafted from three kinds of historical sources: state archives, newspaper archives, and oral histories.

State archives

There are two state archival repositories with collections that I have relied on considerably in my thesis. These are the Limpopo Provincial Archives based in Polokwane and the South African National Archives in Pretoria.

The Limpopo Provincial Archives in Polokwane hold the Lebowa government archival collection. The Lebowa archive is divided into four sections corresponding with various departments of the Lebowa administration: the Department of Bantu Administration (BAD) collection, the Department of Justice (DoJ) collection, the Department of Health (DoH) collection, and the Department of Agriculture and Forestry (TEMO) collection. From the time of the dissolution of Lebowa in 1994 up until 2017 the bantustan archive lay uncatalogued and unused in a basement of the Lebowakgomo Legislative building. However, in 2017 the archives of the three bantustans that were incorporated into Limpopo province – namely, Lebowa, Venda and Gazankulu – were relocated to the provincial archives building in Polokwane.[136] Towards the end of 2018, with the assistance of Laura Phillips, I was able to gain access to the Lebowa Archive for the first time. During my first research trip to the archive, I was provided with incomplete – but nonetheless extremely useful – finding aids for each of the four collections listed above. I focused predominantly on the written materials

[135] Shireen Hassim, 'Texts and tests of equality: The Women's Charters and the demand for equality in South African political history', *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equality*, 28 2 'Who's afraid of feminism? South African Democracy at 20' (2014), p. 17.
[136] Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo', p. 24.

contained in the 14 boxes catalogued in the BA001 finding aid. The materials in the BA001 collection range in date from between 1910 and 1982, with the bulk of sources pertaining to the period 1940 to 1980. The files in the collection are predominantly in English with some Afrikaans and Sepedi documents as well. They consist mostly of written correspondence between various members and departments of the Lebowa administration and between Lebowa and Pretoria. They also include many different maps and planning diagrams of Lebowa and parts thereof. The correspondence files in the BA001 collection deal mostly with the administration of traditional leaders and so-called 'land matters' such as rural trading and business sites, trusts accounts, boundary fences and tribal levies.

Despite the best efforts of the archivists who rummaged through piles and piles of unorganised boxes stacked in a makeshift storage room in an attempt to locate the boxes I had requested, many of them were never produced. I was, however, able to look at the contents of several other boxes from the BA001 collection which had not been catalogued in the finding aid. These boxes, and volume 14 in particular, actually contained more correspondence concerning contentious popular politics unfolding in parts of Lebowa during the period late-1960s to early-1980s, than any of the volumes I consulted from the BA001 catalogue.

During conversations with the provincial archivists, and Laura Phillips who had engaged extensively with the Lebowa archive in her own PhD research, it became clear that the bantustan archives remained in a bad state. When I returned to the archives in early 2019, the finding aid for the BA001 collection was nowhere to be found and it was only by showing my photos of it to the archivists on duty that they acknowledged that the finding aid must have actually existed at some point. It was then that I began to search through the DoJ, DoH and TEMO collections. The historical sources in these collections are, obviously, highly state-centric in nature but both the DoH and TEMO collections hold correspondence documents that provide snap-shots into the lives of ordinary people in Lebowa, especially in moments when they engaged in acts of resistance against the bantustan order. The TEMO collection contains files which stretch back to 1960, two years prior to the actual establishment of Lebowa as a Territorial Authority, and include reports by agricultural officers (known as Rangers) facing fierce resistance – especially by women – in their implementation of betterment regulations. Similarly, the DoH collection, which includes correspondence files

dating up until 1994, has some rich sources detailing the political struggles nurses and social works became embroiled in during the mid-1980s popular uprising in Lebowa. However, while the Lebowa archive does contain 'fascinating material that reflect[s] the concerns of "ordinary" Lebowa residents', as observed by Phillips, the bulk of the sources provide a 'top-down' view of 'divisions or consensus between Bantustan officials and the South African state'.[137] Thus, reading the Lebowa archive 'against the grain', to borrow the phrase from Ann Stoler, and seeking out the moments of disruption – in which subaltern agency bursts into the records of officialdom – within the sea of mundane state-centric repetition, has been my primary method for dealing with the historical sources in the Lebowa and South African state archives.[138]

In addition to the Lebowa archives, the initial chapters of my thesis dealing with the early-apartheid period (1940s to 1970s) in particular, rely quite considerably on material from the Transvaal Native Affairs Department (later renamed the National Department of Bantu Administration and Development) records housed in the South African National Archives in Pretoria. In comparison to the bantustan archives, the South African government archives are in an impeccable state – although their online search functions are certainly not the easiest to master. The collections at the national archives include reports from Native Commissioners and tribal authorities concerning the collection of taxes and levies, the functioning of the migrant labour recruitment system, and the status of 'law and order' in Lebowa's different districts. Correspondence between the Native Affairs Department (NAD), the South African Police (SAP) and the South African Defence Force (SADF) written during and in the aftermath of the Sekhukhune uprising has been a particularly useful source of information regarding some of the militant confrontations between women and state security forces during this moment.

According to Stoler, colonial archives should be seen by critical historians as not comprised merely of skewed and biased sources, but as 'condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety'.[139] Thus, the historian dealing with the colonial archive not only has to read the sources with an understanding of what has been silenced or excluded from these

[137] *Ibid*, p. 25.
[138] Ann Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009).
[139] *Ibid*, p. 20.

documents but also what they illuminate about the 'deeply epistemic anxieties' which produce 'affective tremors' within the colonial archives.[140] After all, it was the apartheid state officials' colonial worldview which dictated what they believed was possible in terms of ordinary people's resistance politics and which often prevented them from being able to interpret and understand what was happening around them.

In *The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, Ranajit Guha argues that when working from the colonial archive:

> [T]he historical phenomenon of insurgency meets the eye for the first time as an image framed in the prose, hence the outlook, of counter-insurgency – an image caught in a distorting mirror. However, the distortion has a logic to it. That is the logic of opposition between the rebels and their enemies … The antagonism is rooted deeply enough in the material and spiritual conditions of their existence to reduce the difference between elite and subaltern perceptions of a radical peasant movement to a difference between the terms of a binary pair. A rural uprising turns thus into a site for two rival cognitions to meet and define each other negatively.[141]

Guha describes the task of the historian seeking to understand 'rebel consciousness' as having to move through 'enemy country' – that is, the colonial archive – and force 'the evidence of elite consciousness' inscribed within it to show 'us the way to its Other'.[142] For Guha, doing so necessarily requires that 'the documentation on insurgency must itself be turned upside down in order to reconstitute the insurgent's project aimed at reversing his world'.[143] Guha's insights have been highly influential for my own understanding and reading of the apartheid and bantustan state archives; as well as my efforts to extract from its documents, evidence of subaltern political agency. Understanding both Guha's notion of reading from a 'distorting mirror' as well as Stoler's 'reading with and against the grain' necessitates a deeply suspicious attitude towards the assumptions, categories and truth-claims made by state officials and other elite actors about ordinary people and their politics. I have applied this same critical lens to the second kind of archives that I have relied upon in my thesis, namely, bantustan and apartheid newspaper archives.

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[140] *Ibid*, p. 19.
[141] Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 333.
[142] *Ibid*, p. 333.
[143] *Ibid*, p. 333.

Newspaper archives

The newspaper collections held in the archives of the Polokwane and Johannesburg city libraries have been another important source of historical information for my thesis. Two newspapers in particular have offered unique insights into the politics of the Northern Transvaal and its bantustans during the apartheid era. These are the *Northern Review* and the *Lebowa Times* both of which were English medium regional newspapers that were owned by the same NP-aligned media corporation and were distributed on a weekly basis in the Northern Transvaal during the apartheid-era. Although the two papers occasionally ran the exact same articles, especially in coverage of spectacular national events such as the Soweto uprising of June 1976, the bulk of their coverage differed significantly as one paper was intended and designed for a white readership based in Pietersburg and other so-called 'white towns of the Northern Transvaal, while the other was specifically crafted for black readers in the Lebowa bantustan. The *Lebowa Times* collection is kept in the archives of the Johannesburg City Library and includes editions dated from 1976 to 1996. It has been by far the most important collection of newspaper sources for my thesis. As a bantustan newspaper, the *Lebowa Times* employed many black reporters from within Lebowa itself. This meant that the articles about political events unfolding within the bantustan that appeared in the *Lebowa Times* often struck a different and more respectful tone than reports appearing in national newspapers. As Lekgoathi has noted of the collections of newspaper clippings kept in the WHP and UNISA archives, with national-level newspapers it is often the case that, 'although most of the articles were written by African reporters who had some understanding of local languages, many of them were based in towns and reflect some of the prejudices that townspeople had of rural folks'.[144]

Not only did the reporters for the *Lebowa Times* have a deep understanding of rural life and personal experience of local politics, some of them were directly involved in the national liberation struggle. In particular, Winnie Kangare and Khangale Makhado and other members of the Black Consciousness (BC) organisations based at Turfloop campus such as SASO, WASA (Writers' Association of South Africa) and BASA (Black Academic Staff Association), regularly wrote reports for the *Lebowa Times*. The famous anti-apartheid activist

[144] Lekgoathi, 'Ethnicity and Identity', p. 27.

and author E'skia Mphahlele also wrote a few articles for the *Lebowa Times*, and received some coverage of his own literary works and other doings during his time as a circuit inspector for the Lebowa Department of Education in the late-1970s and 1980s. As a source of historical information, articles in the *Lebowa Times* yielded far more insights into the everyday affairs of ordinary people, and records of contentious political events which unfolded at the local level in the bantustan's townships and villages, than either of the state archives consulted in my research did.

However, as with any newspaper, the *Lebowa Times* has its limitations as a source of historical information. For example, most accounts are, not surprisingly, journalistic in form and offer only brief snapshots of moments or events that are seldom put in broader historical or political context.[145] Furthermore, as the official newspaper of the Lebowa government, reports in the *Lebowa Times* often towed the political line being handed down from Pretoria and the bantustan administration. This means that reports of contentious or insurgent politics, such as the anti-apartheid campaigns and protests of the 1980s, regularly described the individuals and crowds involved in such actions in counter-insurgent terms – as, for example, 'rebels' and 'mobs' as opposed to 'freedom fighters' and 'the people'.[146] Thus, despite the many strengths of newspapers sources, as well as the other written sources in the state archives discussed earlier, it is only by using oral sources that a deep and detailed history of women's praxes of emancipatory politics in the former Lebowa bantustan can be written.

Oral history Interviews

The oral histories I have collected constitute the primary evidentiary basis of the chapters and sections of my thesis dealing with the late-apartheid period (1980s – 1994) as well as the post-apartheid era (1994 – 2022). Between 2019 and 2022, I conducted over 50 oral history interviews – in form of life histories, oral testimonies, and oral traditions – and had many informal conversations with women and men, but mainly women, in various towns and villages in Limpopo which once formed part of the Lebowa bantustan. When I first began my

[145] For a discussion of the strengths and limitations of newspaper sources in a similar context see, Lekgoathi, 'Ethnicity and Identity', p. 27.

[146] On the concept of 'counter-insurgency' see, Ranajit Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', in N. Dirks, G. Eley, and S. B. Ortner, eds., *Culture/Power/History: A reader in contemporary social theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); and, Ranajit Guha, 'Dominance Without Hegemony and its Historiography', in R. Guha, ed., *Subaltern Studies VI* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).

research at the end of 2018, my intent was to focus on collecting interviews with 'ordinary' or 'non-elite' women who experienced the emancipatory moment of *people's power* – as the mass democratic politics of the mid-1980s is often referred to as in both academic and public discourses in South Africa – from the peripheral space of the Lebowa bantustan villages. I soon discovered that adopting a concept of the subaltern as an identity category and attempting to find the elusive 'subaltern subject' upon which I could base my research was a fruitless and naïve endeavour; not least of all because of my identity as an outside researcher with very few personal social networks in Limpopo and my inability to speak the local languages (such as Sepedi, Afrikaans, and Sindebele) beyond greetings and other basic phrases. My positionality as a white South African of settler colonial heritage has undoubtedly had an effect on the interviews I have collected. But my inability to speak and read Sepedi and other local languages at a competent level, by far, has been the greatest challenge to this aspect of my research and has produced the most significant limitations to the generative value, or the claims that could be made on the basis, of the interviews I have collected, transcribed, and drawn upon in the writing of this thesis.

In attempting to manage my own strengths and limitations as a researcher I was assisted greatly by older academics and my peers at Wits University, especially in establishing preliminary research contacts in Limpopo. Ineke Van Kessels put me in contact with Maurice Nchabeleng (son of the ANC veteran and former UDF regional chairman for the Northern Transvaal, Peter Nchabeleng, who was murdered by the Lebowa police while being held in custody in April 1985) and his wife Queen Nchabeleng. The Nchabeleng family were extremely generous in helping me with my research. Not only did both Maurice and Queen invite me to stay at their home in Polokwane while I was researching in the Lebowa archives and interviewing people in Polokwane; they also took me on several occasions to their respective family homes in the rural villages of Apel in Ga-Sekhukhune and Kgomoschool in Ga-Matlala, and acted as translators in my interviews. This was my first point of access into the rural villages of the former Lebowa bantustan in January 2019 and I conducted most of my interviews with women in these and other nearby villages for about a year until the Covid-19 pandemic erupted in 2020 and my oral history research was almost entirely suspended (aside from about a dozen phone call interviews I managed to conduct) for two years until the beginning of 2022.

In February and March 2022, I scrambled back to Limpopo and, having gained a wealth of experience in my previous trips and a clearer grasp of my research questions after two years of working with my existing sources, I conducted another series of interviews with women in other parts of the former Lebowa bantustan such as Zebediela, Ga-Mapela and Lebowakgomo. The new historical narratives and evidence that come out of these interviews helped uncover the lived experiences of ordinary women in rural areas and can shed light on particular moments or events that may have shaped their ideas of freedom and their struggles for emancipation. As such, they do more than just 'fill the gaps left by the lack of written sources' and, as argued by Lekgoathi, they are new types of sources of historical information that prioritise 'the voice of ordinary people' and thus have the potential to be the evidentiary basis of a new type of history.[147] During my final research trip in 2022, my friend and colleague from Wits University, Kefuoe Maotoane, accompanied me and acted as a translator in my interviews with women workers from the factories of Habakuku industrial area and members of the MWC in Makotse village. As a colleague in the Wits History Workshop, Maotoane had a more intimate understanding of my thesis than the other people who assisted me as translators, and not only did she take the lead in conducting several of my 2022 interviews, she also spent hours sitting with me and translating and transcribing those Sepedi interviews into English.

Thesis structure and chapter outlines

The overall structure of my thesis is chronological, beginning in the mid-twentieth century and concluding in 2022. Following from this introduction is chapter two in which I angle my gender and subaltern lens onto the Sekhukhune uprising of the late-1950s and early-1960s. I argue that the history of the Sekhukhune uprising is about both rural women's emancipatory struggles to reclaim enclosed lands and commons as well as male migrant workers' struggles to control and maintain the institution of chieftaincy as a powerful tool against the impositions of the apartheid state. There is a tendency within existing historiography of the Sekhukhune uprising to examine only the latter aspect of this event, from a perspective which jumps from the local (specifically the villages in Geluks Location – central Ga-Sekhukhune) to the national (the hostels and workplaces on the Rand), skipping out the regional along the

[147] Lekgoathi, 'Ethnicity and Identity', p. 28.

way. The literature also tends to marginalise aspects of this history of rural resistance in which rural women were the protagonists of emancipatory struggles. The aim of chapter two, therefore, is not to problematically 'insert' women's emancipatory land struggles into the established narratives of the uprising. Instead, it is to craft an alternative narrative of this historical event by prioritising the political agency of women, of both commoner and elite status, as protagonists of the uprising and not as appendages to exclusively male organisations and modes of politics. In order to achieve these aims, I situate the Sekhukhune uprising in a longer history of resistance, that predates the passing of the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act, and includes the uprisings which took place on the Trust farms in the Pietersburg district during the World War Two years and the popular anti-betterment resistance in Ga-Matlala (in the Seshego area) during the early-1950s.

The Lebowa bantustan was born in the aftermath of the Sekhukhune uprising of 1958 and died in the aftermath of the Lebowa uprising of 1986. As such both uprisings are important events within the history of the bantustan and women's experiences of emancipatory politics therein. However, equally important are the two decades that existed in-between these two uprisings and the question of what constituted women's emancipatory politics during a period marked by the dramatic decline of organised above-ground modes of popular resistance inside Lebowa and South Africa more broadly. Chapter three explores the shifting configuration of politics in the 1960s and 1970s with a particular focus on the dramatic transformations in Lebowa's socio-spatial landscape and women's everyday lives. By the mid-1960s, in the aftermath of the Sekhukhune uprising, the forces of drought, state violence, patriarchal chiefly rule, forced removals, betterment planning and associated processes of socio-economic underdevelopment, had all combined to undermine existing experiences of and struggles for freedom in Lebowa and a new political historical sequence came into being. This dovetailed with a wider shift in the national liberation struggle following the massive wave of arrests, banishments and bannings in the mid-1960s, which forced the ANC to go into exile and rebuild itself as an underground movement inside the country. This chapter argues that for a small but significant number of women in Lebowa during the 1970s, participation in the making of the ANC political underground in the rural Transvaal was an important expression of emancipatory politics.

For most residents in Lebowa by the 1970s the emancipatory principles fought for during previous decades were far from lived realities and the public spaces of the family farming fields and village commons were no longer regular sites of women-led mass resistance politics, as was the case in the 1940s and 1950s. Instead, these spaces became regular sites of violent confrontation between abusive chiefs under the Bantu Authorities system and rural women engaged in everyday acts of reproductive labour and commoning. Chapter three shows that popular resistance against the criminalisation of rural women's subsistence lifestyles and reproductive labour practices under betterment regulations in Lebowa during this period took the form of a kind of nonmovement subaltern politics of encroachment.[148] This involved small groups of women, or individuals, engaging in non-collective but persistent, pervasive and illegal praxes such as cutting down fences, flouting betterment regulations, and joining the migrant labour system, in an attempt to mitigate against the growing crisis of social reproduction in the bantustans. In the repressive context of this period, the possibilities for praxes of emancipatory politics in Lebowa were severely constrained. The proliferation of women's cooperations, self-help groups, and community organisations or clubs during the 1970s is, I argue, an indication of one of the ways in which rural women attempted to defend and create dignified ways of life in villages of Lebowa during this period of intense state repression and crisis of social reproduction. This is particularly significant from a radical subaltern feminist perspective which sees the personal as political and emancipation as the realisation of the universal principles of equality, dignity, and justice for all human beings regardless of differences such as gender, race, class, or ethnicity.

The dramatic expansion of secondary schooling in Lebowa and the major entry of women from the bantustan into the South African wage labour market were two of the most important changes of the 1970s. However, Lebowa did not experience major protests from students or workers during the 1970s on the scale of either the 1976 Soweto uprising or the 1973 Durban strikes, respectively. It was only in the following decade, during the 1980s, that the radical youth and labour movements took on a mass character in Lebowa and became a new and important space of popular emancipatory politics for rural women. Chapter four explores the lived experiences of young women who were politically active in student and

[148] Bayat, *Life as Politics*, p. xi.

youth organisations in Lebowa during the 1980s. By placing my research into conversation with women-centred literature from other contexts, especially Emily Bridger's work on Soweto's 'female comrades', as well as the wider literature on both the township and rural uprisings of the mid-1980s, this chapter explores certain aspects of the relationship between women, the youth movement, and emancipatory politics in the Lebowa bantustan. Chapter four marks a shift in my thesis from a heavy reliance on archival materials to, now, a much more extensive reliance on oral history sources and, in particular, life history interviews I conducted between 2019 and 2022 with women and men who were members of various youth organisations in the former Lebowa bantustan during the 1980s.[149] This chapter explores the praxes of local youth congresses in the 1980s which overlapped with, and were connected to, older struggles against land dispossession, the enclosure of the commons, and the criminalisation of autonomous rural subsistence lifestyles, championed by women in previous decades.

Chapter five is also focused primarily on the 1980s and analyses the conceptions and practices of emancipatory politics by some wage-earning women workers in Lebowa. Drawing on a combination of newspaper archives and oral history sources, this chapter explores the issue of gender and the experiences of women in Lebowa's labour relations systems at different scales – between workers and managers, amongst workers, and at a wider structural level – in two areas of the economy in which women from the bantustan villages and townships constituted a significant portion of the workforce. These included factory work in the firms of the decentralised industrial areas/border industries and retail work in the so-called 'white' towns adjacent to Lebowa. I show that the history of the labour movement in

[149] The interviews take the form of both life histories and personal testimonies – ten with women and five with men, and two of which are group interviews I conducted with women, some of whom had direct experience of participating in local youth politics during the 1980s and others who did not, in Apel and Zebediela respectively. In addition to these recorded and transcribed interviews, several less formal conversations I had in rural Limpopo during the research process (recorded in written note form at the time or shortly after), have also informed the observations and arguments put forward in this chapter. As a result of my interest to explore the gender and subaltern aspects of the history of the youth movement in the whole of Lebowa – and not just one region or district of the former bantustan as existing scholarship has tended to do – I tried to interview former members of as many different youth organisations as possible. These include, in no particular order, former members of: the Zebediela Youth Congress (ZEYCO), Sekhukhune Youth Organisation (SEYO), Manganeng Youth Congress (MAYCO), Seshego Youth Congress (SEYCO), Mahwelereng Youth Organisation (MAYO), and the Mankweng Youth Congress (MAYCO). Due to the limiting consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for continuous research during the two-year period 2020-2021, follow-up interviews were conducted with only a few of these former student activists and many of those were via phone call.

Lebowa, when considered from the perspective of factory workers in the industrial areas, is a predominantly bleak one with few collective victories for workers. However, this history looks entirely different when considered from the perspective of women workers living in the townships of Lebowa and working in retail stores during the 1980s. Although seldom acknowledged in existing historiography, chapter five shows that during the 1980s the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) was the most politically active and militant independent trade union operating in towns and townships on the border of Lebowa. CCAWUSA provided an organisational platform for women workers in these violently racist towns to launch radical and sustained challenges to both the apartheid composition and management of stores as well as their inferior position as black women in workplaces. Furthermore, during the mid-1980s, CCAWUSA women retail workers played a leading role in forging close links between worker and community struggles in Lebowa's townships and mobilising those networks of solidarity into mass action and general strikes.

Chapters two through five demonstrate that during the apartheid era, changing gender dynamics as well as challenges to patriarchal authority and the subordination of women were variously expressed in popular resistance to apartheid-induced relocation and betterment procedures in the mid-twentieth century and, later, in the radical youth and labour movements of the 1980s. In chapter six, attention shifts to the '1994 moment' and the subsequent post-apartheid period.

Chapter six begins by providing an overview of the political landscape in Lebowa, and South Africa more broadly, in the early-1990s. It was within the effervescent context of the 1994 moment that a wide variety of women's clubs – with different forms and purposes – began to emerge, or in some cases re-emerge, in many villages of the former Lebowa bantustan where rural women's autonomous associational life had been disrupted during the apartheid period. The primary purpose of the chapter is to explore the history of one women's club in particular, the Makotse Women's Club (MWC), which emerged in a typically under-resourced and under-serviced remote village of the former Lebowa bantustan during the 1994 moment. My discussion of the MWC draws heavily on oral history interviews I conducted with several of the club's members, including its founder, in 2022. I argue that the MWC is an example of a relatively autonomous women's organisation engaged in a mode of popular politics, premised on the provision of care, that is not easily recognisable as resistance

vis-à-vis the state, but is emancipatory and sustainable even in some of the most extreme settings of poverty and inequality in contemporary rural South Africa. The history of the MWC shows that emancipatory modes of politics continue to be grafted onto rural women's everyday associational life and conceptions of freedom in the former Lebowa bantustan in the post-apartheid present.

Lastly, chapter seven provides an overview of the history presented in this thesis and some concluding remarks regarding the significance of its arguments for debates in South Africa concerning the political status and land rights of women living under traditional authorities in the former bantustans as well as contemporary theorisations of emancipatory politics.

CHAPTER TWO

Rural uprisings and women's emancipatory land struggles in the Northern Transvaal, 1940s – 1960s

The Sekhukhune uprising (c.1958-1962) is an important event to consider in relation to the history of the former Lebowa bantustan. The bantustan was born in the aftermath of the Sekhukhune uprising and its physical, social and political landscape was shaped by the two-decade long sequence of 'many-headed hydra'-like popular struggles in the Northern Transvaal of which the uprising was a culmination.[150] The purpose of this chapter is to investigate the histories of women's emancipatory struggles in the rural Northern Transvaal during the 1940s and 1950s – i.e. the decades just prior to the actual establishment of Lebowa as an administrative entity. This chapter shows that the history of the Sekhukhune uprising is as much about women's emancipatory land struggles as it is about male migrant workers' struggles to control and maintain the institution of chieftaincy as a powerful tool against the impositions of the apartheid state. The role of migrant labourers and the institution of chiefly rule within the Sekhukhune uprising has been a central concern for social historian Peter Delius whose work has analysed the politics of the Sebatakgomo and Khuduthamaga migrant worker organisations.[151] More recently two Masters theses by George Tseke Nkadimeng and Namanetona Joel Shai have argued that the internal divisions within the communities of Ga-Sekhukhune, in addition to the politics of migrant workers, were a primary cause of the violent protest action that reached an apex in 1958.[152]

[150] The many-headed-hydra is a mythical beast most often depicted in classical Greek epics, such as the tale of Hercules, as a monster resembling a dragon with multiple heads. When one of the heads of the hydra is cut off another two grow back in its place; both more determined, intelligent, and dangerous than before. Social historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker use the metaphor in their discussion of the seventeenth century struggles of the revolutionary Atlantic working-class made up of slaves, sailors and commoners. See, Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2013).

[151] See Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*; 'Migrant Organization'; 'Sebatakgomo and the ZBA'; 'The Tortoise and the Spear'; and, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt'.

[152] George Tseke Nkadimeng, 'A reassessment of the 1958 Sekhukhune Peasant Revolt: Evaluation of internal division as a cause of the uprising' (MA thesis, University of Johannesburg, 2006); Namanetona Joel Shai, 'Intervention and Resistance: The Batau of Mphanama Limpopo Province and External Governance' (MA Thesis, University of South Africa, 2016).

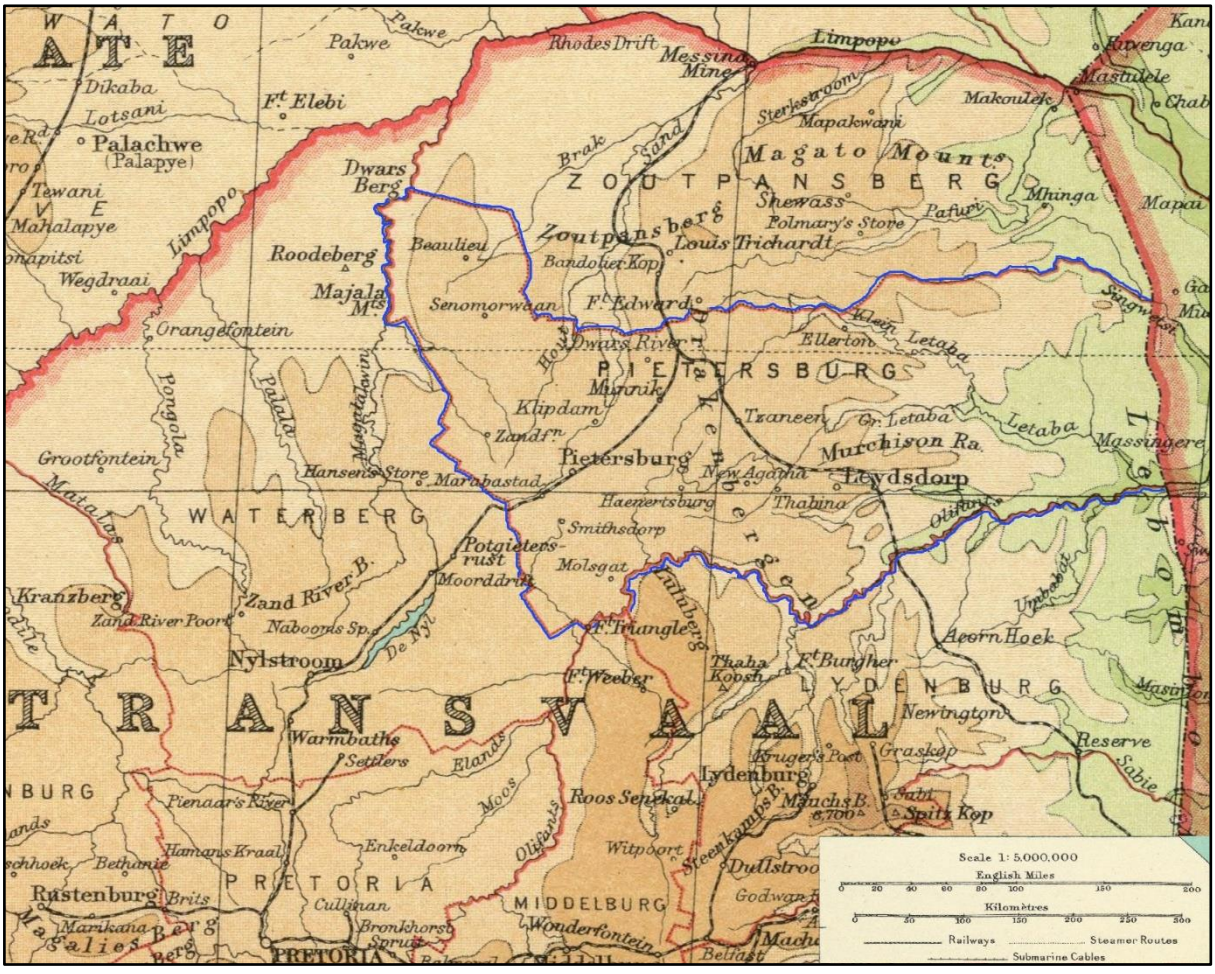
Women's land struggles are an aspect of the Sekhukhune uprising which has not been adequately addressed within the existing academic literature and which therefore provides the central focus of this chapter. On the one hand, the marginalisation of women's emancipatory land struggles within the historiography has much to do with the perceived distinction between the popular politics in the rural Transvaal before and after the passing of the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951.[153] On the other hand, there is tendency within existing accounts to examine the Sekhukhune uprising from a perspective which jumps from the local (specifically the villages in Geluks Location – central Ga-Sekhukhune) to the national (the hostels and workplaces on the Rand), skipping out the regional along the way. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is not to problematically 'insert' women's emancipatory land struggles into the established narratives of the Sekhukhune uprising of 1958. Instead, it is to complicate existing narratives by highlight new modes of resistance during the 1940s and 1950s, primarily against the government's betterment regulations, in which women were significantly involved and, in so doing, challenge the notion that women were merely appendages to exclusively male organisations and modes of politics. In order to achieve these aims it is necessary to begin with an investigation of the resistance which took place in the districts neighbouring Sekhukhune during the 1940s and early-1950s. These are the uprisings which took place on the Trust farms in the Pietersburg district during the World War Two years; the resistance in Ga-Matlala (in the Seshego area) during the early-1950s; and the uprising in Ga-Sekhukhune during the late-1950s.

Women's emancipatory land struggles in the Pietersburg district

During the second half of the twentieth century the Pietersburg district was one of the largest areas constituting the Lebowa bantustan (see map 3). However, it was not known as the Pietersburg district during that time. As part of its policy of racial segregation the apartheid state divided-up the Pietersburg district and renamed those areas demarcated for inclusion in the Lebowa bantustan as the Mokerong and Seshego districts. Only the so-called white town and immediately adjacent lands would remain as the Pietersburg district during the

[153] For an example of a study that advocates for upholding a distinction between the rural resistance politics of the 1940s and that of the post-Bantu Authorities Act period see Joanne Yawitch, *Betterment: The myth of homeland agriculture* (Johannesburg: The South African Institute of Race Relations, 1981). For a convincing critique of Joanne Yawitch's argument see Jo-ann Bekker, 'We will Will Plough'.

apartheid era. However, in order for the incorporation of all these new districts into the burgeoning Lebowa bantustan to become a reality, it was first necessary for the South African state, and its Department of Native Affairs (NAD) in particular, to bring these spaces and their black inhabitants under their control. In other words, the NAD had to find ways to demarcate, plan and govern these lands, according to modernist colonial ideologies, and to impose their associated systems of taxation and 'law and order' onto indigenous populations. The NAD's attempts to do so began during the late 1930s, when the Pietersburg district was selected as one of the first spaces in the Northern Transvaal in which the nefarious betterment policies were implemented on lands which had been purchased by the South African Native Trust (the



Map 3: The Pietersburg District, c.1922. Adapted from J G Bartholomew, 'South Africa', *The Edinburgh Geographical Institute* (London, The Times, 1922).

Trust) after the 1936 Land Act was passed.

Between the late-1800s and the late-1930s, black communities living on farms owned by land companies and absentee landowners in the Pietersburg district maintained and valued a significant degree of independence from the dictates of white landlords and the colonial

state.[154] This is not to suggest that families on these farms were not dependent on wages earned on the mines, in towns and on neighbouring farms – the majority by the 1930s certainly were. However, for migrant workers – predominantly men – and their families – predominantly women and children – the general experience was one in which everyday life on the farms prior to the 'coming of the Trust' in the late 1930s was 'a haven free from white masters and landlords where they were free to do as they wished'.[155] Direct engagements with white authorities came only in the form of annual tax and rent collection tours and even then only heads of families and other prominent members of communities usually attended the meetings in person.[156] The majority of the 10 000 residents on Pietersburg's farms therefore had no personal dealings with white landlords or colonial officials. As a result, local governing elites on these farms, usually but not always governing within the institutional form of chiefly politics, were the only authority figures with whom residents maintained close political relations.[157]

The system of administration established on these farms once purchased by the Trust was a peculiar grafting of colonial private property regimes (based on titling and the enclosure of individual holdings) and forms of indirect rule onto the so-called 'tribal' system of chiefly rule. Many of the men installed as 'headmen' or 'foremen' of Trust farms by the NAD in the late-1930s were already recognised as figures of authority within their communities.[158] As a general rule, those governing elites whose areas of authority bordered the old locations in the district – such as Moleitzie and Matlala locations – were subordinate chiefs governing under the hegemony of the senior chieftaincies and royal houses based in the old locations. On the farms farther away, both politically and geographically, from the old locations, authority was often held by local elites with no claims to established chiefly networks and

[154] The point is made forcefully in Jo-anne Bekker's honours thesis. See, Bekker, 'We Will Plough'; as well as, Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt'.
[155] Bekker, 'We Will Plough', p. 3.
[156] In addition to Bekker, for more information on the relative autonomy and lived experiences of freedom from white landlords and state officials on farms outside of the so-called native reserves in the Northern Transvaal see Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt'; Nemutanzhela 'We plough because we want food'; and, Schirmer, 'Democracy, culture and removals'.
[157] Bekker, 'We Will Plough'.
[158] *Ibid*.

whose authority was legitimised, instead, by the popular will of the farm residents and, later, by the recognition of the Trust and NAD.[159]

At first the news that the Trust had taken over ownership of farms and began paying local elites wages as 'headmen' did little to affect everyday life and social relations in Pietersburg's black farming communities during the 1930s. Nor did the work of small groups of men from the communities employed as 'rangers' to assist white 'experts' to draw up maps and conduct extensive surveys of the people, land, and resources on the farms in the early days of the Trust. These changes wrought by the Trust were hardly considered ominous by ordinary men and women – commoners – who welcomed the vastly reduced tax rate they were expected to pay annually now that they were tenants of Trust lands.[160] The popular rejection of the Trust in Pietersburg came during the World War Two years, in which the severely under-resourced and under-staffed NAD ordered that betterment planning should commence on all Trust lands in the district.

Betterment regulations ushered in a whole new era of economic deprivation and socio-ecological degradation for the communities whose lands were subjected to its implementation. Moreover, the application of betterment planning threatened the foundations of economic and political freedom which commoners maintained for themselves on Pietersburg's Trust farms. As Bekker explains,

> Tenants on land company farms [in Pietersburg] had been in charge of their own lives. They decided what crops they would plant and where they would plant them. They kept as many cattle, donkeys, sheep and goats as they could afford. They resented the annual visit of the tax and rent collectors, but they had learnt to live with it… Under the land companies access to land was limited, but there was still place for future households.[161]

In the absence of the men who were away working for wages most of the year, women were predominantly in control of subsistence farming and were the ones who enjoyed and maintained the independence on Trust farms. For most men who were regularly engaged in work on mines, white-owned farms, or in neighbouring towns earning money to pay for taxes and those things which the surplus products of women's labour could no longer be bartered

[159] Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt'; Yawitch, *Betterment*.
[160] Bekker, 'We Will Plough'.
[161] *Ibid*, p. 88.

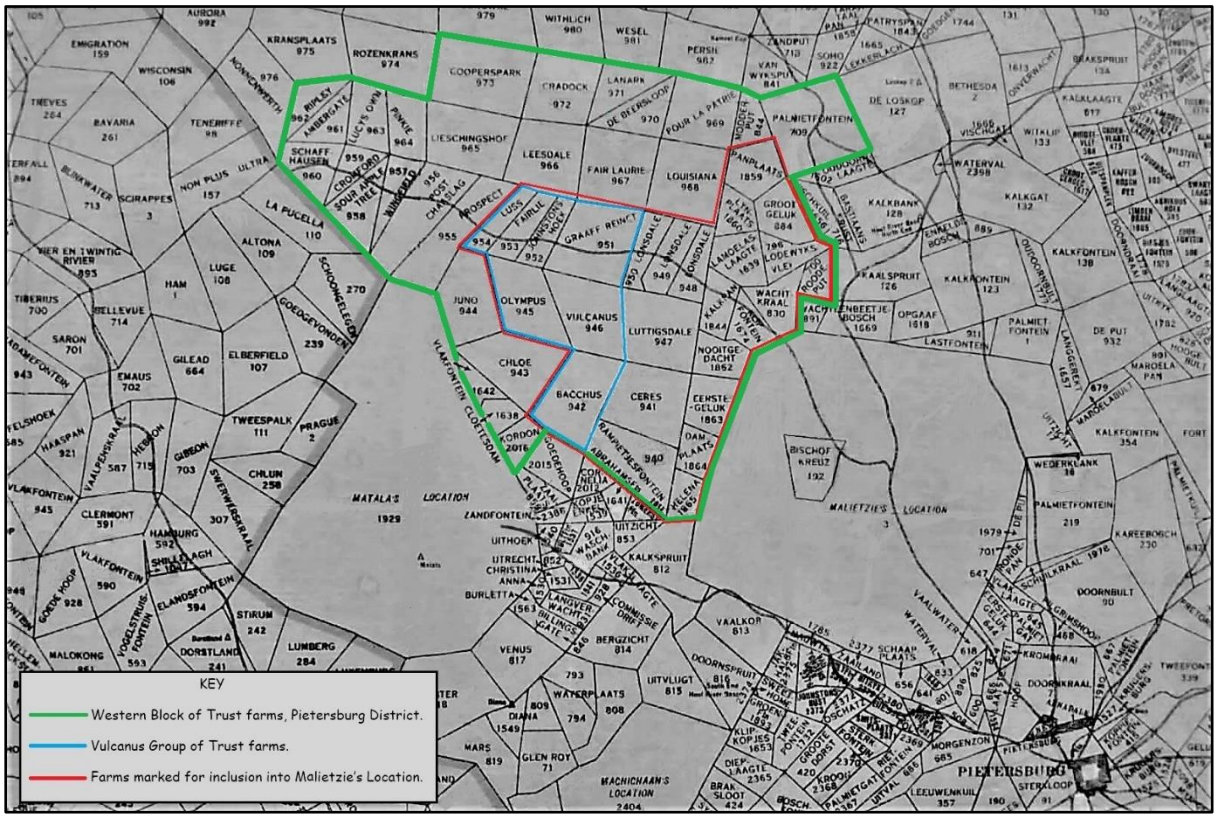
for; their rural homesteads were 'a sanctuary to which they could return; a space where they could run their affairs without outside interference'.[162] Unlike in neighbouring Ga-Sekhukhune, by the 1940s, the days in which women's subsistence farming had been an equal contributor to family coffers alongside men's migrant remittances had long since passed in Pietersburg.[163] Nonetheless, and despite the enormous drought-induced challenges added to women's subsistence agricultural work during the mid-1940s, family fields, commonages and residential gardens were important spaces of control and autonomy for wives and widows (the latter meaning female-headed families) and the fruits of their labour still played an important role in sustaining rural homestead economies.[164]

The application of betterment regulations marked a total shift in popular perceptions and experiences of the Trust in Pietersburg. When the Trust first arrived, many people believed that the reduced rates demanded by the rent collectors were a sign that they would soon be rid of the extortions of the white state and capital forever. Unfortunately, with the application of betterment regulations shortly after the coming of the Trust people soon realised that the opposite had happened, as NAD officials increasingly imposed their control over every aspect of life on the farms.[165] The implications of betterment for everyday life can be understood according to three of its relational constituent processes: enclosure, restructuring and extortion. This triadic dialectic of betterment processes all worked to undermine the independence and autonomy enjoyed by black farming communities in Pietersburg and impose rigid state control in its place.

In the late-1930s the Additional Native Commissioner for Pietersburg, P.A.M Linington, set afoot plans to establish the control of the NAD over the Trust farms in his district. The Western Block of Trust farms, which had been purchased by the Trust under the pretence that the land was to be added to the over-crowed Malietzie Location, was selected as the first area in which betterment schemes would be applied (see map 4).[166] In 1938 Linington called a meeting with two local governing elites in the Western Block, Chief Moloto

[162] *Ibid*, p. 89.
[163] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*.
[164] LPA, TEMO 1157 2/1/1/7 (1 – 9), Landbou Aangeleenthede Maandelikse Werksverslae, 1964 – 1972.
[165] Bekker, 'We Will Plough', p. 88.
[166] NASA, NTS 3799 2567/308, Letter from Additional Native Commissioner to the Chief Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, 8 March 1938.

and subordinate chief (headman), Rapetsie Moloto, and explained that the Trust farms Luss and Fairlie (of the Vulcanus group of farms) were to be enclosed as reserved grazing pastures.



Map 4: Western Block of South African Native Trust Farms between the Matlala and Malietzie Locations, Pietersburg District. Adapted from NASA, *Map of the Transvaal Province, Union of South Africa*. Compiled and drawn by the Surveyor-General's Office, 1931.

The two farms were described by Trust surveyors as 'well wooded and excellently grassed' and home to 69 extended family homesteads.[167] The application of this particular version of betterment would require the 'voluntary' removal of those families from the lands they had developed to such a high standard over the last two generations. For their cooperation and support of this first implementation of betterment planning in the district, Linington promised Rapetsie Moloto and Chief Moloto access for their private herds of cattle to graze on the enclosed pastures during the winter months. Both agreed, and by 1940, all but seven of the 69 families from the farms Luss and Fairlie had moved to tented camps on Graaff Reinet Trust farm (located in the middle of the Western Block shown in map 4) where they waited to be

[167] NASA, NTS 3733 2019/308 (2), Schedule of farms purchased by SA Native Trust in Pietersburg District, 17 September 1937.

allocated lands under Rapetsie Moloto's jurisdiction. The wait would prove to be an indefinite one and by 1943 many of these families had returned illegally to their former homes.[168]

When the families from Luss and Fairlie were removed to Graaff Reinet Trust farm the area had not yet been properly planned according to betterment regulations. This process began in 1940 when Rapetsie Moloto was informed that he and his followers were to demolish their homesteads situated on the low-lying parts of the farm and rebuild them on a linear grid system of side-by-side residential plots – each no bigger than half a morgen (roughly 4282m^2 in size) – in the newly demarcated residential area. Rapetsie Moloto did not resist the orders to move, seeing that there were benefits to moving to an area less exposed to malaria on the farm, but he did order the women and men on Graaff Reinet to cut down 200 trees from the newly enclosed forest in the low-lying area to help ease the process of rebuilding on the other side.[169]

Prior to the Trust, when the farms in Pietersburg were owned by land companies or absentee white farmers, free and unfettered access to trees for fuel and timber was a cornerstone of the independence experienced by members of rural communities.[170] Rapetsie Moloto's orders to cut down the trees which were needed as poles to rebuild homes, kraals and gardens in the new residential area was seen as a gross violation of betterment regulations by the Trust overseer. Not only had Rapetsie Moloto failed to seek permission from the Trust overseer to cut any trees down on the farm – let alone those from a forest earmarked to be enclosed for state timber preservation efforts – he had made no effort at all to obtain the necessary permits or pay the associated fees with such an action.[171] Rapetsie Moloto was taken to court and charged with flouting trust regulations and incitement to murder. The latter charge was the result of accusations by rangers and a black policeman that Rapetsie Moloto had urged the residents on Graaff Reinet to, 'kill the overseer's assistant and any police who tried to stop them cutting trees'.[172] Neither of the two charges brought against Rapetsie Moloto held up in court and eventually on 2 August 1940 he was acquitted. In the

[168] NASA NTS 3799 1222/308, Letter from Senior Agricultural Officer to Additional Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, 11 February 1943.
[169] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Affidavit by M. Moyela, 21 December 1943.
[170] Bekker, 'We Will Plough', p. 19; Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 51.
[171] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Letter from Senior Agricultural Officer to Additional Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, 12 January 1941.
[172] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1).

following years, the Native Commissioner's office confronted the unhappy reality that the defiance of Rapetsie Moloto and his followers 'proved to be more than an isolated hiccup to the Betterment plans', as acts of non-cooperation and outright resistance began to proliferate throughout the Trust lands in Pietersburg.[173]

When, in 1942, rangers under the supervision of a white Agricultural Officer erected a barbed wire fence to subdivide lands which were common pastures into individual grazing camps on Rampietjiesfontein Trust farm, the residents cut the fence in nine places.[174] T.A. Emmet, the new Additional Native Commissioner, called a meeting in response to the cutting of the fence and warned the residents, paternalistically referring to them as his 'children', that such action was wrong and against their own interests.[175] The response of the Rampietjiesfontein residents was to rip the entire fence up and 'leave it to rust in the dirt'. The rangers tasked with investigating the sabotage at Rampietjiesfontein reported that '… most able-bodied men [were] away at work on the Rand the time the fence was damaged' sometime in January and that 'the widows and younger wives' had mobilised to first cut and then completely pull out the fence.[176] However, in early February 1943, when Emmet held an enquiry into the disturbances at Rampietjiesfontein, only 26 men attended the gathering and, when they refused to produce their Trust levy and tax receipts on demand, Emmet had them all arrested as those responsible for damaging the fence.[177]

The 26 men were convicted in March and each received sentences of seven days imprisonment with hard labour or had to pay a fine of 10 shillings. However, these arrests and convictions did not quell the rising dissent in the area. Emmet wrote to the Secretary for Native Affairs suggesting that in order to re-establish state control on the Pietersburg Trust farms, 'trek passes' – expulsion orders – should be issued to 'ringleaders' banishing them from their areas of influence.[178] The NAD in Pretoria were not prepared to authorise the strong action advocated by Emmet despite his flooding of the Department with Agricultural Officers'

[173] Bekker, 'We Will Plough', p. 19.
[174] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Letter from Senior Agricultural Officer to Additional Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, 17 March 1943.
[175] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308, NAD memo titled Pietersburg Land Troubles, undated.
[176] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1).
[177] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Memo by Undersecretary of Native Affairs to NAD, Pietersburg, 11 February 1942.
[178] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Letter from Additional Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 12 March 1942.

reports that described '… women ploughing at liberty' and 'working lands up to 30 morgens on Trust farms Olympus and Lonsdale', amongst other farms.[179] The Trust overseers from Olympus complained that 'things are totally out of hand' and rangers at Lonsdale complained, 'we cannot check up on the natives and we do not know how much stock they own'.[180]

The gulf between the local state officials and the NAD headquarters was exposed significantly when Emmet was informed that the Department did not support his processors' decision to enclose the farms, Luss, Fairlie and two others in the Vulcanus group, as grazing pastures. Emmet pleaded with his superiors to reconsider as, 'the existing conditions on these farms are becoming worse and worse and if these natives are not forced to remove… it will lead to further dissatisfaction amongst those natives who removed voluntarily'.[181] Instead of heeding Emmet's warning the Secretary for Native Affairs, D.L. Smit, chose to dismiss Emmet and replace him with J.H. Steenkamp in June 1942.[182]

Steenkamp reported regularly to Smit about the meetings he held on Trust farms, Lonsdale and Bacchus, both of which were earmarked to be added to the Molietzie Location, and which were held at Chief Moloto's main kraal in the location itself. Steenkamp claimed that the meeting held on Lonsdale was completely 'disorderly' and that 'the feeling on the part of the natives ran very high and I eventually had to stop the meeting as the disorderly section did not want any of the others to express their views'.[183] The views of the so-called 'disorderly section' at this and other meetings were presented to Steenkamp as a list of related grievances. According to Steenkamp the main complaint was that the limitation of family farming fields to 5 morgen plots under betterment regulations made it structurally impossible for families to sustain themselves on the land even with migrant labour wage remittances, which were already a stable feature of the local and household economies of farming communities in Pietersburg long before the Trust took over. In addition to this were the complaints levelled against the payments extracted by Agricultural Officers, in the form

[179] *Ibid*
[180] *Ibid*
[181] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Letter from Additional Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 25 April 1942.
[182] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Letter of appointment of JH Steenkamp as Additional Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, from Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 22 May 1942.
[183] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Letter from Additional Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 9 December 1942.

of permits and fines, for cutting trees or harvesting other forest resources from the commons, as well as prohibition against cultivating land on the banks of streams and rivers. Elias Maneka's statement to the Acting Native Commissioner at a meeting held with residents of 14 Trust farms in the Western Block in 1943 is indicative of the excessive taxes which were imposed under betterment regulations: 'We have to pay taxes for dogs, wagons, General Tax of one pound and one pound 10 shillings rent… even today we have to buy trees.'[184] Bekker provides a descriptive summary of the application of betterment regulations in the Western Block of Trust farms which is worth quoting at length:

> Betterment regulations severely disrupted tenants' everyday lives. Trees, to take one example, were used to repair cattle kraals and to build huts. Wood was also the major source of fuel for cooking and heat. Collecting wood and water, usually the task of women, was a vital part of the daily routine. The Trust ruled that trees could only be felled once residents had paid for the requisite permit. Most people were already hard-pressed to meet tax and rent obligations. And, to obey the restrictions on tree cutting, most had to go further afield, and devote more of their labour time, to search for fuel.[185]

Women, as the proverbial 'hewers of wood and drawers of water' and subsistence farmers of rural black societies, were dealt a particularly raw deal by the application of betterment regulations under the Trust in a number of ways. Widows – female heads of households – as well as second and third wives in Pietersburg could no longer plough in residential areas, break up fresh patches of land for cultivation outside of arable areas, or de-pasture their family herds of cattle on grazing lands (which were enclosed by the state), as they had done quite freely in the past. Under betterment regulations widows were initially allotted farming plots of 2.5 morgen each (half of the size allotted to first wives) and, as more and more new comers streamed into the area seeking the securities of living on 'government land', these categories of women were eventually stripped of all rights to arable plots of land on the Trust farms. The betterment regulations completely ignored and undermined women's long-standing role as cultivators and, in so doing, it made many of their everyday reproductive labours acts of political resistance to the Trust. The reason why women were often identified, but seldom prosecuted, as the main culprits of boundary-fence destruction is precisely because those fences got in the way of their access of their routes to rivers, forests, pastures

[184] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Minutes of the Chief Native Commissioner's meeting at Prospect Trust farm, 15 January 1943.
[185] Bekker, 'We Will Plough', pp. 29-30.

and farmlands. In so doing, the fences physically and politically undermined women's control over their own labour-time, their ability to access and harvest resources previously held in common, and their collective will to '…plough where we like, as we like'.[186]

Another popular contentious practice aimed at preventing the state from gaining control over black rural communities was the removal and destruction of the beacons used by the NAD's field staff to show the new demarcations of residential plots, reduced family fields and grazing commonages. These beacons were usually rocks or sticks painted white and placed strategically around village spaces by teams of rangers under the supervision of a white agricultural field assistant.[187] It was common practice for beacons to be erected in the early hours of the morning so as to not arise any unnecessary attention from the residents. Reports made by these field staffers to the NAD offices in Pietersburg, Zoutpansburg and Lydenburg (three of the districts bordering Sekhukhune) during the 1940s include repetitive stories of these beacons being removed, repositioned or destroyed entirely by local residents within hours of them having been placed.[188] As with fences, the destruction of beacons, the tangible markers of colonial state control in rural communities, was an act of sabotage carried out covertly by women with the help of their children during the course of their daily labours in fields and surrounding bushveld.[189]

The Pietersburg district uprising of 1943

By 1943 the majority of residents, headmen and chiefs in the Western Block of Trust farms were united in their rejection of Trust control and their conviction that 'the land belongs to them and they could plough where they liked and as much as they liked.'[190] The NAD sought to break this unity of opposition by a combination of lawfare and strong-armed policing tactics. On 9 November, 1943, the conflict became direct and violent when a contingent of rangers and black policemen tried to effect the arrest of an ordinary resident on Juno Trust farm, Jacobus Mashala, on a charge of illegal ploughing. Up until this point the NAD had had

[186] *Ibid,* pp. 29-30; also see Nemutanzhela, 'We plough because we want food'.
[187] Nemutanzhela, 'We plough because we want food'.
[188] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Departmental Circular no 33 of 2 December 1942; Also see Nemutanzhela, 'We plough because we want food'; and, Schirmer, 'Democracy, culture and removals'.
[189] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (2), Secretary for Native Affairs' notes of interview with Additional Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, and Senior Agricultural Officer, Pietersburg, undated.
[190] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 59.

no success in getting a conviction from the local magistrate's court on the charge of illegal ploughing in the cases it had tried against Pietersburg Trust farm residents in previous years.[191] However, with loop-holes in the betterment regulations having been closed, and the punishments for transgressions increased dramatically, the NAD was now confident in its ability to get convictions which would scare the dissenting residents into compliance. Native Commissioner Steenkamp was terrified when he saw the police contingent arresting Jacobus Mashala being stormed by a group of 27 residents and forced to let their prisoner go. In his report to NAD head office, Steenkamp wrote that he heard someone in the crowd shout 'Let us kill him [Steenkamp] then the Government will give in' and, fearing for his life, he got into his car and drove away as assegais rained down on his agricultural officers. His parting command before driving off was to instruct the police to use force 'only as an extreme measure'.[192]

The event at Juno Trust Farm was the spark which ignited the Pietersburg uprising of 1943. The next day, 10 November, Steenkamp sent rangers into the bushveld near Juno to try and open negotiations with the leaders of the group of over 500 residents from multiple farms in the Western Block which had assembled there. The white officials were too scared to go and confront the group themselves because it was reported that the residents gathered there were 'fully armed with assegais, battle-axes and knobkerries'.[193] When the rangers came back they reported that their attempts to negotiate with the residents had failed and that 'natives have removed women and children [from the gathering] and clearly intend to force the position'.[194] So alarming were the reports that the NAD headquarters in Pretoria felt compelled to inform the Deputy Prime Minister that a close eye was being kept on this 'very serious' situation.[195]

News of the confrontation and gathering at Juno spread quickly and soon an estimated 1 000 to 1 500 people were reportedly involved in large-scale mobilisations across the Trust farms, many taking to the bush to hold meetings and organise themselves against the state. From the available evidence it seems that most of the people who went into the bush were

[191] This was largely due to the impressive gains made by senator Basner in defending the Pietersburg residents taken to court in the early-1940s. See Hirson, 'Rural revolts', pp. 125-132.
[192] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Affidavit by Native Commissioner J H Steenkamp, 3 February 1944.
[193] *Ibid.*
[194] *Ibid.*
[195] *Ibid.*

men who formed themselves into armed defence units which were tasked with defending communities from falling back under the grip of Trust control.[196] However, not all men went into the bush. Some chose to arm themselves and remain in their homesteads to defend their homes and cattle kraals from being raided in their absence. All the while women continued to take the opportunity the resistance afforded them to break new lands for cultivation – particularly nearby streams and rivers – and harvest crops from the lands they ploughed illegally.[197] In these emancipatory land struggles husbands and wives had to forge deep bonds of solidarity as it was the women who ran the risk of being caught removing beacons and working illegal lands, but it was men who were charged with illegal ploughing and arrested.

On the third day of the uprising the NAD had gathered a considerable police force and arrested 29 people in a series of raids throughout the Western Block. Twelve of the men who were arrested would have evaded the police had it not been for the use of a spotter plane which identified the group hiding in the bushveld. These men were one of the many defence units which had been mobilised by residents and they were arrested in possession of 'six assegais, four hand axes and a number of knobkerries'.[198] Another man arrested on the third day of the uprising, identified in the archival records only by the name Jonas but described as one of the 'ringleaders' of the resistance, was mentioned specifically in the reports of Deputy Commissioner of Police, J.A. Brink, because of the actions of his unnamed wife.[199] Brink reported that because Jonas was understood to be a 'ringleader' two white policemen had been assigned the task of arresting him. When the two policemen attempted to force their way into Jonas's house, his wife had 'taken them by surprise' and attacked them from behind hitting them each on the back of the head with a large log of wood.[200] Under Secretary of Police, G Mears, reporting on the same incident, stated that 'the couple put up a very strong resistance [and] eventually in order to effect the arrest the roof of their hut had to be removed'.[201] That evening the campsite of a NAD officer was burnt down in a coordinated

[196] See for example, NASA NTS 3797 2567/308 (1), Statement by J Manamella, Juno Trust farm, 9 November 1943.
[197] Bekker, 'We Will Plough'.
[198] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Letter from the Secretary for Native Affairs to the Adjunct General of the Defence Headquarters, Pietersburg, 10 November 1943.
[199] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (1), Letter from the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Pietersburg, to the Commissioner of Police, Pretoria, 15 November 1943.
[200] *Ibid.*
[201] NASA NTS 3799 2567/308 (3), Memo by Under Secretary for Native Affairs, 13 November 1943.

attack by a large crowd who reportedly threatened to kill the night watchman on guard but instead directed their violence specifically towards NAD property. This was the only instance during the uprising in which the armed resistance seems to have shifted from a purely defensive mode to a more aggressive one aimed at bringing the fight to the NAD.

The Pietersburg uprising was suppressed quickly. Although rumblings of general discontent and acts of collective and individual disobedience had been a constant feature of the district's political landscape since the late 1930s, the rebellion itself only lasted five days. For the next two years, acts of resistance such as fence cutting and illegal ploughing (defining praxes of women's emancipatory struggles for self-determination and control over rural land), continued on an intensely localised scale throughout the Western Block. However, after the November 1943 uprising these contentious political praxes had lost the support of headmen and chiefs on the Trust farms. After three headmen had been threatened with deportation, the majority of governing elites in the area capitulated to the state's bribery and no longer supported the will of their constituents when it posed a challenge to NAD regulations.[202] Having forcibly imposed its control of the Trust over the recently acquired farms in the region by 1945, the NAD turned its attention more squarely towards the locations and 'tribal' farms that made up the pre-1936 Native Reserves.

Women's emancipatory land struggles in Ga-Matlala

Situated 40km west of Pietersburg (present day Polokwane City), and just south of the Western Block of Trust farms, was the Matlala Reserve – known as Ga-Matlala. In 1950, the area known as Ga-Matlala was 20 square kilometres including the Matlala Location and some surrounding farms which were purchased 'for the tribe' through taxation of residents in the location during the 1920s. Following the 1936 Natives Land Act, 13 additional farms were bought by the Trust and incorporated into Ga-Matlala.[203] In comparison to other reserves in the Northern Transvaal, Ga-Matlala was relatively small, with its resident population numbering only an estimated 25 000 in 1962. Although residents and the NAD both perceived Ga-Matlala to be suffering from 'over-crowding' by the late-1930s, the reality was – as was

[202] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*.
[203] NASA NTS 3733 2019/308 (2), Schedule of farms purchased by SA Native Trust in Pietersburg District, 17 September 1937.

the case in Sekhukhune – that by the 1950s most residents still maintained access to and control over lands for subsistence agriculture and were able to live in the scattered village and homestead settlement pattern that suited local land-use practices and social relationships.[204]

Between the 1930s and 1950s the NAD attempted, with very little success, to gradually impose certain betterment regulations in Ga-Matlala. Paramount Chief Sekgoari Mokoko Matlala, the leader of Ga-Matlala, had been opposed to the application of betterment regulations. His opposition was tolerated by the NAD for two reasons. The first was that Sekgoari had been supportive of the NAD's enclosure of grazing lands in the Western Block of Trust farms during the 1940-1945 period. In 1943 Sekgoari was one of three chiefs to accompany Steenkamp on a tour of the Vulcanus group of farms to inspect the lands marked for enclosure and redivision despite the popular resistance by residents.[205] The second reason for the NAD's tolerance of Sekgoari's opposition to applying betterment regulations within his area of authority had to do with the legislation governing betterment schemes in the 1940s. The difference between the old reserves and the Trust farms, in terms of the application of betterment regulations, was that until 1945 the law stipulated that before betterment planning could commence in reserve areas, consent had to be attained by 'the people' first. On Trust farms, the law did not require that any permission from residents had to be sought in advance. It was in the wake of the uprising on the Pietersburg Trust farms during the early-1940s that the laws were changed and, in 1945, the NAD was given the authority to impose betterment in reserve areas without first gaining the verbal or written consent of affected communities via their chiefly representatives. 1945 was also the year in which Sekgoari died and his wife, Mme Makwena Matlala, came to power as regent of the Bakoni Paramountcy.

Under Makwena's administration, between 1945 and 1950, popular resistance against state control and betterment regulations in Ga-Matlala took on a more coordinated, popular and militant form than ever before.[206] Makwena instructed her followers to ignore the betterment regulations and from 1945 to 1949 the Matlala Location and its surrounding farms

[204] Saleem Badat, *The Forgotten People: Political Banishment under Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Jacana Media, 2012).
[205] Bekker, 'We Will Plough'.
[206] Badat, *Forgotten People*, p. 38.

(both 'tribally owned' and Trust farms) were completely outside the control of the NAD officials. Under Makwena's authority, women continued to break up fresh plots of land for cultivation in areas (particularly by streams and forests) which had been marked for enclosure by Trust overseers.[207] The women and few men who lived and worked permanently in Ga-Matlala also refused to take their herds of stock (cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, and donkeys) to be counted and assessed by Agricultural Officers tasked with maintaining the carrying-capacity ratios to prevent further soil erosion in the reserve. Furthermore, local governing elites under Makwena's administration (subordinate chiefs in the villages of the location and NAD-installed headmen on the Matlala Trust farms) were allegedly told not to enforce the compulsory process of communities having to take their herds of cattle to dip tanks aimed at preventing the spread of infectious diseases to commercial white farms in the area.[208]

The officials of the NAD had learnt important lessons from the 1940-1945 period of popular resistance to betterment on the Trust farms in Pietersburg. One of these lessons was that resistance or compliance were greatly bolstered, one at the expense of the other, when backed by the support and resources of local governing elites. In 1949 Makwena was instructed by the NAD to organise meetings in the villages of Ga-Matlala in which she would share a platform with NAD officials and explain the betterment regulation which were now being applied to them without negotiation or consent. Makwena refused to hold these meetings and also stopped making the journey to the NAD offices in Pietersburg when instructed to do so. Trust overseers from the Ga-Matlala Trust farms reported to the police that groups of anti-state residents calling themselves 'MaCongress' and taking orders from Makwena were usurping their roles in land allocation.[209] For example, Detective A. Sehamola claimed that he had received a verbal report from a ranger at the Trust farm, La Pucella, to the effect that the 'MaCongress group was functioning as a chief's council and allocating reserved grazing camps to people… even old unqualified widows are ploughing freely so that the land will be theirs…'.[210] For her leading role in these many forms of resistance against

[207] NASA NTS 3866 2532/702, Confidential NAD memo entitled 'Matlala land troubles', 22 March 1947.
[208] NASA NTS 3866 2532/702, Affidavit by Bantu field assistant, La Pucela Trust farm, undated.
[209] Badat, *The Forgotten People*, pp. 58-59.
[210] NASA NTS 3866 2532/702, Affidavit by Detective A Sehamola, Pietersburg, 27 January 1947.

betterment regulations, and her refusal to comply with the authority of the NAD, Makwena was the first woman issued with banishment orders by the apartheid state in 1950.[211]

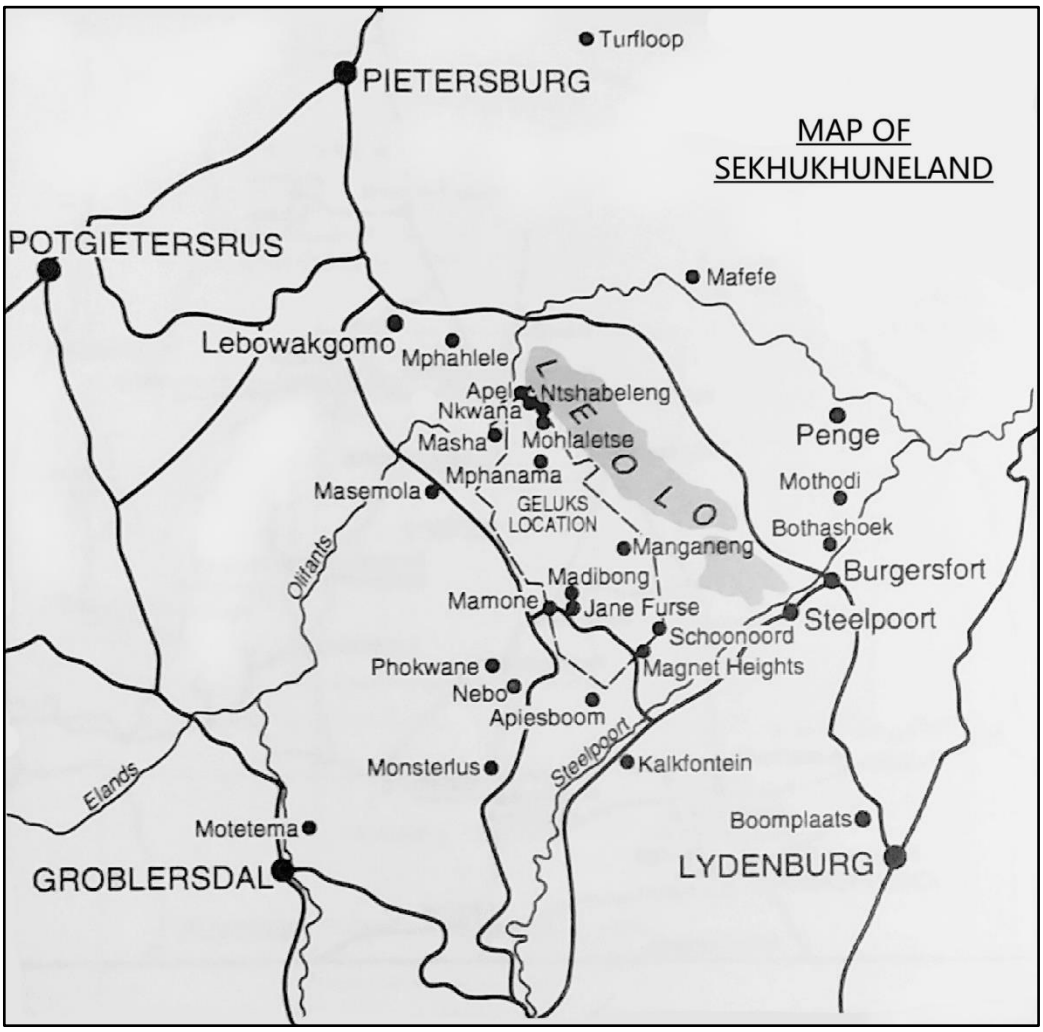
The local history of emancipatory struggles waged against the Trust and betterment regulations in Ga-Matlala during the late-1940s suggests that it was not the passing of the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 which made the institution of chieftaincy a central site of struggle in the mid-twentieth century. Instead, it was the strong relationship of solidarity between local governing elites and the emancipatory land struggles spearheaded by commoners in the 1930s and 1940s which necessitated, from the state's perspective, the passing of the Bantu Authorities Act. When historians allow the passing of state policies such as the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 to become the markers by which they craft histories of liberation struggle politics, as has often been the case, the everyday emancipatory praxes of women and their experiences within the rural uprisings of the mid-twentieth century are likely to be left out or consigned to the footnotes.[212] As such, adopting a critical historical framework and narrative form which prioritises the political agency and lived experiences of women, and asks how apartheid legislation effected their everyday lives and modes of resistance, is a potentially important corrective to some of the more structuralist and state-centric historiography on Bantu Authorities and the bantustans in general. With the resistances of the Trust farm tenants of the Pietersburg district having been crushed by 1945, and a Tribal Authority established at Ga-Matlala in 1955, Ga-Sekhukhune (also known as Sekhukhuneland) was the last remaining space of relative autonomy and independence from apartheid state control which the NAD had to deal with before the Lebowa bantustan could become a reality.

Women's emancipatory land struggles in Ga-Sekhukhune

Unlike women from present day Lesotho or parts of the North West Province, during the first half of the twentieth century women from Ga-Sekhukhune, on the whole, were not well embedded in migratory labour networks spanning from the countryside to the mines, industries, suburbs and townships of the Rand.[213] It was only in the mid-1960s, in the

[211] Badat, *The Forgotten People*, p. 58.
[212] See the discussion of the marginalisation of women in the historiography of the Sekhukhune uprising in the Introduction chapter.
[213] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 23.

aftermath of the uprising, that women from Ga-Sekhukhune – particularly from the periphery villages outside of Geluks Location – became part of a permanently landless class and were compelled to join the migrant work force in large numbers (see map 5). This is significant because at the time of the uprising in the late-1950s and early-1960s the majority of women's livelihood strategies in Ga-Sekhukhune were hinged on access to communal lands and resources ensured under the particular system of land ownership and associated moral economy of rural societies in Ga-Sekhukhune.[214]



Map 5: The Ga-Sekhukhune region also known as Sekhukhune. Adapted from P Delius, *A lion Amongst the Cattle*, p. xvi.

Historically in Ga-Sekhukhune, as in other African societies, the two foundational aspects of homestead economies, land and livestock, had been gendered in such a way that the latter was a largely male domain of work and the former a female one. Without a wife or wives, a

[214] *Ibid*, p. 25.

man could not rightfully gain access to his own farming fields or grazing lands and would remain dependent upon his parents and relatives.[215] This is a complicated specificity about the system of communal land ownership which existed in Ga-Sekhukhune and it exposes a foundational contradiction within the particular kind of patriarchy at play in this part of South Africa. It is important to note that although under colonial rule and apartheid women had the status of legal minors, without land ownership rights, as wives they exercised control over the work processes on family fields as well as the decision-making processes regarding the fruits of their labours in homesteads.[216]

By the 1930s, societal taboos regarding women's rights to work with livestock had all but broken down in Ga-Sekhukhune and most of its neighbouring districts in the Northern Transvaal.[217] This shift took place gradually as an increasing proportion of the adult male population were recruited to work as migrant labourers in the mines and industries of the Rand and women in Ga-Sekhukhune increasingly replaced their husbands, brothers and fathers' roles in managing and maintaining household and village economies. Similarly, as the number and quality of schools in Ga-Sekhukhune increased, especially during the 1940s and 1950s, a trend emerged whereby an increasing number of girls were taking over the animal herding responsibilities historically held by their boy relatives and maintaining the cattle post system while boys went to school.[218] By gaining new levels of control over family herds, through their own and their daughter's labours, women in Ga-Sekhukhune were able to further expand their sphere of influence in homestead economies and increase their autonomy from their husbands.

The available academic accounts and archival evidence suggest there were no coordinated or organised forms of women's social movement politics which led to the general empowerment of women in regard to their control over family fields and livestock in Ga-

[215] *Ibid*, p. 71.
[216] *Ibid*, pp. 23 -26; for more on the discussion of women's control as workers over family fields and commons in rural societies of the Northern Transvaal, included a more nuanced consideration of how this plays out in relation to the many patriarchal limitation placed on their rights under customary laws, see Yawitch, *Betterment*; and, Brent McCusker, 'The impact of membership in communal property associations on livelihoods in the Northern Province, South Africa', *GeoJournal*, 56 (2002), pp. 113-122.
[217] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, pp. 71-72.
[218] *Ibid*, p. 35.

Sekhukhune during the colonial period.[219] The political processes by which some women in Ga-Sekhukhune were able to gain relative equality with their male-counterparts in the labour and decision-making processes regarding cattle were more reflective of Asaf Bayat's ideas of the 'slow encroachment of the ordinary' and of the historical agency of non-collective forms of movement politics, than most ideas within classical social movement theory discourses.[220] Whatever their form, the outcome of these gendered processes of historical change within the homestead economies ensured that by the 1950s women in Ga-Sekhukhune had a particular interest in maintaining and expanding the system of communal land ownership which afforded them access to both land and livestock.

Between the 1880s and the 1930s, during a period of tumult induced by brutal processes of colonial conquest and waves of socio-ecological disasters – including droughts, plagues, diseases, and mass cattle killings – women in Ga-Sekhukhune had certain tangible freedoms, some old and others more recently attained, which they guarded fiercely and sought to expand where possible. It is necessary to talk of certain 'freedoms' as opposed to 'rights' which women in Ga-Sekhukhune experienced historically because, as most feminist and rural scholars show, the discourse of rights within the context of South African customary law is one which is far from empowering for women (particularly unmarried women, single mothers and widows) who were, and in many places still are, treated as legal minors with no individual rights to land ownership. However, avoiding the murky waters of the human rights discourse debates, it is possible to give an account of the freedoms which women in Ga-Sekhukhune had gained and maintained, despite the patriarchal domain of formal public village politics from which women were by-and-large excluded, by the time that the introduction of betterment became a reality in the early-1950s. These freedoms, which Delius calls 'core values' of Pedi societies in the first half of the twentieth-century, can be accounted for by way of three political axioms: first, that there should be no class of landless or stockless people in rural societies; second, that it was wrong to extort taxes or rents from widows or the elderly in rural societies; and third, that commoners (including women) had the right to vote local governing elites out of office and replace them by way of democratic consensus.[221]

[219] *Ibid*, p. 35; also see University of the Witwatersrand, William Cullen Library, Historical Papers (Hereafter, WHP), A1655, Donald Rolfe Hunt Papers, 1860-1946.
[220] Bayat, 'From Dangerous Classes', p. 541.
[221] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, pp. 25-26.

These three political principles were central to the land struggles championed by commoner women during the Ga-Sekhukhune uprising and, because of their radically egalitarian and pro-poor political content, the struggles to make or maintain these principles were politically emancipatory.

In regard to the second principle which exempted certain people in rural societies from processes of taxation, it is necessary to explain what the category 'widow' means within this historical context. The term 'widow' in both chiefly and colonial-cum-apartheid state discourses of the twentieth century was used to refer to a large and heterogeneous group of women in rural societies. The sociological category 'widow' included wives whose husbands had died (as is the common usage today); wives whose husbands were alive but had stopped returning home from work or sending home remittances; as well as unmarried women with children. The women who fell under the category widows were heads of their households and were deemed the most economically vulnerable group in rural society. Very few women headed households in Ga-Sekhukhune at this time had access to cash wages and thus maintaining their access to family fields and local economies of bartering was essential for their survival strategies. The commonly held principle that widows should not be called upon to contribute to meeting the price of taxes imposed upon communities by the NAD, in the form of bags of grain, livestock or cash, was a necessary measure to prevent them from becoming part of a structurally impoverished class within rural societies. Undoubtedly, rural societies were stratified in terms of class. Those men and women who were close to the power networks of the chieftaincy often had much larger family fields and private property in rural societies. However, the moral economy of rural societies in Ga-Sekhukhune was such that certain risk-sharing and pro-poor local governance policies – such as the two principles discussed above – were important blockers to the structural formation of a class of permanently poor, landless/stockless, people in rural societies.[222]

By the 1950s the three emancipatory political principles – no landless or stockless groups; no taxation of widows or the elderly; and the right for commoners to dismiss leaders from local governments (chiefly councils) in rural societies – remained an important aspect of the shared distribution of the sensible amongst commoners in Ga-Sekhukhune and

[222] *Ibid*, pp. 25-26, pp. 70-72.

neighbouring districts in the Northern Transvaal.[223] On the one hand, it was the threat to these freedoms posed by the imposition of betterment regulations which galvanised thousands of women into direct confrontations with the agents and infrastructure of the NAD and the burgeoning Lebowa bantustan state in the late-1950s and early-1960s.[224] On the other hand, the shared commitment to these radical political principles shaped the particular modes and forms of popular politics which emerged in Ga-Sekhukhune and qualified these struggles as emancipatory.

Sebatakgomo and the Ga-Sekhukhune uprising

> *To shout 'Stop, thief!' is to assume that someone is listening. It is to assume that the crowd agrees. As the miscreant flees, the crowd will trip him up, or remember his licence plate, or otherwise initiate action needed to restore the commons. We can throw the rascals out of office; we can expropriate the rich; we can pull down fences. To make this cry, this shout, requires that we're standing on firm ground, some kind of commons.*[225]

The shout 'Stop, thief!', as it featured during the great wave of peasant struggles against processes of mass enclosure in sixteenth century England described by Linebaugh, can be equated to the cry of 'Sebatakgomo!' in the Ga-Sekhukhune district of the Northern Transvaal during the late-1950s. The SePedi term 'Sebatakgomo!' translates into English as 'There is a lion amongst the cattle!' and, much like the shout 'Stop, thief!', its inherent assumptions and associated practices of resistance were embedded in and relied upon a shared distribution of the sensible and moral economy within rural communities. When a woman or group of women shouted 'Sebatakgomo' in Ga-Sekhukhune during the late-1950s it had the effect of mobilising local residents to directly, urgently and collectively confront state officials – be they

[223] The idea of the 'distribution of the sensible' is one I have borrowed from the theorisations of Jacques Rancière. The idea of the distribution of the sensible is defined as, 'the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it'. According to Rancière, one of the characteristic features of radical egalitarian politics – or emancipatory politics – is its ability when manifested in popular praxis is to produce something 'new' which enters into and disrupts the shared 'distribution of the sensible' of a particular place. See, Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of aesthetics: The distribution of the sensible*, (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 12.

[224] It should be noted that most studies of the uprising emphasise the political principle: a chief is a chief only by the people. The threat posed to this principle by the system of Bantu Authorities was a central aspect of the political subjectivities driving the politics of the Sebatakgomo and Makhuduthamaga migrant worker organisations. See Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*; Nkadimeng, 'A reassessment of the 1958 Revolt'; and, Shai, 'Intervention and Resistance'.

[225] Peter Linebaugh, *Stop, Thief! The commons, enclosures, and resistance*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2014), p. 1.

agricultural officers, policemen, rangers, or in most cases a combination of the lot – who were present within their neighbourhood at the time the cry was made.[226] Just as the cry of 'Sebatakgomo!' can be equated with the shout of 'Stop, thief!' so too can the apartheid policy of betterment be compared with the general phenomenon of state enclosures and the destruction of the commons.

The term Sebatakgomo is undoubtedly a defining characteristic of the history and historiography of the Sekhukhune uprising. Historians have devoted considerable attention to the ANC-linked migrant worker organisation called Sebatakgomo (later renamed Fetakgomo) and the leading role it played in mobilising and directing popular resistance campaigns against the imposition of Bantu Authorities and the Trust in Ga-Sekhukhune during the late-1950s. Sebatakgomo was formed in 1954 by young men from Ga-Sekhukhune who lived in hostels on the Rand. Many of these men, including two prominent leaders of the organisation, Flag Boshielo and John Nkadimeng, were members of the Communist Party and the ANC. The rationale behind creating the organisation, as Delius argues, was to mobilize popular support 'in defence of a residual but cherished economic and political autonomy grounded in chiefly power and communal tenure' in Ga-Sekhukhune.[227] Sebatakgomo and the Khudutamaga – 'a parallel commoner body' established in 1956 in Ga-Sekhukhune itself 'which replicated the village-based structure of Sebatakgomo' – led a popular movement spanning town and countryside which sought to control and democratise the Bapedi chieftaincy according to the political principle that 'a chief is a chief by the people' (*kgoshi ke kgoshi ka batho*).[228]

As was the case with other reserves in the Northern Transvaal, such as Ga-Matlala, after 1945 the Trust and its application of betterment regulations had become 'an increasingly intrusive presence' particularly on the peripheries of Ga-Sekhukhune where a number of subordinate chiefs and government installed headmen cooperated with the NAD.[229] The residents of Ga-Sekhukhune, both at home and on the Rand, reasoned that the Trust 'seemed determined to penetrate and dominate every nook and cranny' of their everyday lives.[230] In

[226] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*.
[227] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*.
[228] Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt', p.10
[229] *Ibid*, p. 12.
[230] *Ibid*, p. 10.

February 1957, a meeting was held in Ga-Sekhukhune in which the Sebatakgomo organisation was able – in what was a spectacular and yet non-violent political coup – to vote out senior councillors within the *Dihlogo tsa Motse* (inner council of the paramount) accused of collaboration with the state and replace them with Arthur Phetedi Thulare and Godfrey Sekhukhune, two members of the resistance movement. As Delius explains,

> The Pedi Paramount Morwamotshe and other chiefs who had wavered in the face of state banishments and threats had their resolve to resist considerably strengthened by this mobilization and by the justifiable fear that their lives would be at risk should they buckle.[231]

Less than two months after Arthur Phetedi Thulare and Godfrey Sekhukhune had taken up their respective positions within the newly reformed senior council at the Bapedi political capital in Mohlaletsi village, the state banished them to two distant reserves in Natal. Morwamotše was given assurances by the NAD that if he established a Tribal Authority for the Bapedi the two banished councillors would be allowed to return. Morwamotše agreed to the terms and a Bapedi Tribal Authority (invested with the powers of a Regional Authority for the two magisterial districts of Praktiseer and Sekhukhune) was officially gazetted. However, the NAD did not hold up its end of the deal and when it had become apparent that Godfrey Sekhukhune and Alfred Thulare were not going to be allowed to return home from banishment, mass demonstrations erupted in Ga-Sekhukhune. The most significant of these, according to Delius, was the July 1957 march of 8 000 men from the villages of Geluks Location who 'donned ceremonial dress and gathered from as far as 20 miles away at Mohlaletse, where they presented a petition bearing 30 000 signatures to N.A.D. officials, demanding the return of their exiled "sons"'.[232] What is not mentioned in Delius's account is the event that took place a month later, on Saturday 20 August 1957, in which 10 000 women and children marched from the villages of Ga-Sekhukhune to the Schoonoord magistrate's office without a petition but also to demand the return of the banished people.[233]

Both the men's petition and the women's demonstration were ignored by the NAD and for the next months widespread resistance took place throughout Ga-Sekhukhune. The

[231] *Ibid*, p. 10.
[232] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 118.
[233] NASA SAP 552 15/29/57, Letter from the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Transvaal Division, to the Commissioner of Police, Pretoria, 29 August 1957.

forms of resistance included the repertoire of political praxes associated with radical anti-betterment land struggles – fence cutting, destroying beacons, illegally ploughing enclosed lands, and so on – as well as tax boycotts and consumer boycotts of businesses owned by government supporters such as Mabowe James Sekhukhune.[234] The response of the state to the immense up-scaling of popular resistance in Sekhukhune was to: disestablish the Bapedi Tribal Authority on 29 November 1957; suspend Morwamotše from office; banish another two dissident members of the Dihlogo tsa Motse (Lot Kgagudi Maredi and Kgagudi Maruntanyane); and, on 7 March 1958, to apply a proclamation to Ga-Sekhukhune which banned the ANC and stipulated that basically 'any form of opposition to "the authority of the State… or of any Chief or headman" would result in "a fine of £300 and three years' imprisonment"'.[235] The final retaliation of the state to the popularisation of political resistance in Ga-Sekhukhune in 1957 was to banish Morwamotše and his wife, Mankopodi Sekhukhune, and their children to the Transkei on 21 March 1958.[236]

At the time when the ANC was banned in Ga-Sekhukhune, a number of Sebatakgomo's most active members had been arrested and detained as part of the Treason Trial proceedings, and the organisation changed its name to 'Fetakgomo o sware motho' (Fetakgomo) which translates loosely into English as 'Leave the cattle, save the people', but the implied meaning is the axiom 'people first'.[237] The Dihlogo tsa Motse, after Morwamotše's banishment, became known as the 'Khudutamaga' (meaning central committee); the dissident men and women of Ga-Sekhukhune, the commoners, became known as 'Makhudutamaga' (the soldiers of Khudutamaga); and the resistance movement in general began to 'develop an increasingly local focus and flavour' as links to the urban-based organisational modes of Congress politics were undermined by the state.[238] The small minority of people in Ga-Sekhukhune who supported the state and were in favour of the Bantu Authorities system's proper functioning were known as 'Marangera' or rangers.

[234] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Letter from the Deputy Commissioner of Police, Transvaal Division, to the Commissioner of Police, Pretoria, 29 January 1960.
[235] Badat, *The Forgotten People*, p. 91.
[236] *Ibid*, p. 91.
[237] Fetakgomo Local Municipality, '2015/16 Final Draft IDP/Budget'. Accessed online at: fgtm.gov.za/fetakgomo/documents/importantdocuments/idp/DRAFT%20IDP%20FOR%202015%2016%20.pdf
[238] Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt', p.10.

At Manganeng village in Geluks Location on 16 May 1958 police attempting to arrest local activists opened fire on a crowd of residents, killing two people – one of whom was a pregnant woman – and injuring several others. This event sparked the 'outbreak of violence known as the Sekhukhune Revolt'.[239] In the days following the events at Manganeng on 16 May, a coordinated campaign of retributory violence in the form of several targeted assaults and acts of arson was deployed by militant groups of MaKhudutamaga against the Marangera in Ga-Sekhukhune. By 18 May, nine men had been killed and the homes of dozens of others burnt down by crowds as a result of their support (real or popularly perceived) of the NAD's policies.[240] In response to the revolt the state arrested 340 people – 37 of whom were given life sentences – and units of the mobile police column occupied Sekhukhune for several months. The arrests did not have the desired effect of quelling resistance and the three years following the revolt of May 1958 represented the zenith of Fetakgomo's political history in which the NAD was forced, firstly, to suspend all existing attempts to implement betterment schemes and regulations in the area and, secondly, to allow the return of Morwamotše and some of the other councillors who had been banished.[241]

In the early-1960s, the NAD abandoned its attempts to impose Bantu Authorities and regulations over the central villages of Geluks location where Fetakgomo held its headquarters. The NAD instead focused on trying to use a combination of intimidation and bribery to induce subordinate chiefs and headmen on the peripheries of the reserve to establish their own Tribal Authorities and institute betterment regulations. According to Delius, this new approach was largely successful and by the mid-1960s the power of the Bapedi Paramountcy had been broken and the role of the Fetakgomo organisation in the radical resistances in Ga-Sekhukhune had been undermined significantly.[242] This was especially true for the Bapedi communities living on the Trust farms on the southern border of the Sekhukhune magisterial district such as the Ironside, Drooghoek, and Tweefontein Trust farms.[243] The revolt of November 1958 had not successfully impeded the enforcement of betterment regulations on those farming communities residing in the parts of Sekhukhune

[239] *Ibid*, p.10.
[240] Shai, 'Intervention and Resistance'.
[241] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*.
[242] *Ibid*
[243] NASA BOA 5/512 F109/1236, Letter from the Bantu Commissioner, Groblersdale, to the Chief Bantu Commissioner, Pietersburg, 6 November 1965.

which lay outside of the central reserve and Geluks Location. In these periphery spaces of Ga-Sekhukhune women's emancipatory land struggles, similar to those on the Pietersburg Trust farms and in Ga-Matlala in previous decades, were a defining feature of the popular political landscape before and during the Sekhukhune uprising and in its immediate aftermath. Although Fetakgomo did play a role in these intensely local and often militant land struggles of the early-1960s, that role was largely confined to using their networks to put members of those communities in contact with activist lawyers linked with the Communist Party in Johannesburg to organise legal defence for arrested persons.

Women's emancipatory land struggles in Ga-Maepa

In 1954 the residents of Ga-Maepa, who lived in the traditional scattered-homestead village settlement formation on a farm called Drooghoek, were informed that the Trust had purchased the farm to be 'properly planned and incorporated' into the Sekhukhune district.[244] As a result of the changes in the legislation governing the Trust in 1945, the application of betterment regulations was imposed upon the residents of Ga-Maepa without a pretence of consent from the three local governing elites in the area or the residents themselves. An excerpt from communist lawyer Shulamith Muller's research notes – compiled sometime in 1961 when she was organising the defence of certain residents from Drooghoek facing charges of illegal ploughing – provides insight into the political landscape of Ga-Maepa in the early 1950s:

> The Maepa tribe has occupied the farm Drooghoek in Sekukuneland for as long as memory goes. Nearly all the present occupants were born there and [so were] many of their parents. Prior to about 1954 it was Crown land – occupants paid their £1.10.0 per annum to the government and realised that the government owned the land. But they were left very much to themselves and regarded the land as their own. Allotments were inherited from father to son and so remained in the family. For example one of the men whose wife has now been arrested has been looking after his father's land since about 1952. His father had 5 separate allotments which adjoined one another – a total acreage of 34 acres. Although this is far more land than the average African possesses it has to be remembered that from it he had to support two wives and three adult married sons with their families. In fact the father has gone to

[244] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Letter from Deputy Commissioner of Police, Transvaal Division, to the Commissioner of Police, Pretoria, 11 August 1960.

> town to obtain cash wages in order to eke out the family income. Nevertheless they were able to live.
>
> In 1954, however, 'organisation' came to the Maepas. The farm in question had been taken over by the Native Trust… The land has simply been cut up into smaller portions. Married men have now been allotted 3 morgen each and unmarried men 1 morgen only. The man whom I have already mentioned now has 3 morgen instead of 35 acres! Yet on this he has to support the same number of people. Despite applications by his adult sons for their own allotments these have not been granted.[245]

The residents of Ga-Maepa were unprepared when agricultural officers began erecting beacons and marking the new divisions of land for the area in late 1954. Nevertheless, protests rapidly ensued with the illegal removal and destruction of demarcation beacons and fences, a general refusal by families to move their homes from the newly designated enclosed pasture land, as well as a general boycott of all taxes.[246] The initial resistance by the Ga-Maepa community resembled the emancipatory land struggles waged primarily by women against the officials, infrastructure and regulations of betterment in Ga-Matlala and the Pietersburg Trust farms in the 1940s. These emancipatory praxes were unable to prevent the families of Ga-Maepa from having to demolish their homesteads and rebuild them in the demarcated residential area in 1955. Once in the new residential area, residents were forced to rebuild their houses on a linear-grid system that clustered families into close quarters at the foot of the Leolo Mountains and gave them access to tiny plots of land for cultivation located at a significant distance from the residential area.[247] The area of the farm from which the majority of residents had been removed was enclosed as a 'reserved grazing pasture' to be occasionally used by the NAD to de-pasture state owned herds of cattle in the region.[248]

For three years the women of Ga-Maepa, as the ones responsible for subsistence farming and maintaining household economies whilst most men were away working for cash wages, attempted to eke out a living on the newly assigned plots of land. During this period, more and more women were forced to leave the village and become migrant labourers in

[245] WHP, A3417, Ruth Muller Papers 1980-2015, Shulamith Muller Legal Practice Files, undated.
[246] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Memo by the Commissioner for Police, 23 August 1960; also see, Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies'.
[247] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Letter from Deputy Commissioner of Police, Transvaal Division, to the Commissioner of Police, Pretoria, 11 August 1960.
[248] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60.

order to sustain themselves and their families. For the remaining residents of Ga-Maepa the situation was desperate during these years. This was especially the case for widows who were prohibited by betterment regulations in the mid-1950s from being allocated any plots of land for farming and grazing purposes and were subject to the rents and taxes of the Trust. At the height of the Sekhukhune uprising in November 1958, the residents of GaMapea reoccupied the enclosed pastures from which they had been forcibly removed in 1954 and the women set about ploughing and cultivating as much land as each could manage.[249]

The timing was extremely strategic on the part of the occupiers and was no doubt facilitated by the fact that 1958 was the year in which the Sekhukhune uprising reached its peak and the NAD was struggling to maintain control over the entire region. Unfortunately, the archival records pertaining to the events at Ga-Maepa, including police reports and NAD correspondence files the Pretoria National Archives as well as the Muller collection at Wits Historical Papers, provides little detail into the actual process by which the residents reoccupied the enclosed parts of the farm in 1958. All that is known is that the residents at Ga-Maepa, in alliance with some residents from the neighbouring Ironside Trust farm, were engaged in a series of 'riots' that the police, distracted by daily cases of arson and real or perceived threats on the life of state supporters throughout Sekhukhune, were unable to subdue and which ultimately resulted in the loss of control over Drooghoek Trust farm.[250]

From 1958 until 1961, the residents of Ga-Maepa maintained their occupation and control over the farm despite several attempted raids by the police to break the resistance. Up until January 1960, the police were unable to penetrate the community's defences and effect arrests or collect taxes from the residents. The natural mountainous landscape, and the fact that in the 1960s there was only one road which vehicles could use to access the Drooghoek Trust farm, were of huge benefit to the resisting residents who sought to keep state authorities out of their community. When the local Agricultural Officer and police attempted to enter the farm in June 1959 to arrest tax defectors, they found that the road had been blocked with 'all manner of things [such as] large pieces of wood, rocks and dongas' and that a 'group of serious women with canes watched on from a distance' as the convoy

[249] NASA SAP 552 15/29/57, Letter from Deputy Commissioner of Police, Northern Transvaal, to the Commissioner of Police, Pretoria, 29 August 1957.
[250] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60.

was forced to return to Middleburg police station.[251] The joint efforts of the NAD and the police to regain control over the residents of Ga-Maepa reached a zenith in January 1960 as the NAD became determined to reimplement betterment regulations on Drooghoek Trust farm. The NAD was especially concerned to count and cull the residents' herds of stock on Drooghoek Trust farm in order to save the soil of the grazing pastures for state-owned herds of cattle in the region.[252]

At 6pm on 14 January, 1960, a convoy of 'Bantu Fieldworkers' (rangers) under the supervision of Agricultural Officer Van der Walt entered Drooghoek Trust farm.[253] The date was carefully planned. Van der Walt had insisted that the raid be held-off until all of the men, who were migrant workers, and seen as 'the big troublemakers in the area', had returned to their places of work following the Christmas holidays.[254] The people then left to defend the farm against the NAD and police would be mostly women, children and elderly men. The time of the raid, early evening at 6pm, was also strategically chosen so that the majority of women would have just returned to their homes from the fields and commons and family herds of stock would most likely be back in the kraals. The plan was to impound any and all cattle which did not carry the branded mark indicating it had been inspected and taxed by the NAD. Seeing as the residents of Droooghoek had refused to pay their taxes or have their cattle checked by the NAD since their forced removal in 1954, it was understood that all of the cattle were likely targets for confiscation. Any woman or man who claimed ownership over unbranded cattle would be immediately arrested and subject to prosecution. According to the Middleburg police station commander's report:

> While the [rangers] were gathering cattle, about 50 Bantu men and women, armed with assegais, axes and canes, rushed at them and freed two prisoners whom the [rangers] had detained. The [rangers] fled from the scene.[255]

The NAD, however, were not prepared to give up so easily this time. The following day at 11 am, Van der Walt and his team of rangers returned to Drooghoek with a heavy police guard made up of additional officers from the Burgersfort police station. Their goal was to impound

[251] NASA BOA 5/512 F109/1236, Affidavit by Senior Agricultural Officer, Groblersdal, 7 July 1959.
[252] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Letter from Deputy Commissioner of Police, Northern Transvaal, to the Commissioner of Police, Pretoria, 2 December 1960.
[253] *Ibid.*
[254] *Ibid.*
[255] *Ibid.*

all unbranded cattle and arrest as many of the 'troublemakers' in the area as possible – including women and men identified in the crowd from the previous day's confrontation.[256]

The rangers went to the commons, rounded-up some of the community's cattle and drove them to a state pound that had been set up on the neighbouring Trust farm, Ironside. 'While the workers were feeding the cattle, six bantu women armed with canes appeared on the scene. They noticed the police and fled'.[257] Once the rangers had driven the cattle into the crush on Ironside Trust farm, Van der Walt told the police that 'it was now safe for them to leave the area' as everything had gone smoothly. He did this presumably believing that the group of women who had appeared on the scene and may have attempted to rouse the people into a confrontational mood, had instead been intimidated by the police presence, and had chosen instead to comply. However, as soon as the police arrived back at the station, they received orders to return immediately to the farm as a large group of 'residents from Drooghoek [had] descended upon the crush and liberated three of the confiscated cattle' from within.[258] When the police returned, they and the rangers hunted down and eventually recovered the animals which had been driven by the crowd into the bushes of the mountainside on Ironside Trust farm. The 'rebels' who had liberated the cattle, on the other hand, evaded capture.[259] Further details of what took place are provided in the report of the Deputy Commissioner of Police:

> To avoid a recurrence of events, Constable Dreyer was sent back to the complaints office to fetch six non-white members of the Force to guard the cattle. Shortly after leaving, Sergeant du Toit, the Bantu Constable and Mr v.d. Walt … [attempted] to determine if there were any Bantu in the area where the cattle were being driven. While the police were out of sight, a number of Bantu returned and again liberated the three cattle. Sergeant du Toit and Mr. v.d. Walt then pursued them and arrested one Bantu. The remaining Bantu were immediately dissatisfied and requested that the prisoner be released. They stormed Bantu Constable Mabunda and freed the prisoner. The Bantu were in a fighting mood and fled into the mountains with the cattle and the prisoner. Sergeant du Toit explains that the Bantu were known and that he did not try to catch them because it would have ignited the tensest atmosphere. After the arrival of Constable Dreyer with reinforcement, the Bantu were

[256] *Ibid.*
[257] *Ibid.*
[258] *Ibid.*
[259] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Memo by the Commissioner for Police, 12 December 1960.

> pursued. They could not be traced, but the cattle were found and sent to the crush.[260]

By the end of the evening the NAD officials, rangers and police were able to secure the confiscated cattle but were unable to detain any of the people who had attempted to thwart them. The following day, 18 January, represented a turning point in the struggle for control over Drooghoek Trust farm. The District Commander of the Middleburg police, Major J. du Plooy, led a raid 'to arrest those responsible for the recent resistance' which took the residents completely by surprise. On that day almost every resident from Drooghoek, and many from neighbouring farms, were attending the wedding of a prominent and relatively wealthy member of the community – unfortunately, unnamed in the police reports. The police force assembled for the raid was made up of black and white officers from Nebo, Maartenshoop, Sekhukhune, and Middleburg, police stations. Although the exact number of policemen involved is unclear it was undoubtedly an intimidatingly large group and one which was flanked by a cohort of rangers under the supervision of Agricultural Officer Van der Walt. According to Du Plooy's report 'this raid was successful and went extremely quietly and there was no resistance' as,

> Most of the Bantu who [had] caused the trouble were drunk. They also did not know in advance that their cattle would be inspected... At the same time, the Agriculture Officer and his field workers inspected cattle and arrested tax and trust rental offenders… As a result of the raid, 58 persons were arrested on charges under the Trust Law, Tax Law, possession of dangerous weapons, possession of marijuana (one case) and Proof (pass) book offenses. The prisoner who was liberated on January 14, 1960, was also arrested and the two Bantu who freed him were also detained. Their cases will be heard soon.[261]

The raid of 18 January 1960 was the moment in which the state was able to regain a foothold on Drooghhoek Trust farm and begin to reaffirm its control over the people and the land. Between February and August 1960, the police continued to send regular patrols throughout Drooghoek and neighbouring Trust farms and rangers periodically attempted to enforce betterment measures and extract taxes from the residents of Drooghoek Farm. The majority of women at Ga-Maepa resolutely refused to return to ploughing the tiny plots designated by

[260] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Letter from Deputy Commissioner of Police, Northern Transvaal, to the Commissioner of Police, Pretoria, 2 December 1960.
[261] *Ibid*.

the Trust, and many families continued to boycott the payment of all taxes. As late as 1963, the NAD still received complaints from Trust officials that 'there are so many widows with plots [who] still refuse to pay the Trust levy and don't show any tax receipts'.[262] However, as the presence of rangers and policemen became an increasing feature of residents' everyday lives residents in Ga-Maepa gradually began to fall in line with the dictates of the state.[263]

In August 1960, direct confrontations between rangers and the residents of Drooghoek Trust farm flared up once again. Officials of the Bantu Affairs Commissioner's Office had received information from the Agricultural Officer that the 19 families who had been convinced to comply with betterment regulations and return to the demarcated residential area had been prevented from doing so by the 'oproerige vroue' (unruly women) who were now illegally ploughing lands on yet another piece of enclosed land on the neighbouring Trust farm Triangle.[264] The Middleburg police made the following report to the Director of Security Police in Pretoria describing the situation as follows:

> On-site investigation reveals that the usufructuaries' of the two farms under chiefs Makua, Maepa and Ratau were dissatisfied with the re-designation of lands by the agricultural officer… This discontent was so bad the previous ploughing season that the lands were left almost completely untouched. *However, the bantu is beginning to feel the pressure, but while some families (possibly the richer ones) now want to accept the situation, there are still others (especially widows) who remain dissatisfied.* In view of the fluidity of the situation in Sekhukhune, the bantu affairs commissioner was asked to address the complainants and the dissatisfied with their tribal chiefs on 2.12.1960 to try to eliminate the friction. He agreed to this and the necessary steps will be taken to allow the meeting to take place.[265] (emphasis in italics added)

At this stage, in November 1960, the Bantu Affairs Commissioner (BAC) and his officers were under the impression that the situation at the Drooghoek Trust farm was being closely monitored by the police and Agricultural Officer but no further action would be taken until such time as the meeting between the BAC and the local chiefs from the area had taken place on 2 December 1960. The Middleburg police, under direction from Pretoria, and Agricultural

[262] NASA BOA 5/512 F109/1236, Affidavit by Senior Agricultural Officer, Groblersdal, 22 May 1963.
[263] LPA TEMO 1157 2/1/1/7 (1 – 9), Landbou Aangeleenthede Maandelikse Werksverslae, 1964 – 1972.
[264] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Letter from the Station Commander, Middleburg, to the Director of Security Police, Pretoria, 9 January 1961.
[265] *Ibid.*

Officer Van der Walt, however, had a very different idea.[266] They continued to scout the area, trying to devise a strategy to once again penetrate the community's defences and arrest the illegal land occupiers. Eventually they came up with an elaborate scheme to enlist the services of a collaborator from the Ironside Trust farm to lead a force of 100 policemen through the labyrinth pathways of the mountainside to conduct a surprise raid on Ga-Maepa resident in the dead of night.[267]

Before the police could execute their raid, the BAC had to give his approval. This approval was not forthcoming. In fact, when the BAC's office replied to the police, they made it clear that such heavy-handed tactics were to be avoided at all costs and that the cases of all those from Drooghoek already arrested and charged in connection with infringement of Trust Laws would be handled *de-novo* (anew).[268] The reason for this change in position by the BAC was not given to the police but was discussed in correspondence with the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner (CBAC) of the Northern Transvaal and was revealed to be the result of the Administration's fear that local disputes such as the one on Drooghoek farm could turn into 'a Matlala situation'.[269] The term 'a Matlala situation' was a reference to the staunch popular resistance against the NAD and the Trust which took place in Ga-Matlala during the late-1940s and early 1950s.

As a result of the non-confrontational stance of the BAC in the last months of 1960, there were no new arrests made on Drooghoek Farm and, due to a reshuffling of personnel within the NAD, the meeting of 2 December was postponed to 1 January 1961, the day on which a new Bantu Affairs Commissioner for Sekhukhune, Mr. Jansen, took up office.[270] According to a police report, Jansen prioritised the issue of Drooghoek Farm on taking up office:

> On 3/1/61, there were eleven prisoners awaiting trial in the [jail] cells, who were caught in the act of ploughing on the lands assigned to others or reserved for conservation. Police were also investigating 43 similar offenses. These

[266] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Letter from the Station Commander, Middleburg, to the Director of Security Police, Pretoria, 14 January 1961.
[267] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Letter from the Station Commander, Middleburg, to the Director of Security Police, Pretoria, 9 January 1961.
[268] *Ibid.*
[269] *Ibid.*
[270] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Letter from Deputy Commissioner of Police, Northern Transvaal, to the Commissioner of Police, Pretoria, 2 February 1961.

> issues were all from the Drooghoek area. After consultation with, and at the request of the local Bantu Affairs Commissioner, (Mr. Jansen) who was moved there on 1/1/60, a further effort was made to resolve his dispute over the allocation of lands on Drooghoek and the adjacent Trust farms. Two of the disgruntled chiefs (the third one is in Lydenburg prison) as well as the leader of the law-abiding group were taken by the District Commandant, S.A. Police Middleburg, Tvl. (Major Du Plooy) and Mr. Jansen spoke to them in his office. Mr. Jansen took a compatible stance and persuaded the disputed leaders to discuss their followers' grievances at a meeting soon to be held at his office. In the meantime, lands that have already been ploughed should be left this way and those who have not yet ploughed, due to the approaching end of the ploughing season, will immediately be given other lands. The trial awaiting prisoners were released on their own responsibility and their case was postponed. The other outstanding complaints are also not discussed further. Mr. Jansen also stated that he undertook to make an extension to his headquarters for the release of the convicts who are now serving their sentence in Lydenburg Prison. Pending developments and at the request of Mr. Jansen also stops the intensive patrolling of the area by police. It appears that Mr. Jansen has very good knowledge of Bantu and that the prospects of settling the disputes that cause the unrest in Sekhukhune are good.[271]

In this meeting the resistance movement at Drooghoek had won concessions from the state that were virtually unheard of at the time and unlike anything the Maepa community had managed in the past year. The removal of the police from the area and the commitment by Jansen not to harass women cultivating lands according to their own regulations and not those of the Trust was an important victory for the residents of Ga-Maepa. This temporary break in the state's attempt to forcefully reassert its control over Drooghoek Trust farm was a result of the struggles waged by the residents of Ga-Maepa in defence of their collective autonomy from the dictates of and control of the state and their determination to uphold emancipatory political principles insuring sufficient access to land and protection from excessive taxation for all. Geography, and the Leolo Mountains specifically, enabled the resistance movement to sustain itself and defend the lands that it occupied for residential, cultivation and grazing purposes on Drooghoek, Ironside and Triangle Trust farms. The pro-government residents in the area were a weak and small minority, unlike in areas such as Ga-Matlala, and the local governing elites privately gave their support to the popular resistance

[271] *Ibid.*

movement and claimed to be powerless to stop the people for doing as they choose when questioned by state authorities. For a period of about five months, the residents of these Trust farms were completely free from the incursions of the state into their everyday lives. It all came to a tragic end in May, 1961, when a series of brutal police raids resulted in the mass arrest of a group of 50 people charged with illegal ploughing and unlawful occupation of reserved pastures.

Of the 50 people who were arrested at Ga-Maepa and brought to the Schoonoort court on 18 May 1961, twenty-nine were women.[272] Most of the women charged with illegal ploughing were between fifty and sixty years old; but seven of them were younger mothers who had their babies with them in court.[273] It was exceptional in the 1950s and 1960s, outside of the anti-pass struggles, for ordinary black women in rural areas of South Africa to actually appear in court on charges such as the occupation of enclosed lands or other acts in contravention of betterment regulations. Those women from Ga-Sekhukhune who did appear in magistrate's courts during the period of the uprising were regents, chieftainesses or senior wives whose husbands held positions within the office of the chieftaincy.[274] In light of this, some readers must have been at least slightly taken-aback when an article appeared in the *New Age* newspaper on Thursday 18th May 1961 with the bold caption stating:

> Fifty African peasants from the farm Drooghoek in Sekhukhune are today sitting in jail on charges of illegal ploughing. Twenty-nine are women, seven of whom have their babies with them. One case has been tried and the accused convicted and fined £20 – which he cannot pay.[275]

The article in the *New Age* was entitled 'Arrests and Jailings While Peasants Starve: "Land Reform" in the Reserves' and was described by the editors as a '…story of so-called "land reform' at Drooghoek'" written by an anonymous contributor identified only by the initial 'S' appearing at the end of the article.[276] The author was the communist lawyer Shulamith Muller and the article from *New Age*, along with a handful of related documents dealing with the Sekhukhune Revolt, are part of one of the very few surviving folders from her Johannesburg

[272] WHP, A3417, Ruth Muller Papers 1980-2015, Shulamith Muller Legal Practice Files, undated.
[273] *Ibid.*
[274] An example is Mmadinoge Kgoloko (née Mashabela) who was found guilty of masterminding the fatal attack on her late husband's younger brother, Kgolane, a known government sympathiser at Madibong village during the riotous month of May 1958. See, Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*.
[275] WHP, A3417, Ruth Muller Papers 1980-2015, Shulamith Muller Legal Practice Files, undated.
[276] *Ibid*.

legal practice.[277] In 1957 Muller had been drawn into the politics of the Sekhukhune uprising when Fetakgomo comrades enlisted her services to appeal the banishment orders served on Phetedi Thulare and Godfrey Sekhukhune. In the following years, Muller's practice also took on the defence of the 340 people (majority men and a small minority women) charged with the assaults and killings of so-called rangers in May 1958, as well as the case of the Drooghoek Trust Farm residents in 1961.[278]

In building a defence case for the twenty-nine women and twenty-one men put on trial on 18 May 1961 for the illegal occupation of reserved pasture and failure to comply with an order of the Bantu Commissioner in May 1961, Muller argued that it was the threat of starvation that motivated the residents to abandon their allocated farming plots and residential areas in 1958 and reclaim their former position on the enclosed pasture.[279] In trying to build the best possible defence for the women and men taken to court in 1961, Muller downplayed any radical political motivations or tactics that were involved in the Ga-Maepa residents' collective re-occupation of the reserved pastures on Drooghoek Farm from 1958 onwards. This was a legal strategy that was quite common in political trials in South Africa during the apartheid period. The police records dealing with 'Bantoe Onrus' (Native Unrest) in Ga-Sekhukhune during this period, however, paint a very different picture of the political motivations of residents on Drooghoek Trust farm to that of Muller. According to the police, the Drooghoek Trust farm, as well as the neighbouring Trust farm Ironside, was the home of a group of rebels known as the 'Voortrekkers' who were '…the group responsible for the riots in the area in 1958'.[280]

The 50 accused were found guilty and variously sentenced, many having to serve prison sentences of up to three years with hard labour, because the money collected for the Ga-Maepa community defence fund, which had been established during the initial occupation of 1958, had run out and fines could no longer be paid.[281] With the mass arrest of May 1961, the state was finally able to truly regain control over the Trust farms on the south-eastern

[277] *Ibid.*
[278] Ruth Muller, "A certain legal practitioner: Reconstructing the life of Shulamith Muller" (MA thesis, Wits University, 2012), pp. 9-10.
[279] WHP, A3417, Ruth Muller Papers.
[280] NASA SAP 602 15/14/60, Letter from Deputy Commissioner of Police, Transvaal Division, to the Commissioner of Police, Pretoria, 11 August 1960.
[281] WHP, A3417, Ruth Muller Papers.

fringes of Ga-Sekhukhune and extract taxes and impose betterment regulations despite the ongoing resentment of residents. However, as mentioned earlier, two years after the popular resistance movement had been quelled, in 1963, reports were still coming in to the NAD of 'widows with plots [who] still refuse to pay the Trust levy and don't show any tax receipts' at Ga-Maepa.[282] Furthermore, as discussed in the next chapter, women continued to be the main perpetrators of acts of sabotage and other modes of resistance against betterment and associated processes of forced removal and resettlement throughout Lebowa during the late-1960s and 1970s.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored women's emancipatory struggles, during the period 1940s to early-1960s, in some of the rural spaces of the Northern Transvaal which constituted the Lebowa bantustan during the late apartheid era. I began by highlighting the strong relationship of solidarity between governing elites and commoners in the popular resistance against the imposition of betterment in the Western Block of Trust farms in the Pietersburg District in the late-1930s. I then showed that everyday acts of non-cooperation and outright resistance against the NAD proliferated throughout the Trust lands in the district during the early-1940s and culminated in the Pietersburg uprising of 1943. The Pietersburg uprising was suppressed quickly, however, defining praxes of women's emancipatory struggles for self-determination and control over rural land, including acts of resistance such as fence cutting and illegal ploughing, continued on the farms in the Western Block.

After the 1943 Pietersburg uprising, however, these popular acts of resistance by women against the NAD no longer had the support of chiefs and other traditional elites, and by 1945 the colonial state was finally able to assert its dominance over the Trust farms in the district and begin to impose its betterment measures elsewhere in the region. Its attempts to do so in Ga-Matlala, during the 1940s and 1950s, were highly unsuccessful due in no small part to the efforts of Mme Makwena Matlala, regent of the Bakoni Paramountcy, under whose authority women in Ga-Matlala continued to plough lands enclosed by the Trust and defy the deeds of the NAD. Trust overseers from Ga-Matlala reported that groups of anti-

[282] NASA BOA 5/512 F109/1236, Affidavit by Senior Agricultural Officer, Groblersdal, 22 May 1963.

state residents calling themselves 'MaCongress', and taking orders from Makwena, were actively undermining and ultimately usurping their roles in land allocation and establishing their own courts. For her leading role in the resistance against betterment regulations, and her refusal to comply with the authority of the NAD, Makwena was the first woman issued with banishment orders by the apartheid state in 1950.

With the resistances of the Trust farm tenants of the Pietersburg district having been crushed by 1945, and a pro-NAD Tribal Authority established at Ga-Matlala in 1955, Ga-Sekhukhune was the last remaining space of relative autonomy and independence from apartheid state control which the NAD had to deal with before the Lebowa bantustan could become a reality. Drawing on Delius, I argued three popular and emancipatory political principles – that there should be no landless or stockless groups; no taxation of widows or the elderly; and the right of commoners to dismiss leaders from local governments (chiefly councils) – remained part of the shared distribution of the sensible amongst commoners in Ga-Sekhukhune. Furthermore, and most importantly, they were the key ideas which animated women's struggles during the Sekhukhune uprising of the late-1950s and early-1960s. Not only did the threat to these freedoms posed by betterment galvanise thousands of women in Ga-Sekhukhune into direct confrontations with the agents and infrastructure of the NAD; the shared commitment to these radical political principles also shaped the particular modes and forms that women's emancipatory politics took in Ga-Sekhukhune during this period. Finally, by focusing on the popular resistance in Ga-Maepa between 1954 and 1961, I have argued that rural women's emancipatory struggles to reclaim state enclosed lands and commons are a fundamental part of the history of the Sekhukhune uprising.

CHAPTER THREE

The making of the Lebowa bantustan and women's emancipatory praxes in the 1960s and 1970s

The history of the Sekhukhune uprising, discussed at length in the previous chapter, is important for understanding the making of the Lebowa bantustan. This is because it was in the context of the immediate aftermath of this political event that Lebowa came into existence as a Territorial Authority and so-called 'Northern-Sotho National Unit' in 1962. Roughly two decades later, in the mid-1980s, another political event, known variously as the Lebowa uprising or the Sekhukhune revolt of 1986, signalled the beginning of the end of the Lebowa bantustan. Diverse forms of popular insurgent politics, pitting people's power in black workplaces, schools, and communities, against the policies, infrastructure and authorities of the apartheid regime, were a defining feature of the South African political resistance landscape during the 1980s. What constituted women's emancipatory political praxes in the Lebowa bantustan during the insurrectionary climate of the 1980s is the subject at the heart of chapters four and five of my thesis. In this chapter, however, attention is placed on the two decades in-between the first and second Sekhukhune uprisings and the question of what constituted women's emancipatory politics at the time of the making of the Lebowa bantustan.

In this chapter I explore the shifting configuration of Lebowa's socio-spatial landscape in the 1960s and 1970s with a particular focus on the impact of these transformations on women's everyday lives and emancipatory politics. In 1972, the Lebowa Territorial Authority was elevated to the status of a Legislative Assembly and declared a Self-Governing Territory by Government Proclamation R225. I argue that by this time, communities in Lebowa were experiencing multiple and rapid processes of socio-economic and spatial change stimulated and shaped by three main related factors. The first was the forceful grafting of the apartheid system of Bantu Authorities onto the institution of chieftaincy which resulted in a dramatic increase in authoritarian and violent modes of local governance in Lebowa. The second was the phenomenon of forced removals and resettlements in Lebowa from the 1960s onwards. And, the third was the imposition of the apartheid socio-agriculturalist interventionist policies known as betterment planning/schemes. This chapter explores how the interplay of these

three relational factors – reconfigured chiefly rule, forced removals and resettlements, and betterment planning – produced the spaces which made up the Lebowa bantustan and shaped the history of women's emancipatory politics therein from the late-1960s onward.

This chapter also locates rural women's praxes of emancipatory politics in Lebowa within the wider context of the national liberation struggle by exploring their role in supporting and sustaining the political networks and activities of the ANC underground in the Northern Transvaal during the 1970s. Involvement in the ANC underground was an important expression of emancipatory politics for some women in Lebowa during the repressive period of the late-1960s and 1970s in which popular above-ground modes of resistance were severely curtailed throughout South Africa. The primary focus of the chapter is, however, geared more towards an exploration of some of the more popular modes and praxes of emancipatory politics by women in Lebowa's villages during this period in between the 1950s and 1980s rural uprisings. I argue that during the 1960s and 1970s, resistance against the criminalisation of rural women's subsistence lifestyles and reproductive labour practices under betterment regulations in Lebowa remained popular and took the form of a kind of nonmovement subaltern politics of encroachment.[283] This involved groups of women, or individuals, engaging in subtle but widespread and reoccurring praxes such as cutting down fences, destroying stock registration cards, harvesting resources from enclosed lands, and flouting betterment regulations, in an attempt to mitigate against the growing crisis of social reproduction in the bantustans. This crisis of social reproduction, as I explore in the chapter, was marked by women's increasing inability to access commons and their related struggles to perform everyday reproductive labours such as washing, cooking, feeding children, building houses, and caring for the sick and the elderly in rural communities. Lastly, I argue that during this period in which the possibilities for praxes of resistance politics were severely constrained, another important expression of emancipatory politics can be seen in the proliferation of women's cooperations, self-help groups, and clubs practicing a subaltern politics of care aimed at creating and defending dignified ways of living in Lebowa's crisis-ridden villages.

[283] Bayat, *Life as Politics*, p. xi.

Bantu Authorities and the Rise of the Lebowa Bantustan

In line with the white-supremacist segregationist discourses of the apartheid regime, Lebowa was created as the ethnic 'homeland' of a heterogeneous group of South Africans classified by colonial ethnologists as 'Northern Sotho'. According to historian L. J. Louwrens *et al*, the term 'Northern Sotho' held both a linguistic and geographic meaning in apartheid state discourse, referring to:

> an imaginary line stretching from Pretoria [Tshwane] through Middelburg, Groblersdal and Lydenburg [Mashishing] to Sabie. From Sabie the line runs along the Sabie River and then north through Bushbuckridge and Klaserie areas, across the Olifants River, then westwards as far as Louis Trichart [Makhado], and northwards again as far as Messina. From there it stretches westwards to Botswana border and then southwards through the Potgietersrus [Mokopane] district, through Warmbaths [Bela-Bela] back to Pretoria.[284]

From the outset the planning of Lebowa was problematic for the apartheid administration because its geographic classification of the Northern Sotho included about 123 different chieftaincies with diverse historical backgrounds. In trying to deal with the complex political identities of black societies in the region, state ethnographers divided the area into four subcategories: the Central, Eastern, North-Eastern and Northern Sotho.[285] These terms were solidified in state discourse by ethnologist Van Warmelo's 1935 classification study of the Transvaal Sotho and were an important epistemological basis upon which the political and spatial planning of the Lebowa bantustan commenced in the 1960s.[286]

The Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 specified that Lebowa would be one of eight bantustans in South Africa each with its own government constituted on the basis of the Bantu Authorities system. The passing of this Act saw the Native Affairs Department (NAD), placing greater pressure than ever on its Bantu (formerly Native) Commissioners to urgently

[284] L Louwrens *et al*, quoted in Tlou Erick Setumu, 'Official records pertaining to blacks in the Transvaal, 1902-1907', (MA thesis, University of Pretoria, 2001), p. 18.

[285] The Central Sotho chieftaincies were those polities under the rule of the Maroteng (Sekhukhune) Paramountcy which included the Bapedi, Batau, Bantwane, Bakone, Batswako, Bakwena, Banareng, Ba ga Mohlala, Ba ga Moraba, Ba ga Mphogo, BagaNkwane, and Baroka. The Eastern Sotho were classified as those black communities living in the Pilgrimsrest area including the Bakutswe, Bapai and Mapulana. The North-Eastern Sotho included the Ba ga Mašišimala, Bakutswe, Ba ga Mahlo, Ba ga Mametša, Ba ga Letswalo, Balobedu, Ba ga Mmamabolo and Bagaga. And finally, the term Northern Sotho referred to the Bakgaga, Ba go Molepo, Bakone, Batlou, Babirwa, Batlokwa, Batlhaloga, Bakwena (Ba Moletši) and Bagananwa. See, T Setumu, 'Official records', p. 19.

[286] *Ibid*, p. 19.

establish tribal authorities in their areas as the first and most important foundation of the new order. The biggest problem area for the NAD in the Northern Transvaal was Sekhukhuneland (today referred to as Ga-Sekhukhune), the largest of the six units of land constituting Lebowa in the early 1960s, and the space in which popular struggles against in the late 1950s had been most successful in thwarting the imposition of betterment regulations and the establishment of tribal authorities.

The Sekhukhune Paramountcy had been at the centre of uprisings of the late-1950s. In trying to break the popular resistance in Ga-Sekhukhune, at first, officials from NAD sought to coerce Sekhukhune Paramount Morwamotše into adopting a positive attitude towards the introduction of Bantu Authorities. However, under mounting pressure from below, the highest tier of the institution of chieftaincy in Ga-Sekhukhune refused to accept the new government policies and the majority of lower-ranking governing elites in the region followed suite. As such, the NAD eventually changed tactic and, after banishing Morwamotše, his wife Mankopodi, and his senior councillors, the NAD formally dissolved the Sekhukhune Regional Authority. In place of the originally desired centralised Sekhukhune Tribal Authority the NAD found alternative lower-ranking local governing elites who were willing to accept the new government policies on behalf of the people of Ga-Sekhukhune and established a total of 53 separate Tribal Authorities in the district between 1958 and 1972.[287] Frank Shikoane Matlala, for example, had been a junior member of the chieftaincy in Sekhukhune under the authority of Morwamotše until the late 1950s when he began to collaborate with the NAD in the establishment of tribal authorities. In exchange for his public support of the government and compliance to its dictates, Matlala was promoted to the status of chief in 1957 and given jurisdiction over twenty-two farms in the Marble Hall area, on the southwestern border of the Nebo district, about 110km away from the political capital of Ga-Sekhukhune.[288]

When Matlala left Ga-Sekhukhune to take up his new post in Marble Hall it was done under the watchful protection of a cohort of local soldiers and policemen because both he and the NAD officials were afraid that the supporters of Morwamotše would react violently to this blatant undermining of the latter's authority. Matlala's son, Mokgome Maserumula (M.M. Matlala), followed the path laid out by his father and for a decade from 1964 until 1972

[287] Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, p. 80; also see, Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo', p. 34.
[288] Claassens, 'It's Not Easy to Challenge a Chief', p. 9.

was the Chief Councillor of the Lebowa Territorial Authority.[289] However, for the first two years of its existence from 1962 to 1964 the highest-ranking position within the Lebowa government was held by another state-backed leader from outside the Ga-Sekhukhune area: Kgoshi M.L.J. Chuene (also sometimes spelt Tšwene or Tshwene in records of the Lebowa and South African state archives).

Chuene's area of jurisdiction was in the Pietersburg district and included the densely-populated Tshwene (Chuene) Location as well as a number of surrounding Trust farms in the present day Chuenespoort area. Although some of the Trust farms in Chuene's area had been sites of local anti-state resistance during the mid-1940s, the most intense forms of protest took place on the Trust farms neighbouring Chuene's area, specifically on those Trust farms bordering the Mphahlele, Matlala, Maja and Molapo locations. Perhaps it was for this reason, coupled with the continuing loyalty of Chuene to the South African state throughout the period of the Sekhukhune uprising, that it was Chuene who was assigned the position of Chairman of the Lebowa Territorial Authority in 1962.[290]

At the height of the Sekhukhune uprising in 1958, Chuene led a small delegation of chiefs and headmen from the Pietersburg district to the Native Commissioner's office to deliver the following New Year's message of loyalty:

> No doubt your onerous and varied responsibilities that, redound upon you, make it very difficult for you especially this crowded time of the year, to have time to read humble messages of Goodwill and Cheer from so humble a servant as myself. Honourable Sir: Allow me to congratulate you and your Department on the New Dawn, that you ushered into Bantu Administration, I refer to the Bantu Authorities Act, Bantu Education Act, Indentification of Bantu Women, and the Rehabilitation schemes that are now being implemented. May their implementation be accelerated. I am aware that there is gnashing of teeth and much unwarranted criticisms from sources both inimical in aim and ignorant of the purport of measures, but suffice to say "Montsoŝi-wa-Boŝego re Moleboga gosele". All Bantudom will one day awaken to the truth of the above proverb. May God bless you and give you long life – Our Montsoŝi-wa-Boŝego.[291]

[289] *Ibid*, p. 8.
[290] NASA NTS 327 41/55, Minutes of interview of Chief Chuene in the office of the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 4 December 1956.
[291] NASA NTS 327 41/55, Letter from Chief Chuene to the Chief Native Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, 7 December 1958, (original emphasis). It is interesting to note that this statement by Chuene is very similar to that

In the first years of the 1960s the NAD saw Chuene as a favourable ally in their battle to regain control over the black communities of the rural Northern Transvaal in the aftermath of the massive struggles over land in the Pietersburg district during the 1940s and the Sekhukhune uprising of the late-1950s. Chuene had proven himself to be a willing collaborator in establishing a Tribal Authority and, unlike many of his counterparts in the region, worked willingly with the South African state forces to crush the dissident Fetakgomo and Congress groups in his area of jurisdiction.[292] As such in 1962, Chuene held multiple positions of authority within all three levels of the newly created Lebowa administration. At the lowest rung of the Bantu Authorities system Chuene was chief of the Tshwene Tribal Authority. Secondly, Chuene occupied the position of Chairman of the Polokwane Regional Authority covering the areas of Lebowa which fell within the Pietersburg magisterial district.[293] And, when the first sitting of the Lebowa Territorial Authority was held at Turfloop campus on 4 September 1962, Chuene was elected as Chief Councillor. Between 1960 and 1965 the Bantu Affairs Commissioner for the Pietersburg district was 'happy to report' that Chuene's Location, and the trust farms over which he held authority, were free of 'communistic-agitators' and 'show[ed] no sign of political trouble'.[294] This was significant as the neighbouring Ga-Mphahlele and Ga-Matlala were considered to be hotbeds of existing and potential anti-state political organisation by South African security personnel in the region, who regularly recruited informers to monitor the movements of known 'communistic-agitators' in both areas well into the mid-1960s.[295]

In the 1960s, Chuene, like M.M. Matlala, was a subordinate chief being groomed by the apartheid state to remain in power when the Lebowa Territorial Authority would be upgraded to the status of a Legislative Assembly and declared a Self-Governing Territory following the passage of Government Proclamation R225 in 1972. However, unlike Matlala,

made by Lucas Mangope who said to the Minister of Bantu Affairs "lead us and we shall try to crawl" when he was installed as kgoshi of the Baurutshe tribal authority after the Hurutshe revolt. See, Michael Lawrence and Andrew Manson, "The 'Dog of the Boers': The Rise and Fall of Mangope in Bophuthatswana", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20 3 (1994), pp. 447-461.

[292] NASA NTS 327 41/55, Letter from Chief Chuene to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 12 January 1957.

[293] This was in accordance with Government Notice No.79 of 26 January, 1962. See URU 5674 F55/4/4 List of Tribal Authorities to be incorporated into Leolo and Polokwane Regional Authorities, 14 May 1969.

[294] NASA BOA 5/522 F109/1525, Letter from the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, 3 January 1965.

[295] *Ibid.*

Chuene's relationship with the Bantu Affairs Commissioner of the Pietersburg district soured considerably by the middle of the 1960s.

In April 1965 Bantu Affairs Commissioner, R. L. Gwilt, sent a confidential report to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner which painted a troubling picture of Chuene that jarred sharply with the image the state held of the civilized, humble, and progressive chief Chuene who had delivered the message of support and loyalty to the Native Commissioner in 1958. Gwilt reported that after consultations with Brigadier Venter of the Security Branch in 1964 it was decided that several native informers would be recruited from within Chuene's Location and surrounding trust farms, and a Bantu Information Officer would be deployed, in order to monitor the chief's daily routine and behaviour in fulfilling his duties as local chief, head of the Polokwane Regional Authority and Chairman of the Lebowa Territorial Authority.[296] The decision to discretely monitor Chuene on such a close scale for over a year, Gwilt explained in his report, was based on the fact that many rumours of alleged misconduct by Chuene and his personal bodyguards had made their way to both the police and the magistrate's office in Pietersburg.[297]

For example, in September 1964 an agricultural officer reported that he had witnessed Chuene and his bodyguard using the Tribal Authority truck to chase down a group of women walking along the Chuniespoort-Middleburg Road with headloads of firewood they had collected from a Trust farm. The group of women threw themselves to the side of the road as the truck came hurtling towards them and, abandoning their bundles of wood, dashed off over fences and into the bush. 'All but one elderly woman, Nkhutane Masago, escaped. Nkhutane was taken to the truck and on command of Chief Chuene, his bodyguard beat her'.[298] When the agricultural officer confronted Chuene and suggested that he did not have the right to beat women collecting firewood that was already dead and fallen to the ground the chief replied that these women were from Mphahlele's location and their presence on his

[296] NASA BOA 5/522 F109/1525, Confidential letter from the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, 29 April 1965.
[297] *Ibid.*
[298] *Ibid.*

Trust farms was a direct attempt by the Mphahlele chiefdom to 'undermine his authority and ultimately lay claim to his land and people'.[299]

A similar incident was also reported to have taken place a short while after the assault of Nkhutane Masago, towards the end of the year 1964, in which Chuene and his bodyguard drove the community owned truck down the Chuniespoort-Lydenburg road in order to apprehend a group of women from Mphahlele's location who had taken their cattle to a water-pump on a trust farm they had been told, by agricultural officers, they were allowed to access. In this instance Chuene himself engaged in the physical assault of the women who were unable to escape the area in time. One young woman, known only in the archival record as Mabeba, was strangled so severely by Chuene on this day that she had to be taken to hospital. Kanyane Lesiba lived on the Trust farm Doornvlei which was officially situated in Mphahlele's area of jurisdiction but which Chuene claimed was his by right of his senior position within both the Polokwane Regional and Lebowa Territorial Authorities.[300] In December of 1964, Kanyane Lesiba was yet another woman whose body became the battleground for Chuene in his attempt to extend his control of the region. She had been spotted by Chuene and his bodyguard as she went about her usual business of chopping and processing firewood from the officially designated woodlot on the Trust farm Doornvlei. Chuene ordered his bodyguard to beat her for having chopped wood on a trust farm he claimed had been assigned to him. But it was not only beating that local women had to endure at the hands of Chuene. He also developed the habit of confiscating both men and women's cattle found grazing on 'his trust farms' and forcing a steep cash payment for their return. Ramatsabane Mathabane was one such woman who had a herd of nine cattle which 'were captured by Chief Chuene's rangers on a trust farm and taken to the capital. Ramatsobane had to pay Chuene R20 to unload her cattle'.[301] When considering all these instances of Chuene's 'alleged misconduct' in his report, Gwilt confessed:

> I cannot confirm whether the above is true or not but *it is typical of Chief Chuene to do such things*. I also learned from a trustworthy source in Mphahlele that only those who pay Chief Chuene can graze their livestock on

[299] NASA BOA 5/522 F109/1525, Confidential letter from the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, 7 May 1965.
[300] *Ibid.*
[301] NASA BOA 5/522 F109/1525, Confidential letter from the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, 29 April 1965.

> trust farms in his area and drink water there. However, the Bantu detective cannot get confirmation of this but will keep his eyes and ears open.[302]

Despite the habitual frequency with which Chuene flouted trust regulations and violently assaulted women engaged in daily labours of household and community reproduction from the time of his instillation as Chairman in 1962 until 1965, no official investigations had been made into the alleged misconduct nor had any disciplinary action been taken. This was because, as Gwilt explained in his report to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, '[a]s you know, the bantu have an incomprehensible fear of Chief Chuene and will never come forward to lodge complaints against him'.[303]

The everyday socio-spatial and political constraints faced by women in the GaTshwene area as a result of Chuene's reign of terror left them with few avenues by which they could resist. Barred from attending public gatherings and unwilling to seek the help of white state authorities who were deeply mistrusted, many women were forced to take up what James Scott calls 'the weapons of the weak' – subtle and often disguised acts of resistance such as secretly breaking new trails to enclosed lands and feigning ignorance of betterment regulations when confronted by authorities.[304] These and other everyday modes of resistance by women against the enclosures of commons and the application of betterment regulations in Lebowa during the 1960s and 1970s will be explored more later in this chapter.

During the repressive period of the making of the Lebowa bantustan, women in rural villages continued their everyday work of collecting wood and water in the safest and stealthiest ways possible. Many women turned to relatives or neighbours for help in gaining access to wage-paying jobs outside of the rural areas as a domestic worker in the cities. It was, however, illegal for women from the bantustan in the 1960s and 1970s to travel to urban areas and none of the labour contracts at local labour bureaus were made available to women.[305] Correspondence files from the Department of Bantu Administration and Development (successor of the NAD) show that in 1977 so-called 'Bantu Labour Control Boards' in Lebowa were reminded by Pretoria that, 'The general principle is that women from

[302] *Ibid.*
[303] *Ibid.*
[304] James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).
[305] NASA KGL 4/3/2/B, Bantu Labour Control Boards. Quarterly Returns of Activities and Meetings, 15 March 1977.

homelands should not work in prescribed areas. Local labour that qualifies to work there must be used. If the latter is not available, farm labour may be used instead as set out in Chapter 1, (Employment), paragraph 2D (1) (c) on page 22 of the code "Bantu labour".'[306] This meant that trying to find urban employment was a daunting task for women in Lebowa for which they received little to no help from the state.[307] Other women in the GaTshwene area quietly approached local men working as rangers and told them of the challenges they faced as a result of Chuene's actions and hoped that such messages would make their way to the NAD or the SAPs and so convince those with the power to remove Chuene and his stooges from office. Confidential letters passed between the Bantu Affairs Commissioner of Pietersburg and the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner of the Northern Transvaal in 1965, suggest that reports of Chuene's abuse, especially against women in the Ga-Mphahlele area, did make their way to the NAD.[308]

However, the NAD was willing to turn a blind eye to the rumours of violence and the violations of trust regulations by Chuene because he was an important figure in the establishment of the Lebowa bantustan administration. Furthermore, Chuene had shown himself to be an opponent of the national liberation movement which was trying to re-establish itself as an underground force in rural Lebowa after the banning of the ANC in the region and the destruction of the Sebatakgomo political networks and modes of politics in the wake of the regional State of Emergency declared in 1958.[309] Yet, Gwilt had been deeply troubled by the rumours that Chuene had been charging fines and collecting monies from residents of both his area and the GaMphahlele area since 1964. This frustrated Gwilt because, according to the official financial records of Chuene's Tribal Authority, the tribal bank account was completely empty which meant that Chuene must have been pocketing all of the money he had allegedly been extracting from the local residents. In 1967 Gwilt's attitude towards Chuene was one of pure dislike as he reported that not only had the chief

[306] *Ibid.*

[307] As such, most women in Lebowa had to rely on help from family members, friends, or neighbours in their home villages to get a job that was not in the poorly paid seasonal agricultural labour sector. Usually this was as a domestic worker in the shops of nearby towns or in the suburban homes of Indian or working-class white families. Generally, it was only after working in these poorly paid spaces of domestic service that women from Lebowa were able to get better-paying jobs in the middle-class white suburbs. See, Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 163.

[308] NASA BOA 5/522 F109/1525, Confidential letter from the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, 11 May 1965.

[309] *Ibid*.

failed to attend the last two sittings of the Polokwane Regional Authority, he had also been attempting, yet again, to undermine the establishment of the Mphahlele Tribal Authority and, worst of all, in the opinion of Gwilt, rumours had surfaced that Chuene was starting to show signs of 'anti-white sentiments'.[310]

Chuene and Matlala were just two of the dozens of subordinate chiefs who were attracted to the powers and privileges that the state offered to those who established Tribal Authority structures under the Lebowa Territorial Authority. The archival reports and incidents discussed above are testament to the ways in which ordinary women bore the brunt of the violence of struggles within and between chieftaincies that were stimulated by the imposition of Bantu Authorities and the establishment of the hierarchical structures of the Lebowa administration. They also show how the violence of local elite struggles for power within the emerging bantustan state, and at times against the interests of the NAD, disrupted women's everyday social reproductive labour practices (such as collecting wood and drawing water) and transformed agricultural commons from sites of relative autonomy into heavily policed spaces of state authority.

Within the repressive context of the 1960s and 1970s, the roads cutting through the bantustan became like arteries of violence and repression for women in Ga-Chuene and many other parts of Lebowa. Not only were they at risk of being beaten by local elites, such as Chuene and his bodyguards, but they were also in danger of being picked up, without their consent, and forced to work on white owned commercial farms neighbouring Lebowa for days or weeks at a time. As Delius notes, 'Farmers' bakkies and trucks crammed full of women careering along the rutted and potholed roads at breakneck speed became a common sight' in Lebowa by the 1970s.[311]

Existing studies have noted that chiefs were often involved in negotiations with white farmers who recruited women and children from Lebowa as seasonal workers. My oral history interviews with men and women in villages of the former Lebowa bantustan reveal that there were also spaces in Lebowa where white farmers took it upon themselves to forcefully recruit whomever they found on the roads without conferring with any local authorities. Maurice

[310] *Ibid.*
[311] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p.149.

Nchabeleng recalls that during the late-1970s, when he was a teenager, the main road by-passing Apel village in Ga-Sekhukhune was one such place where mothers taught their children to be careful of lingering or loitering by the road in case the Boers took them away to work on the farms.[312]

In the northern section of Ga-Matlala in the Seshego district, on the other hand, the process by which women were forced to provide labour on white owned farms, according to the women I spoke to there, was similar to that described by Delius in *A Lion amongst the Cattle*. Philippa and Freeda, two women in their 60s who have lived in Kgomoschool village their whole lives, recall that prior to the mid-1980s the local subordinate chief who governed over their village and four others in the area had an organised system of extracting women's labour for his own personal gain.[313] The women could not remember exactly when this system began, sometime in the late-1960s or 1970s, but they did recall the ways in which it played out in their everyday lives. Once a month, in the early hours of the morning a messenger of the chief would pace down the streets of the residential area of Kgomoschool clapping his hands in a particular rhythm. The sound of this clapping was the signal used to summon all the women to the chief's place. It was a particularly gendered summoning as in Ga-Matlala by the late-1960s women were banned from attending regular gatherings at the chief's place and it was known that this clapping was a call to gather not for a public meeting but for a work team to be assembled. If a woman deemed fit and capable of working did not heed the summoning she risked being beaten and fined by the chief's men. Once gathered at the chief's place the group of women, usually made up of at least one member of each household, was put in the back of vehicle and driven at top-speed to work on a white owned farm. After a day of back-breaking work in the fields the women were driven back to their village and returned to their homes where many of them still had to do the work of cooking dinner and completing all the other daily reproductive labours they had been unable to do because of their absence during the day.[314]

Every week, on a rotational basis, women from one of the five local villages would be assembled in this way and forced to work on the white farmer's land. They received no

[312] Maurice Nchabeleng, interviewed by author, Apel village, Ga-Sekhukhue, 19 April 2019.
[313] Philippa S and Freeda M, interviewed by author, Kgomo school villages, Ga-Matlala, 24 August 2019.
[314] *Ibid*.

payment for this labour and believed that the chief was pocketing the money from the white farmer for himself and not depositing it into the tribal account which was supposed to be used for community development projects. This suspicion was fuelled by two observations made by the women of Kgomoschool village at the time. The first was the increasingly lavish lifestyle of the chief and his close relatives who seemed, in the eyes of ordinary residents, to have endless access to cash with which they built themselves beautiful houses and bought luxury goods. The second reason why they suspected that the chief was embezzling the funds earned by the women working on the white owned farm was because whenever there was a community development project, such as building a new school, residents were told that there were no funds available in the tribal account to pay for either the labour or materials required. As a result, the residents of Kgomoschool were forced to pay additional taxes and do the work of building the school themselves.[315]

The significance of this is that it shows the extent to which women's everyday lives during the late-1960s and 1970s were disrupted by the new labour burdens placed upon them by authoritarian governing elites whose powers were bolstered by the rise of the Lebowa bantustan. Whether for community development projects, betterment schemes, or for the personal enrichment of local chiefs, the new labour demands placed on women in Lebowa during this period had the effect of radically reducing the amount of time they had to spend working in their own family fields – if indeed they had access to them in the first place. This transformation in women's labour systems, coupled with the application of betterment regulations and forced removals, meant that the significance of rural land (meaning family farming fields) as regular sites of women's collective struggles for freedom in Lebowa waned significantly in the latter half of the twentieth-century. Furthermore, customary law under Bantu Authorities and betterment regulations formally barred women from inheriting land and livestock in Lebowa and, as a result, many women were 'dispossessed of resources which they had long commanded by errant husbands or sons acting with chiefly support in terms of customary law'. As Delius explains,

> The radical transformation of the rural economy, which took place from the late 1950s, saw increasing numbers of families without land or livestock and almost entirely reliant on cash... Some support could be derived from networks of kin and neighbours, but there was little long-term option for households

[315] *Ibid.*

> which did not benefit from money remitted by fathers, husbands, brothers or sons but for some female members to seek wage labour.[316]

Delius argues that 'the most important change of all' in the rural economy of Lebowa was 'the beginnings of large-scale female labour migrancy' from the late-1960s onward – a process that was clearly fuelled by the imposition of Bantu Authorities and betterment.[317] However, before considering the gendered transformations in wage labour or the equally significant changes in formal education which shaped the political resistance landscape of Lebowa during the 1980s (see chapters four and five), I want to draw attention to the large role played by the process of forced removal and resettlement which, alongside betterment, produced the variously categorised spaces that constituted the Lebowa bantustan in the 1960s and 1970s.

Forced Removals and Resettlement

I argue that the idea of the 'social production of space', as theorised in the work of Henri Lefebvre, is useful for understanding the making of the Lebowa bantustan as it challenges notions of place as 'passive or an empty canvas on which history happens'.[318] Noor Nieftagodien argues that 'the concerted effort by the apartheid government from the early 1950s to reconfigure urban spaces by eliminating existing contentious spaces and replacing them with "properly planned" "model townships" was a significant and largely underestimated factor in shaping "geographies of resistance"' of South Africa.[319] The concept of 'geographies of resistance' is similar to that of 'movement landscapes'.[320] Both are used as relational analytical concepts which highlight 'the mutually constitutive relationship between place and resistance', or in other words, the ways in which place shapes resistance and vice versa.[321]

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[316] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p.149.
[317] *Ibid*, p.148.
[318] Noor Nieftagodien, 'Popular movements, contentious spaces and the ANC, 1943-1956', in A Lissoni *et al*, eds., *One Hundred Years of the ANC: Debating liberation histories today* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012), p. 137.
[319] *Ibid*, p. 138.
[320] For a discussion of the concept of 'geographies of resistance' see Steve Pile and Michael Keith, eds., *Geographies of Resistance* (New York: Routledge, 2009). For a discussion of the concept of 'movement landscapes' see L Cox, 'Studying movements in a movement-become-state: Research and practice in postcolonial Ireland', in O. Fillieule and G. Accornero eds., *Social movement studies in Europe: The state of the art* (Oxford: Berghahn Press, 2016), pp. 303-310; and, Karl von Holdt and Prishani Naidoo, 'Mapping movement landscapes in South Africa', *Globalizations*, 16 2 (2019), pp. 170-185.
[321] Nieftagodien, 'Popular movements', p. 138.

For example, in some of the old rural locations in Lebowa, such as Geluks and Mphahlele locations, the mass uprisings and emancipatory land struggles of the 1940s and 1950s thwarted the NAD's application of rural apartheid spatial reconfiguration plans, known simply as betterment. It was the massive increase in the black population which had been forced into Lebowa during the late-1960s and 1970s which resulted in the NAD reclaiming control over these contentious spaces and transforming them into 'properly planned' rural areas.[322] Apartheid's processes of forced removal and resettlement were intrinsically linked to the urban policies of influx control as well as the bantustan system. One of the key aims of apartheid's forced removals and resettlements was to eliminate existing contentious spaces which had been fostered during the popular struggles of the 1940s and 1950s and replace them with 'properly planned' settlements in which the black population could be controlled, taxed, and spatially contained.[323]

The grand apartheid goal of creating ethnically pure and geographically consolidated homelands was pursued with passion by the apartheid state in the Northern Transvaal during the 1970s. The major proposals for so-called 'homelands consolidation' were drawn up and ratified by South African parliament between 1973 and 1975 in accordance with the Bantu Laws Amendment Act of 1973. It is estimated that some 304 958 people were removed between 1970 and 1979 as a result of the policies intended to consolidate the bantustans.[324] As Bundy notes, 'black spots' were lands of African freehold occupation, 'relics of the nineteenth century era of prosperous African peasant farming' outside of the former native reserves.[325] In other words, black spots were those farms which were bought by Africans prior to the 1913 and 1936 Land Acts and located within the boundaries of white South Africa.

[322] NASA BOA 1549 A18/1608 (1), Department of Bantu Administration and Development memo titled 'Segregasie: Sekhukhune' by the Deputy Secretary for Labour and Housing, Pretoria, 21 June 1973; This argument is also made in Essy Letsoalo's PhD thesis. See Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p. 69.
[323] Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p.69.
[324] Rogerson and Letsoalo, 'Rural underdevelopment', p. 353. Examples from Lebowa include the resettlements of whole communities from Matoks Location in the Sekgosese district to the newly incorporated Bochum district Trust farms Wurthsdord, Stettin and Koninggrantz, in 1976. Again, in 1979, communities from areas outside of Matoks Location in the Sekgosese district were forced to move to 'properly planned' closer settlements established on In Der Mark and Kromhoek Trust farms incorporated into the historically contentious space of Bochum. These are just two of many examples of the forced removals effected by the apartheid state in order to consolidate the Lebowa bantustan. See NASA BOA 1549 A18/1608 (1), Letter from the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Sekhukhune, to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, 17 January 1974; and, *Lebowa Times*, "We go nowhere", 8 December 1978.
[325] Colin Bundy quoted in Rogerson and Letsoalo, 'Rural underdevelopment', p. 351.

People who were forcefully removed from black spots were resettled on farms adjoining the reserves known as 'released' lands which were bought by the Trust and then given over to the respective bantustan governments. Between 1948 and 1976, 258 632 people were removed from black spots and resettled in the bantustans. The total number for the period 1970 to 1979 was 240,555; and by 1980 the figure was at about a quarter of a million.[326] From the 1950s, Lebowa was directly affected by this particular type of forcible mass population resettlement as hundreds of families – primarily from areas in the Eastern Transvaal such as Groblersdal, Pilgrim's Rest, Middleburg and Lydenburg – were uprooted from their farms and forced into Lebowa's closer settlements.[327] For example, from the 1860s the farm Maleuskop, situated between Groblersdal and Middelburg, had been owned and occupied by the Bakopa community. One hundred years later, in 1960, the farm was declared a black spot and by 1962 over seven hundred families had been forcefully relocated to the closer settlement Tafelkop. By 1980 Tafelkop was Lebowa's second largest closer settlement with an estimated population of 13,332 residents.[328]

The processes of resettlement into Lebowa caused by black spot removals was often a source of conflict and tension between chiefs and the South African state. For example, in the early 1970s families living on the farm Brakfontein, just outside Groblersdal, were informed that they no longer had rights to occupy the farm they had owned for generations and were to move to Boschkloof closer settlement in Lebowa. The residents, with the support of their local leader Kgoshi Mampuru, refused to move because they reasoned that while the land at Boschkloof was indeed richer in agricultural potential than Brakfontein, it was too small to accommodate all of the community members. Furthermore, the closer settlement lacked any economic base and was located inconveniently far away from the urban centre of Groblersdal, where many members of the community worked as wage labourers. Early one morning in September 1973, a large contingent of police officers descended onto Brakfontein farm and used loudhailers to order the people out of their homes to be rounded up and taken to Boschkloof. Kgoshi Mampuru was dragged out of his home by the police and temporarily arrested, along with four others, whilst the police effected the removal. When, later that day,

[326] Shula Marks, 'From Difaqane to Discarded People: South Africa's Internal Refugees', *African Research and Documentation*, 22 1 (1980), pp. 2-12.
[327] Schirmer, 'Democracy, culture and removals'.
[328] Rogerson and Letsoalo, 'Rural underdevelopment', p. 353.

Mampuru and the others were released from custody they were informed that their homes had been demolished and they were taken by the police to their new farm in the Ga-Sekhukhune district of Lebowa where they found that 2,000 people had been moved as well.[329]

In other instances, the processes of resettlement into Lebowa caused by black spot removals caused conflicts between chiefs and their constituencies. This was certainly the case in the resettlement of the people from Boomplaats farm in the Lydenburg district to Sterkspruit in the Sekhukhune district in 1960-1961. Boomplaats had been purchased in 1907 and when the residents were informed in 1955 that they had lost their rights to the land and were required to move 65km to a new farm, situated far from any towns where work could be accessed on a daily basis, they collectively refused to do so. The unity of the community was undermined, however, when Kgoshigadi Victoria Dinkwanyane capitulated to pressure from officials of the NAD and moved to Sterkspruit along with fifty families. The remaining 250 families were able to maintain a hold on their land for about five years until they were arrested and prosecuted for occupying and ploughing lands illegally in November 1960. In January 1961 government officials arrived at Boomplaats with an ejection warrant and the peoples' resistance was dealt a decisive blow. Under the watchful eye of the police a bulldozer demolished all of the homesteads and the people were forced into government trucks and dumped on Rietfontein farm where they had to live under refugee-like conditions until Sterkspruit had been 'properly planned' for their re-establishment.[330]

In addition to black spot and 'homelands consolidation' removals was the process of urban relocations, involving the mass removals of large sections of the black working-class population from townships and squatter camps adjoining towns and cities in urban and peri-urban spaces of South Africa. From the mid-1950s onwards the apartheid state embarked upon a radical programme of spatial reconfiguration in black urban residential spaces which saw the forced relocation of large sections of the black urban population into displaced urban townships in rural bantustans from where they were expected to commute on a daily basis

[329] NASA BOA 1549 A18/1608 (1), Letter from the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Sekhukhune, to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, 17 January 1974; also see Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies'.
[330] NASA BOA 1549 A18/1608 (1), Letter from the Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Sekhukhune, to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Pietersburg, 17 January 1974; also see Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies'.

to work for wages in white industries.[331] The production of space in Lebowa was very much affected by the political landscapes of the white towns of the Northern Transvaal which it bordered and whose economies its people served as both labourers and consumers. For example, the deproclamation of the 'old locations' at Potgietersrus and Pietersburg, in 1968 and 1962 respectively, led to the creation of the black 'towns' of Mahwelereng and Seshego in Lebowa. The purpose of these relocations, as articulated by the Pietersburg Town Council, was to make South Africa's towns 'white by night'.[332] In 1968 another of Lebowa's large townships, Lenyenye in the Naphuno district, was created as a direct result of the mass resettlement of black families from Tzaneen's suburbs 'because the White residents complained that the noise from the location disturbed the peace'.[333] In fact, all major proclaimed townships in Lebowa were the product of this type of resettlement process.

The Department of Cooperation and Development in Pretoria was responsible for the planning of proclaimed townships and the projects were financed by the Trust – the body through which the Lebowa Department of Interior and Works, or the Administration Boards, provided housing and services (meaning water and sewage). These townships were administered by the Lebowa Department of Interior, through a system of superintendents and town councils, under the supervision of the Department of Cooperation and Development which had the final say in all matters regarding the townships. In Lebowa, the majority of townships were the *slaapdorpe* or dormitory townships which provided daily or weekly supplies of black labour to nearby white urban centres. Examples of this type include: Seshego (catering to Pietersburg), Mahwelereng (catering to Potgietersrus), Lenyenye (Tzaneen), Ga-Kgapane (Tzaneen), Namakgale (Phalaborwa), Motetema (Groblersdal) and Sebayeng (Pietersburg). There was also an administrative township, Lebowakgomo, established in 1972 which functioned as the political and administrative capital of Lebowa; and a university township, Mankweng, which was the seat of the University of the North (or Turfloop). Both of these had some kind of (albeit limited) local economic base, centred around

[331] Colin Murray, 'Displaced Urbanization: South Africa's Rural Slums', *African Affairs*, 86 344 (1987), pp. 311–329.
[332] *Northern Review*, 'A Municipal Council for the 1970s', 18 February, 1972.
[333] Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p. 63.

the bantustan administration and that of Turfloop, respectively, unlike the other proclaimed townships.[334]

The residents of proclaimed townships were in theory allowed to buy or lease residential plots with government-built houses, but the reality was that very few residents could afford to do so. Furthermore, due to the crippling financial crisis faced by the Lebowa government (which characterised the semi-state entity from its inception in the 1960s right up until its dismantling in the mid-1990s) it was only able to build a tiny fraction of the houses required by residents in Lebowa's townships. In a newspaper article from the *Lebowa Times* in 1979, a Seshego resident complained that the government had not built any new 'match-box' houses in the township since 1966.[335] By the 1980s the Lebowa government abandoned its role in housing provision (except for a few houses for Lebowa government employees built in Seshego) and handed it over to the Lebowa Development Corporation (LDC) which continued the practice of providing loans to build houses that were designed to cater for, and were therefore only affordable to, the minority black middle class families.[336] As such, most people forced into these townships resorted to buying a plot and erecting a shack on it in which to live. In this way townships such as Mankweng and Seshego (zone 3) came to resemble 'ghettos' or 'slum areas', with vast squatter areas overshadowing the comparatively small section with government-provided housing.[337] During the 1980s these proclaimed townships would become the main spaces in which the activists and organisations of the national liberation movement, particularly the UDF and AZAPO, operated within the Northern Transvaal region.

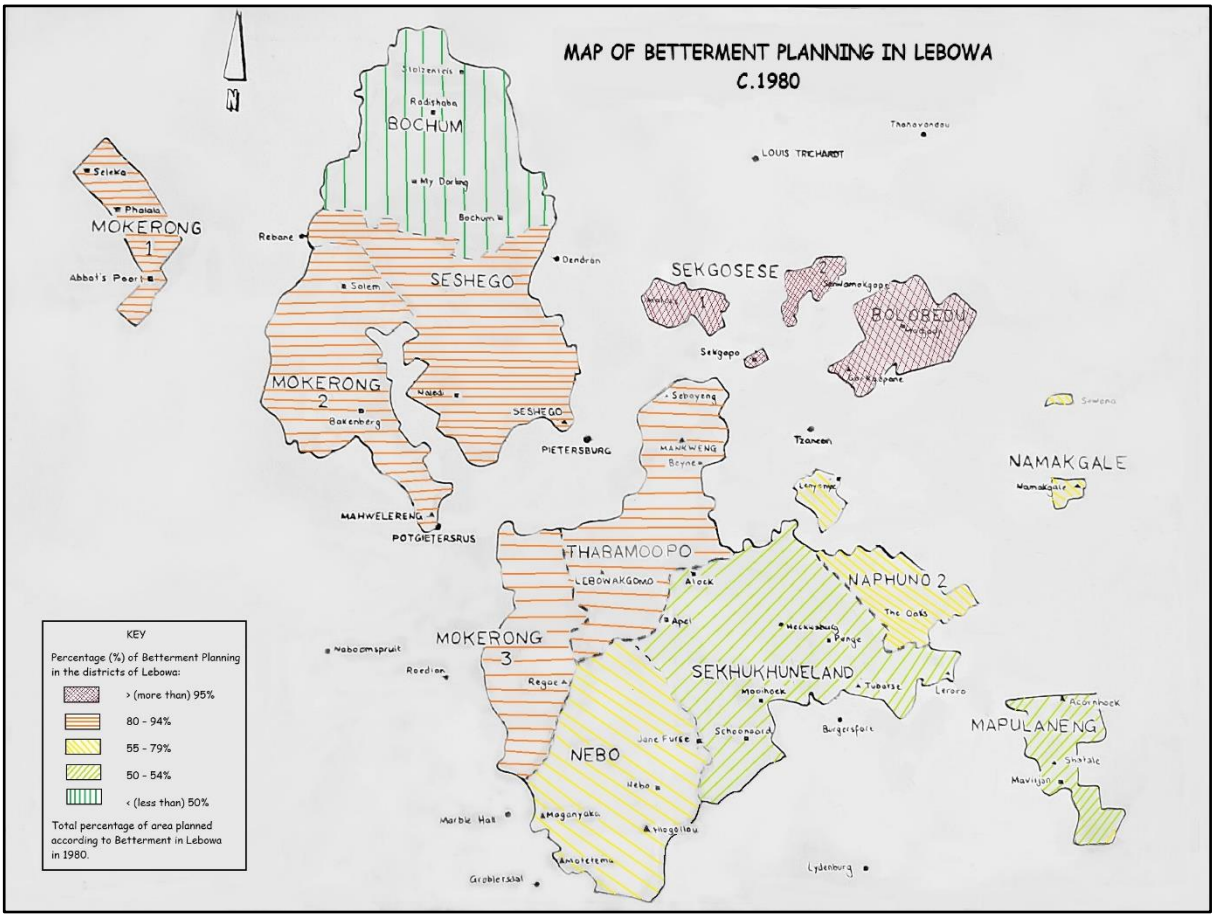
In her PhD thesis, Laura Phillips provides a detailed analysis of the politics of housing provision and service delivery for Lebowa's growing numbers of civil servants and black businessmen (rarely women) in proclaimed townships from the early-1970s onwards. Phillips argues that women employed by the Lebowa administration as nurses and teachers used

[334] Following Letsoalo, what I mean by saying these closer settlements had no economic base is that they were spaces 'with no industries and consequently [there were] extremely limited opportunities of employment both locally and within daily reach'. Furthermore, entering into more distant migrant labour networks was 'restricted because Africans were not allowed to leave the area where they live to look for work, and if they do so 'illegally' and find a job, they cannot be registered'. Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p.79.
[335] *Lebowa Times*, 'Lack of funds blamed for housing shortage', 26 October 1979.
[336] For more on the role of apartheid spatial reconfiguration processes in the making of a black middle class of civil servants in Lebowa see Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo'.
[337] Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p.57.

their access to claims on government housing in proclaimed townships as a means to greatly improve their everyday lives. The middle-ranking civil servants of the ever-expanding Lebowa bantustan administration, and a smaller number of businessmen, made up the thirty-five percent of people estimated to have moved voluntarily into Lebowa's proclaimed townships.[338] In these circumstances, very few of the women in Lebowa who gained access to jobs as nurses, social workers and teachers during the bantustan era continued to reside in their home villages preferring instead to live in the spaces of 'displaced urbanisation' such as Lebowakgomo, Mahwelereng and Seshego.[339]

Forced resettlements as a result of political banishment, breaching influx control and associated legislation (more commonly referred to as 'pass laws') as well as resettlements resulting from the abolition of labour tenancies on white-owned farms were affected in a different manner from the mass removals discussed above. Unlike the patterns of mass resettlement which are associated with so-called black spot removals, homelands consolidation, or urban relocations, resettlements linked to the ending of labour tenancies, political banishment or contravention of pass laws resulted in individual removals and resettlements into the betterment villages and closer settlements of the bantustans.[340] Map 6 (below), provides an indication of the different percentages of betterment planning in each of Lebowa's districts by 1980.

[338] Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo'.
[339] Murray, 'Displaced Urbanization', p. 327.
[340] Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies'.



Map 6: Percentages of betterment planning in the districts of Lebowa, c.1980. Adapted from E Letsoalo, *Survival strategies*, p.68.

Betterment Planning

By the 1980s the betterment rural village was the dominant form of settlement in Lebowa and was often referred to by people as *malaeneng* (place of lines) or *tickylaene* (place of lines where money is essential to survival) – referring to the imposition of a grid system along which people were forced to build their homes in linear rows.[341] Betterment planning entailed the antithetical form of the traditional village scattered homestead type of settlement. People were clustered together into densely populated residential areas; agricultural commons were enclosed and divided into individual grazing camps; and arable lands no-longer surrounded the homesteads but were lumped-together in a block adjacent to residential areas (see figure 1 below). Around and within all of these spaces, barbed wire fencing was erected to ensure

[341] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p.145; and Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p. 76.

that no humans or animals would transgress the imposed boundaries of the new spatial ordering of things.[342]

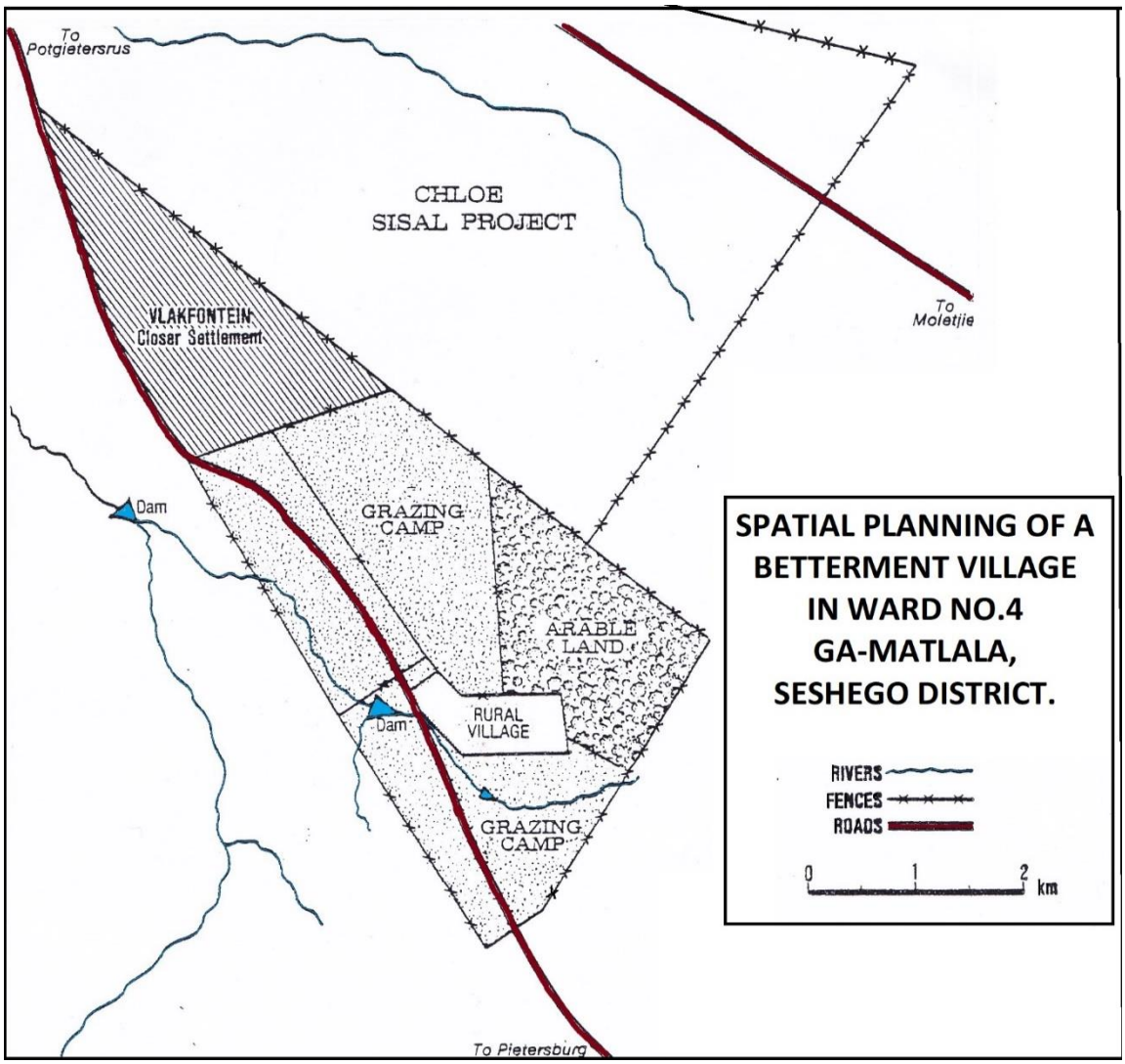


Figure 1: Spatial planning of a betterment village in Ward no.4, Ga-Matlala, Seshego District. Adapted from Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p. 74.

There were two related forms of forced removal and resettlement which were associated with and necessitated by betterment schemes and the creation of betterment villages. The first type of resettlement was one which entailed that families who were given rights to live and farm in the newly organised betterment village were forced to demolish their existing homesteads and move a short distance into newly demarcated residential plots. Despite the short distances involved in such resettlement processes, some of the fiercest

[342] Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p.76.

battles that engulfed rural communities of Ga-Matlala during the 1970s and 1980s were fuelled precisely by the issue of women and men being forced to move their homes into the dreaded *malaeneng* residential areas.[343] The second form of resettlement associated with the creation of betterment villages saw the remaining families who were not given rights to farm or live in the betterment village being forced to demolish their homesteads and move more significant distances away into closer settlements where they were given no access to either grazing or arable land for subsistence farming. When, for example, the Phokwane Tribal Authority area in the Nebo district was planned for agricultural betterment in the late-1960s only 70 percent of families living there were given farming rights. Those given rights to farm were forced to move a short distance into the demarcated residential plots while the remaining families were rendered landless and had to move into the closer settlement of Uitkyk. Similarly, when the Molepo area in the Thabamoopo district was planned in the mid-1960s, an equally large number of families (no less than 30 percent) were rendered landless.[344]

The basis on which certain homesteads were given farming rights, although mediated by the uniform set of betterment regulations, often varied from place to place in its application. According to the betterment legislation only those families who could prove that they had occupied and farmed an area of no less than 3 morgens (2.5701 ha) in the immediate past could apply for farming rights within the new 'properly planned' betterment villages. During the mid-1940s, when the NAD was struggling desperately to gain control over the tenants of Trust farms in the Pietersburg and Zoutspansburg districts, an amendment was made to the 3 morgens limitation placed on farming plot sizes. The NAD declared that if a man could prove that he had previously farmed more than 3 morgens of land then he would be eligible to apply for additional lands. The amendment was made in an attempt to break the unity of resistance the NAD faced by residents of Trust farms subjected to betterment planning in the 1940s by pitting the interests of long-term residents against those of newcomers. However, the catch 22 of this amendment was that the men making claims to additional lands had to prove that they themselves – and 'not their wives or grandfathers' –

[343] Philippa S and Freeda M, interview 24 August 2019.
[344] Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p. 78.

had worked the land.[345] As farming was a female-dominated sphere of work in South Africa, the adult men who were full-time farmers and not migrant workers – in other words men who personally worked the land on an everyday basis – made up only a tiny portion of the rural population. As such, the promise of additional land was effectively undermined by the gendered aspects of betterment regulations and by the 1950s those families receiving lands in areas subjected to betterment planning were at best able to get a plot of 3 morgen for subsistence farming.

Women who did not have a father, brother or husband present to make a claim for family farming rights were called widows and, in the 1940s, betterment regulations stipulated that they were only allowed access to farming plots of a reduced size of 2 or 2.5 morgen regardless of the extent of land they claimed to have cultivated in the past.[346] By the 1960s, the sheer number of families applying for farming plots in betterment villages of the burgeoning Lebowa bantustan as a result of the multiple forced removal processes enacted by the state meant that women-heads of homesteads were excluded from land allocation altogether and were forced to move into closer settlements.[347] The structural exclusion of women from being allocated fields for family subsistence farming in Lebowa was a fundamental reason why the radical land struggles of the 1940s and 1950s were no longer a dominant part of the political resistance landscape in Lebowa in latter decades. As Delius has shown, even during the uprising of 1986 in which the conditions of possibility for radical political praxes such as the illegal occupation and cultivation of enclosed rural lands were ripe, it was only in the few areas of Lebowa with a consistently high rate of annual rainfall where women engaged in such land struggles.[348]

In general, from the mid-1960s onwards in Lebowa the percentage of landless families in any given betterment planning ward ranged from about 25 to 100 percent.[349] All families who were rendered landless were forced to resettle into closer settlements. For instance, at

[345] NASA, NTS 3733 2019/308 (1), Notes of the meeting held at Pietersburg on by the Chief Native Commissioner, 9 October, 1943.
[346] *Ibid*.
[347] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 71; Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p. 174; also see, NASA BOA 1549 A18/1608 (1), Department of Bantu Administration and Development memo titled 'Segregasie: Sekhukhune' by the Deputy Secretary for Labour and Housing, Pretoria, 21 June 1973.
[348] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 71
[349] *Ibid*, p. 71. Also see, LPA TEMO 1157 2/1/1/7 (1 – 9), Landbou Aangeleenthede Maandelikse Werksverslae, 1964 – 1972.

the Ponie Mahlangu Tribal Authority area in the Nebo district during 1974 a total of 273 families were pushed off the land as part of betterment planning and forced to move into one of two nearby closer settlements, namely, Hlogotlou and Gemsbokspruit.[350] By 1980 it was estimated that 72 per cent of Lebowa had been planned according to betterment regulations with the two districts of Sekhukhune and Bochum, where the strongest opposition to betterment took place in the 1950s, being the areas within Lebowa with the lowest percentage of area planned (see Map 6). It is upon the basis of this statistic in particular that Letsoalo argues 'there is an identifiable inverse relationship between the patterns of settlements and those areas of strong resistance towards both betterment and resettlement'.[351] This inverse relationship between resistance and the production of space in Lebowa is evident in the fact that Bochum and Sekhukhune had fewer closer settlements than other districts by the time Lebowa was reincorporated into South Africa in the 1990s.[352] In spaces such as Ga-Matlala, on the other hand, the popular struggles of the 1950s were unsuccessful in stopping the implementation of betterment and tribal authorities, and this had a direct effect on the form and content of women's local struggles in the following decades.

By the late-1970s there were approximately sixty closer settlements in Lebowa with over 200,000 residents. The population size of Lebowa's closer settlements generally ranged from 500 to 16,000 residents with an average of about 3,000 people. Some of the closer settlements in Lebowa which were created as resettlement sites for involuntary removals of the 'surplus populations' of betterment villages were Uitkyk, Hlohlokwe, Gemsbokspruit, Vlakfontein, Mamila, Brakfontein, Senwamokgope, and Cumbrae. Other closer settlements in Lebowa such as Bothashoek, Tafelkop, Dientjie, Boschkloof, and Merweskraal, were the product of both betterment and black spot forms of forced removal. It is also important to keep in mind that many of the resettlements on Trust lands were, at least in theory if not always in practice, planned according to betterment and referred to in state discourse as (betterment) rural villages. However, with residents given no rights to grazing lands and only

[350] The Hlogotlou closer settlement also acted as a dumping ground for some of the resettled people from Doornkop. In the late 1970s Hlogotlou was proclaimed a township but according to research done in the early-1980s the area still bore all the features of a closer settlement the exception being that it was administered by a superintendent and that one could buy a site within its boundaries. See Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p. 71.
[351] See Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p. 79.
[352] *Ibid*, p. 79.

a tiny area of arable land for collective use, these spaces were far more like closer settlements than betterment villages.[353]

For people who lived in the areas of jurisdiction of state-backed Tribal Authorities the enforcement of betterment planning on the ground created huge economic disruptions and new socio-spatial constraints. Betterment regulations introduced a host of new taxes and permits that rural households had to pay in order to sustain themselves. This included permits for cutting down trees, digging wells, drilling boreholes, fishing, and hunting, as well as taxes on livestock such as cattle, goats, and dogs. Women's everyday lives were fundamentally disrupted and reorganised by the imposition of these taxes which necessitated families gaining access to more and more cash in order to meet payments. Furthermore, regulations such as the banning of so-called scrub-cattle and donkeys (both of which were important technologies of agricultural work for poor women in rural communities who could not afford to hire a tractor or large draught animals) made subsistence farming more challenging than ever for the households that relied on it the most for their survival.[354] By the 1960s most people in Lebowa already struggled to meet tax and rent obligations.[355] In addition, meeting the vast range of betterment related-permits and taxes was a challenging if not impossible task for many households.

The application of betterment planning also entailed the redivision of existing rural settlements, known in state discourse of the time as traditional villages, into residential areas, arable lands, and grazing camps. The traditional village in Lebowa was a form of settlement which consisted of scattered homesteads (sometimes referred to as hutgroups by state ethnographers and academics[356]) each surrounded by arable land for use by the particular household as well as communal grazing lands which were not divided into 'camps' or plots.[357] The amount of land taken up by any one traditional village varied according to the size of the

[353] Rogerson and Letsoalo, 'Rural underdevelopment', pp. 347-361.
[354] For a discussion on the political and economic significance of donkeys in rural South Africa and the Bophuthatswana donkey massacre of 1983 see Nancy Jacobs, 'The Great Bophuthatswana Donkey Massacre': Discourse on the Ass and the Politics of Class and Grass', *The American Historical Review*, 106 2 (2001), pp. 485-507.
[355] Bekker, 'We will plough where we like', pp. 29-30.
[356] See for example Nicolaas Jacobus Van Warmelo, 'A preliminary survey of the Bantu Tribes of South Africa', *Ethnological Publications No.5* (Pretoria: South African Government, 1935); and, Hermann Otto Mönnig, *The Pedi* (Pretoria: Van Schaik Ltd, 1967).
[357] Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p.35.

family or families who occupied it and their ability to fence and cultivate the area. Fencing in this context was minimal and generally involved planting hedges or interlacing tree branches to keep livestock and wild animals out of gardens and larger ploughing areas. Traditional villages were, in most cases, administered by a *bakgomana* made up of the heads of prominent homesteads, acting on behalf of the local *kgoshi*.

As no services were provided to villagers, they drew their water from wells which they dug, collected wood from woodlots on commons which they maintained, and of course they built their own homes.[358] In other words, the generally held expectation was not that the institution of local government would provide these services but that local governing elites would facilitate access to the spaces and resources necessary for all families to provide for themselves, especially in times of crisis. This was particularly true of the spaces known as 'commons' which, unlike farming fields and residential lands, were not allocated on a family basis by the chieftaincy and which were generally managed and maintained by rural societies on a daily basis without interference from local governing elites. Historically, the commons were spaces in which all households in rural societies harvested certain natural resources for various purposes and with varying degrees of frequency throughout the year.

However, for the rural poor – those women and men without formal jobs or rural land upon which to produce their own food – the resources of the commons were essential to household economies. Clay from rivers was collected and used by poor women to make pots, plates and other household containers which they would then sell for cash (or, more commonly, barter for chickens, grain, clothing, or other items) to women from nearby villages. Mats and brooms which were made from reeds and grasses collected by women from the commons, worked into finished products with the help of household members, and sold in informal local markets were also essential survival strategies for the poorer households in Lebowa. The spaces identified as commons – such as rivers, forests, mountains, and so on – were controlled and managed collectively by rural societies according to customs held in common, with minimal interference from the chieftaincy. Yet, as shown earlier with reference to Chuene, in some spaces the abusive nature of chiefly rule under Bantu Authorities, and the violent enclosure of commons entailed in the application of betterment, meant that practices

[358] *Ibid*, p.108.

of commoning that were – and in some cases still are today – essential aspects of rural women's everyday reproductive labour were variously criminalised and in certain instances seen by state officials as acts of political resistance.[359]

Emily Mashilo, a woman in her mid-70s who lives in Sandsloot village, one of the many betterment villages constituting the archipelagic entity of Ga-Mapela situated about 35km outside the town of Mokopane (previously Potgietersrus), told me some extremely illuminating stories about her earliest memories of everyday life for women in the area. She was a young girl in 1971 when her family and several others were evicted from a white-owned farm, Rietfontein, and taken by government trucks to the vast expanse of nothingness which they were told was their new village. I asked if 'the government' had provided them with any tents or materials such as corrugated iron sheets or timber with which they could build at least temporary shelters. She scoffed at me and with a somewhat unbelieving tone replied with her own question, 'Government? What government?'. Hesitantly, I said, 'Well, the apartheid government I guess'. She shook her head slowly and explained that there was nothing provided for her family or the numerous waves of other families that were subsequently dumped into the area throughout the 1970s and 1980s. All they had were the few things they could fit onto the lorries that brought them to the area and then the resources they could harvest from the bushveld once the state officials monitoring the whole processes had left them.[360]

Every day, the women of Sandsloot village would take the long walk down to the Mahwelereng River to draw water for their families and garden plots. At least once a week women would have to trek to the nearby mountainsides to gather firewood which was not only their primary source of fuel but also an important source of cash income for the poorest of women who headed households that received little or no remittances from family members engaged in migrant labour and therefore made a small amount of money for themselves by selling wood to members of the community who were too old or otherwise unable to collect it for themselves.[361] The strongest women could carry a load of about 30kg on their heads on a good day, but it was backbreaking work which only got harder as the

[359] LPA TEMO 1157 2/1/1/7 (1 – 9), Landbou Aangeleenthede Maandelikse Werksverslae, 1964 – 1972.
[360] Emily Mashilo, interviewed by author, Sandsloot village, Ga-Mapela, 27 March 2019.
[361] *Ibid*

distances they had to travel became farther and farther as more and more families were forced to take up residence in the villages.

One of the characteristic features of rural villages near commuter townships such as Ga-Mapela was the coming together of black urban and rural lives and as a result of forced removals. Many of the new inhabitants of the Ga-Mapela area in the early-1970s were, like Mashilo and her family, from rural backgrounds having been evicted from white farms or having moved 'voluntarily' (in other words being forced by insurmountable structural constraints) from traditional-cum-betterment villages in which they had been rendered landless or issued a *trekpass* (expulsion order) for whatever reason by the local chief. Women from rural backgrounds tended to build their new houses out of mud-bricks they made by hand and according to an architectural design that was historically the norm for its resilience and ability to insulate homes against the harsh heat and powerful thunderstorms that were typical of the area.[362] The women who had been 'endorsed' out of the urban areas of South Africa and relocated to the settlements of Ga-Mapela, on the other hand, built homes of a different kind when they were first stranded in the area.

Mashilo recalls that 'the city women' would arrive with sheets of corrugated iron and erect shacks to live in because 'they did not know how to build the kind of mud-brick houses' that were common in rural areas.[363] The shacks were of course a nightmare to live in because they were swelteringly hot in summer and bitterly cold in winter. In the immediate aftermath of forced resettlement solidarity between women from urban and rural backgrounds became a defining feature of everyday life and community building in Ga-Mapela. Mashilo remembers how her relatives and other 'women who knew the land' would assist the new arrivals from the city in learning how to build structures, to add to their existing homes, using the materials available in the bush around them. They also showed the city women how to collect clay and reeds from the nearby Mahwelereng River in order to make clay pots and weave matts which could then be sold for cash. Similar narratives of ethical acts of sharing between women in

[362] *Ibid*
[363] *Ibid*

resettlement spaces are scattered throughout Desmond Cosmas' first-hand account of the processes of forced removal he witnessed in South Africa during 1968.[364]

Vivian Maletane, also a long-term resident of Sandsloot village who was forcibly removed to the area in the early-1970s, echoed Mashilo's statement that in the immediate aftermath of resettlement women who had familiarity with the local terrain taught those from urban areas how to understand, manage and make use of the natural resources in the area that seemed to many a barren wasteland when they first set eyes upon it, in order to eke out a living in a context of absolute economic crisis. The women from the city, according to Maletane's recollections were, on the other hand, instrumental in helping their rural counterparts understand and forge wage-labour migrant networks stretching down to Johannesburg, as well as in making close ties to potential buyers of their homemade products in the nearby proclaimed townships and satellite villages:

> You see, those younger mothers, and girls, who came here by the government trucks with the others like we did, but not from the farms, from the townships in the cities, some did not know how to make gardens, or how to keep the dust from outside the home, or, you know, how to make food from nothing when there is no money or make some small medicine for their children when their stomachs were sick. Eish, ja, it was tough, tough, tough, if you did not have some experience of living in the rurals. But they learnt quickly. All the mothers helped each other. And the women from the townships, they also knew so much too about jobs and money, and they helped the others from the farm understand how the world worked like that, in those places [the urban areas].[365]

As Maletane's statement suggests, women who had been resettled from urban areas also shared their understandings and experiences of seeking and securing wage labour jobs – primarily as domestic workers – in the suburban homes and offices of white South Africans in the PVW region. In this way, within the crisis-ridden context of Lebowa's resettlement spaces, women engaged in an emancipatory politics of community building which valued the democratic sharing of everyday burdens and material and subjective resources. In so doing, as James has pointed out, 'egalitarian mutuality [was] interwoven with new inequalities and

[364] Similar descriptions of the kind of homes women built in resettlements can also be found in Cosmas Desmond, *The Discarded People*, (Johannesburg: The Christian Institute of South Africa, 1971); also see WHP, AG2735, Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC), 1980s-1998.
[365] Vivian Maletane, interviewed by author, Sandsloot village near Ga-Mapela, 27 March 2019.

dependencies' and became a feature of the collective distribution of the sensible in rural households of South Africa.[366]

It is important, however, not to romanticise the residential spaces or lived experiences of women in rural Lebowa. These were not communities free of internal conflict and division. As more and more of the black urban population were forced into the bantustans, increasing socio-economic stratification and mushrooming classes of poor, landless and unemployed peoples, became defining features of rural societies. All this was happening while at the same time a new class of civil servants, governing elites, and black businessmen was being created. Some of the spatial dynamics of these processes of class stratification are aptly described by Delius:

> While crumbling mud huts with rusting iron roofs held in place by boulders bore mute testimony to desperate circumstances, houses with brick walls, glistening windows, pitched roofs and ample garages, also became an increasingly common sight from the 1960s… Alongside chiefly homes and tribal offices, the most elaborate buildings belonged to local businessmen.[367]

Along with these processes of class stratification came rising levels of crime, particularly in the form of stock theft, as well as a simultaneously increasing presence of police (meaning actual policemen as well as people employed by other government departments with powers to detain and arrest, such as forest guards and agricultural rangers) in rural societies. Furthermore, a growing generational cleavage between the youth (who, unlike many of their parents, attended formal schooling and were influenced by urban township youth cultures) and older people (the vast majority of whom were women struggling to pay their children's school fees and put food on the table on a daily basis) became a dominant and often divisive part of the social landscape of Lebowa in the late-apartheid era.

The abusive nature of chiefly rule under Bantu Authorities, the socio-economically devastating impacts of betterment planning, the apartheid state's effective crackdown on the South African national liberation movement in the early-1960s, and the subsequent processes of forced removals and resettlements, were all decisive factors in constraining and conditioning the possible expressions of emancipatory politics by women in Lebowa during

[366] James, 'Women Use their Strength', p. 1051.
[367] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 153.

the 1970s. However, it was during this period of intense repression that the exiled ANC began to rebuild itself as an underground movement inside South Africa. Supporting and participating in the ANC-led underground was, I argue, an important expression of emancipatory politics for relatively small but nonetheless significant number of women in the Lebowa bantustan from the mid-1970s onward. The remaking of the ANC underground network in Lebowa during the 1970s relied on the support and involvement of rural women who transformed their households into safehouses for MK cadres and ANC comrades (and their resources) in the Northern Transvaal. However, as will be shown in this section, the everyday reproductive work involved in creating and sustaining rural households in the politically and economically repressive climate of the 1970s was such that it often prevented women who supported the underground in this way from being equally involved, in comparison with their male relatives and comrades, in the political discussions and decision-making processes secretly taking place on a regular basis inside their homes.

Women and the making of the ANC underground in Lebowa

According to Delius, the processes by which the ANC began to re-establish a presence in Ga-Sekhukhune during the early 1970s was more the result of 'official malice' by the apartheid state than the 'organisational design' of the ANC leadership.[368] In the early 1970s, a cohort of ANC veteran activists who had been involved in the first MK sabotage campaign during the early-1960s were released from Robben Island and banished to their rural homes in the bantustans. Those placed under banning orders and restricted to villages in the Lebowa bantustan after their release from prison included Peter Nchabeleng, Nelson Diale, and Martin Ramokgadi. Delius explains that, in the repressive context of the mid-1970s, 'under the watchful and vindictive eye of the local security force', Nchabeleng and Diale remained relatively isolated and their efforts at re-establishing the ANC underground were mostly limited to forming 'small discussion groups' for the 'handful of local Congress supporters who were brave enough to risk contact'.[369] It was in 1976 that Martin Ramokgadi made contact with Nchabeleng and Diale in Ga-Sekhukhune and the process of creating underground MK units, operating under the command of the Transvaal committee led by John Nkadimeng in

[368] *Ibid*, p. 175.
[369] *Ibid*, p. 175.

Soweto, began in rural Lebowa. The first two units created were in Nchabeleng and Diale's respective home villages of Apel and Masemola. Shortly thereafter, however, on 4 January 1977, MK guerrilla Naledi Tsiki was found by police in Apel and taken into custody along with Peter Nchabeleng and his eldest son Elleck Nchabeleng.[370]

Although Peter Nchabeleng together with Nelson Diale and Joe Gqabi were eventually acquitted from the charge of harbouring and recruiting people for military training, Elleck Nchabeleng and his remaining co-accused were found guilty of 'terrorism' and he was sentenced to six years imprisonment on Robben Island.[371] According to Houston and Magubane, the police clampdown in December 1976 and January 1977 ultimately resulted in 'the smashing of the two key internal underground networks' in South Africa – the Transvaal and Natal networks – as many of their leading figures were either arrested, placed under renewed banning orders or forced into exile.[372] It was only in the late 1980s, after Peter Nchabeleng's death, that the MK Nchabeleng Unit – responsible for the coordination and oversight of all MK activities in the Northern Transvaal region – was officially established and the underground military work of recruiting, training and arming young guerrilla soldiers again became a significant feature of the popular resistance landscape in Lebowa and the rural Northern Transvaal more broadly.[373]

The police sweep of the Transvaal underground networks in December 1976, exposed the Nchabeleng household in Apel, as well as several other households in the Ga-Sekhukhune and adjacent Nebo district in southern Lebowa, as nodes in the underground. These rural households functioned as safehouses and secret meeting places for underground political activists as well as infiltrated MK guerrillas. In order to understand the important role played by women in the making of underground activist households in rural Lebowa it is useful to focus on the history of the Nchabeleng activist household in Apel village.

[370] Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane, 'The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s', in SADET, eds., *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2 (1970-1980)*, (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2006), p. 405.
[371] Ahmed Timol website, 'Peter Nchabeleng (1928–1986)'. Accessed online at: https://www.ahmedtimol.co.za/peter-nchabaleng-1928-1986-63rd-person-to-have-died-in-police-detention/.
[372] John Nkadimeng, for example, went into exile at this time and became 'a central figure in the Swaziland machinery' of the ANC. See Houston and Magubane, 'The ANC Underground', p. 422.
[373] WHP, AG2691 (A1 – E4), 'Secret Police Reports relating to organisations and alliances', (1984–1996).

Peter Nchabeleng's wife and fellow ANC comrade Gertrude Nchabeleng's testimony at the TRC hearings discussing the arrest of their son Elleck gives a snapshot view of the role of her home as safehouse for MK guerrillas that were deployed back into South Africa in 1976:

> He [Elleck] was arrested because [Tokyo] Sexwale came [with] Martin Ramokgadi and Naledi Tsiki and Bafana. And Martin Ramokgadi saw that these kids won't be able to stay here [at Elleck's place], and then he took his kids and brought them to my house, and they were staying with me. They [the ANC] could assist us with many things because I stayed with their kids.[374]

Anne Heffernan's book, *Limpopo's Legacy*, also provides useful insights into the role of the Nchabeleng activist household in Apel in shaping the history of the Sekhukhune Youth Organisation (SEYO) in Ga-Sekhukhune and the wider politics of youth movements in the Northern Transvaal during the early 1980s.[375] However, one of the main limitations of Heffernan's study of the Nchableng family's activism is that it is based on the experiences of 'Patriarch' Peter Nchabeleng and his politically active sons – Elleck, Luthuli, Maurice and Mpho – while neglecting the less overtly political experiences of the women – specifically, Gertrude Nchabeleng and her eldest daughter Pinky – who were also deeply involved in making and sustaining the Nchabeleng activist household.[376]

In the 1950s Gertrude Nchabeleng was a member of the regional branches of both the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) and of the African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) in Pretoria. She was one of the everyday women activists within the crowd – the non-leader participants of which we know little – that embarked upon the historic march to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956 in protest against the extension of the pass system to black women.[377] As was the case for many everyday activists in the anti-apartheid struggle, maintaining a relatively conservative public persona as a church-going woman served to conceal the more clandestine political activities of Gertrude Nchabeleng done on behalf of

[374] Truth and Reconciliation Commission (hereafter TRC). 'Human Rights Violations Submissions – Questions and Answers: Nchabeleng Matsatsi Gertrude' (Pietersburg, 17 August 1996). Accessed online at: https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/pieters/nchabele.htm.
[375] Anne Heffernan, *Limpopo's Legacy: Student Politics and Democracy in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press and James Curry, 2017) p. 162.
[376] Heffernan, *Limpopo's Legacy*, pp. 162 – 163.
[377] *Ibid*.

the Congress movement.[378] For example, in the late 1950s, with the help of her church group, she held bake sales and organised for small groups of women to go door-to-door throughout the township raising money for the legal defence of comrades who had been imprisoned during the course of the Sekhukhune uprising. If they were questioned by the authorities, they would say that they were raising money for the church because, although the ANC was not yet banned on a countrywide scale, it had been declared an illegal organisation in Ga-Sekhukhune since November 1958 as a result of its role in the uprising.[379] This recalls Raymond Suttner's observation that by the time the ANC was declared an illegal organisation in 1960 many of its members had already gained experience of some elementary aspects of underground modes of politics in the context of the rural resistance movements and township-based political campaigns of the 1950s.[380] This was certainly the case for Gertrude Nchabeleng. Pinky Nchabeleng remembers that at the time when the ANC was banned her mother's 'passion as an activist was for political education' and it was through the local women's church groups, stokvels, and everyday friendships in Atteridgeville that she '… would kind of preach about what is right, like those parts of political thinking in the Freedom Charter and then also in the bible that encourage things like freedom, the message of a society with equals with no racism or class oppression'.[381] Shortly after Peter Nchabeleng was sentenced to imprisonment on Robben Island in 1964, Gertrude Nchabeleng was issued with an eviction order, forcing her to relocate with her children to the rural village of her birth, Apel, in the recently established Lebowa bantustan.

From the time of her forced removal from Pretoria to Ga-Sekhukhune during the mid-1960s, up until the mid-1980s, Gertrude Nchabeleng was the sole breadwinner responsible for financial maintenance of the Nchabeleng household in Apel village. Aside from the irregular sums of money provided by the ANC to the family for their role in harbouring underground activists and MK guerrillas during the mid-1970s, as alluded to in Gertrude

[378] Alan Kirkaldy, 'Everyday Communists in the South African Liberation Struggle: The Lives of Ivan and Lesley Schermbrucker', presentation given at the Wits History Workshop *Red Lives: 100 years of the South African Communist Party* webinar, 24 August 2021. Accessed from author.
[379] Pinky Nchabeleng interview, 19 April 2019. Also see WHP, A3417, "Ruth Muller Papers 1980-2015", *Shulamith Muller Legal Practice Files*.
[380] Suttner argues that the M-Plan inspired mode of popular underground politics adopted by the ANC in the post Rivonia period was different to the Leninist-Marxist inspired vanguard-type underground politics practiced by the Communist Party since its formation as the SACP in 1950. See Raymond Suttner, 'The African National Congress (ANC) Underground: From the M-Plan to Rivonia', *South African Historical Journal*, 49 1 (2003), p. 131.
[381] Pinky Nchabeleng, interview, 19 April 2019.

Nchabeleng's TRC testimony, the wages she earned as a cleaner for an Indian-owned trading store near Apel was the only source of revenue the family had regular access to.[382] In accordance with dominant patriarchal gender norms, the women of the Nchabeleng household were expected to do all the reproductive labour required for sustaining a rural household. For Pinky Nchabeleng, this reproductive labour included everyday tasks, such as fetching wood and water from the commons, tending to the family's vegetable garden, preparing and cooking meals, washing clothes and cleaning rooms, as well as caring for her infant sisters. In addition to all this, she and her mother would also have to make sure that the political meetings and discussion groups being held by Peter Nchabeleng and his sons were catered with food and drinks and proceeded both secretly and undisturbed. When Pinky Nchabeleng returned to Pretoria to join the wage labour market in the late-1970s, after her brother Elleck's arrest, her younger sisters Milistasie and Lilian stepped up and took on this domestic role which, according to Pinky Nchabeleng, prevented them 'as women' from being able to attend the secret political meetings and education workshops being held by their father in their living room, or from travelling to attend other underground meetings taking place in nearby villages and towns, in the way that their brothers were able to.[383] Yet, without the daily efforts of the women of the Nchabeleng family, it would not have been possible for their household in Apel to become the activist space that it was in the 1970s and 1980s.

It is important to recognise and analyse the role played by everyday activists (particularly women whose political contributions are often missed when researchers do not look for traces of them explicitly) in forming part of that older generation of activists which, firstly, rebuilt the internal underground during the first half of the 1970s and, secondly, played a role in fostering intergenerational political links with a younger generation of student activists from the 1976 moment onwards. In the Ga-Sekhukhune area, this older generation of activists – currently in their late 80s and early 90s – are known as the Sebatakgomo generation. The women in this cohort, including Gertrude Nchabeleng, are popularly remembered as having played a fundamental role in supporting the comrades of the ANC underground in the 1970s and the radical youth movement of the 1980s.[384] This is reflected not only in public histories and popular memories of the MK in rural Limpopo during the late-

[382] TRC, *Nchabeleng Matsatsi Gertrude*.
[383] Pinky Nchabeleng interview, 19 October 2019.
[384] Rudolph Phala, interviewed by author, Parliamentary Village, Polokwane City, 6 March 2019.

apartheid era, but also in the fact that the MK veteran branch in the Apel-Nkoane-Nchabeleng area of Ga-Sekhukhune of present-day Limpopo is named after Gertrude Nchabeleng.

In addition to everyday activists and custodians of safehouses such as Gertrude Nchabeleng, it is also equally important to briefly consider the experiences of younger women who formed part of the MK Nchabeleng unit's operations in Lebowa and the Northern Transvaal more broadly during the late-1980s and early-1990s. From 1986 onward young women in Lebowa were also recruited into this MK unit as combatants. The unit's command structure was dominated by men such as Isaac Ditshego, Ephraim Mogale and Morgan Mathebe. However, there were women who functioned as part of the leadership structure of the unit too such as Margaret Mathebe. Mathebe was recruited in 1987 and sent outside the country for military training in topography, firearms, physical combat, and drilling. After four years she returned to South Africa in 1990 and was made the commander of MK operations and cadres in the Tzaneen region of Lebowa.[385]

For about five months Margaret carried out her mandate as commander until July, 1990, when she and several other members of the Nchabeleng unit were arrested by the security police and placed in detention. At the time of her arrest Margaret Mathebe was 28 years old.[386] Another underground activist woman who was arrested as part of the security branch's crack down on the MK Nchabeleng unit in June/July 1990, was Edna Sethema who lived in BelaBela Location outside Warmbad (present day BelaBela). On 29 June, 1990, Sethema was arrested by security police at her home after a member of her unit had confessed under interrogation that Sethema's house was being used as a safehouse. As was a common apartheid policing tactic, security police had forced Monapule Radebe to drive with them through the streets of Bela Bela and point out the houses of ANC activists that he had identified under interrogation. This was how Sethema was found with the following: a loaded AK 47 rifle, eight RGD5 offensive hand grenades, three F1 defensive hand grenades, two landmines, and a host of other ammunitions and igniters, hidden throughout her home in Bela Bela. Both Mathebe and Sethema, as well as a number of their comrades operating in and around Lebowa, were arrested and charged with harbouring ANC terrorists and weapons. Sethema was 33 years old at the time of her arrest and, under interrogation by the security

[385] WHP, AG2691/A1, Police Documents (1984 – 1996).
[386] *Ibid.*

branch police in Sandton, Johannesburg, she confessed that she had been 'trained locally in the use and handling of weapons and explosives by a foreign military trained ANC terrorist'.[387]

The significance of Mathebe and Sethema's experiences with the MK Nchabeleng unit is twofold. Firstly, their histories show that one of the ways in which women from rural Lebowa engaged in the politics of the national liberation movement, and the armed struggle in particular, was as transnationally and locally trained MK combatants. Secondly, the above narrative reaffirms the argument made by feminist scholar Siphokazi Magadla, that women's varied political contributions in the war against apartheid cannot be reduced – as so often happens in both national liberation and feminist accounts of women's politics – to 'auxiliary roles' because '…these actions formed the central pillar of combat under conditions of guerrilla warfare'.[388] However, it is clear that the ANC and MK underground was a highly masculine domain of politics in which relatively few women participated directly as combatants. This was also the case in Lebowa during the 1970s, when only male combatants were being recruited and the network of activist households in Lebowa was predominantly limited to the southern parts of the Ga-Sekhukhune and Nebo. As such, it is necessary to explore some of the other, more popular, modes of emancipatory politics that were put into practice by women in the context of the unfolding crisis of social reproduction and political repression in Lebowa during this period before turning attention to the radical political climate of the 1980s and early-1990s.

Women's everyday praxes of resistance and collective responses to the crisis of social reproduction in the 1970s

Feminist scholars have argued that the 'crisis of social reproduction' is a global phenomenon that manifests in particular ways in different spatial-temporal contexts. In contemporary South Africa, Fakier and Cock have shown, the crisis of social reproduction in black working class communities derives from the legacies of apartheid. According to them, features of the crisis of social reproduction (with social reproduction defined as the necessary and unpaid care work in the household mainly done through the domestic labour of women) include, but

[387] *Ibid*

[388] Siphokazi Magadla, 'Demobilisation and the civilian reintegration of women ex-combatants in post-apartheid South Africa: The aftermath of transnational guerrilla girls, combative mothers and in-betweeners in the shadows of a late twentieth-century war', (PhD thesis, Rhodes University, 2016), p. 29.

are not limited to, 'the issues of inadequate state provision, the restructuring of work, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the international phenomenon of rising food prices'.[389] The discussions in this chapter thus far all serve to show that by the close of the 1970s rural communities in the Lebowa bantustan faced a deep crisis of social reproduction in which most women struggled to meet their basic daily needs – like feeding themselves and their families, accessing water for drinking and washing, taking care of the sick and the elderly, and paying for school fees and uniforms (as well as many other rents and taxes). I have argued that the crisis of social reproduction in Lebowa's villages in the 1970s was the product of the highly racialised and gendered apartheid processes and policies of Bantu Authorities, forced removals and resettlement, and betterment planning, imposed in the wake of the mid-twentieth century popular uprisings, that resulted in a renewed assault on the spaces, activities, and relationships of social reproduction in rural communities.

Fakier and Cock observe that poor and working class black women were, and remain, the main 'shock absorbers' of the crisis of social reproduction in South Africa.[390] In Lebowa, historical and anthropological studies have shown that two main responses of women in rural communities to the crisis of social reproduction were to invest heavily in formal education, especially to ensure a better future for younger generations, and to seek out wage-paying jobs. Both of these responses to the crisis of social reproduction are indicative of Asef Bayat's theorisations of the 'slow encroachment of the ordinary', discussed in chapter one of my thesis.[391] This is important to bear in mind when considering the rise of the youth and labour movements in Lebowa during the 1980s and understanding the participation of women in the emancipatory political praxes therein (see chapters four and five).

However, in the 1960s and 1970s the dominant mode of women's emancipatory politics in Lebowa was still comprised of anti-betterment struggles that had first been put into practice by women on a much larger scale and in a more organised form – often with support from chiefs – during the rural uprisings of the 1940s and 1950s. In the aftermath of the popular uprisings, these anti-betterment struggles now took on the form of nonmovement

[389] Khayaat Fakier and Jacklyn Cock, 'A Gendered Analysis of the Crisis of Social Reproduction in Contemporary South Africa', *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 11 3 (2009), p. 353.
[390] *Ibid*, p. 353.
[391] See, Bayat, 'From Dangerous Classes'.

subaltern politics involving the noncollective daily endeavours of hundreds of individual women in Lebowa fighting in subtle and piecemeal ways against the destruction of their autonomy and existence as subsistence farmers and commoners in rural societies.

The early records of the Lebowa Department of Agriculture (which include detailed reports by agricultural officers and rangers from the mid-1960s onward) provide a window into women's everyday resistance praxes against betterment during this period. For example, ranger reports from 1972 describe how women from villages in the Nebo district illegally set fishing nets and harvested reeds and other plants from the banks of an Olifants River tributary which had been enclosed by the state.[392] The white senior agricultural officer for the area complained in his annual report that,

> The bantu here [in Nebo] are generally discontent over their allotment of ploughing lands… and of new river conservation schemes… Even the women are most unsatisfied and complain to the tribal chiefs that there is a major problem of hunger in their villages because of [a lack of access to] water and land… It seems that many have taken to invading the nearby irrigation scheme with all manner of fishing equipment and ploughs to poach everything they can from the waters and the reeds. My bantu field assistants continue to find evidence of such activities all along the river and have even seen groups of bantu fleeing the scene on carrying large loads with them. The fear is that the entire left side of the river will degrade fast if the bantu women are not forced to accept the situation as more of them will surely do these things if the few currently in action are not dealt with properly now.[393]

Unfortunately, archival records detailing this kind of women's anti-enclosure struggles in Nebo are not available beyond the end of 1972, and it is unclear whether the state was able to 'deal' with the women 'properly' or not. In several other instances throughout the late-1960s and 1970s, rangers submitted reports complaining about the destruction of fences by women in an effort to regain direct access to farming lands, rivers and commonages.[394] One particularly interesting batch of records spoke of an old woman (whose actual name is not given) from Mamphokgo village near Marble Hall who, both rangers and policemen accused, had taught the young boys in the area how to make tanned goat hides, which she instructed

[392] LPA TEMO 1157 2/1/1/7 (1-9), Landbou Aangeleenthede Maandelikse Werksverslae, 1964 – 1972.
[393] LPA TEMO 1157 2/1/1/7 (9), Landbousake Senior Landboubeampte Jaarverslag: Nebo-distrik, 28 November 1972.
[394] LPA TEMO 1157 2/1/1/7 (1-9).

them was 'the best material to throw over barbed wire fences when you need to climb over them quickly'.[395] The ranger report from July 1968 detailing this situation claimed that 'It is because of what that old lady showed them to do with the goat skins that the boys from Tafelkop and Motetema use these things to climb fences [and] steal from the Groblersdal farms and can do so without getting caught so easily'.[396] In the same year, rangers in Ga-Sekhukhune wrote that residents from Ga-Malepe village, near Penge, had ripped up poles and downed roughly 3km of fencing that had been set up to *kraal* livestock confiscated from villagers who had not paid their taxes or were in contravention of the strict stock limitations imposed under betterment.[397]

In an interview with a small group of old women from Apel village in Ga-Sekhukhune, they spoke about their struggles against state-erected fences used to dispossess rural communities of access to land and resources necessary to live a dignified life.[398] They showed me the large boulders in the village where women used to crush the various grains they harvested into mealiemeal and explained that, during the apartheid period, some women would collect hard rocks, grind them down on the boulders, and create tools for breaking wire fences (which were either barbed or chain-linked). They had to be methodical in grinding down and sharpening the edges of the rocks without taking off too much material or the tool wouldn't be strong enough to withstand multiple beatings against metal. The alternative was to use family-owned metal tools such as hoes, assegais, axes, or knives, to break down state fencing but, 'this one was a risk because then one lady could have her family property damaged and then have to replace them'.[399] Furthermore, these items – aside from the hoe – commonly found in most rural households were deemed to be weapons under apartheid legislation and black women could actually be arrested and fined for carrying them in public. Magdalene, a woman in her 40s who grew up in a village near Tzaneen, explained that her grandmother had a deep scar running the length of her left palm from a fence that had cut her sometime in the 1970s or 1980s. Magdalene recounted that her grandmother and her friends used to have to cross a fence daily 'to take their goats to the river and to get water for

[395] LPA TEMO 1157 2/1/1/7 (8), Landbousake Senior Landboubeampte Jaarverslag, 7 July 1968.
[396] *Ibid*.
[397] LPA TEMO 1157 2/1/1/7 (8), Bantoeveldassistente se verslae, 13 March 1968.
[398] Sekhukhune Rural Women's Association (SRWA) members, group interviewed by author, Komani Disability Centre, Apel village, 19 October 2019.
[399] *Ibid*.

their families.'[400] These women did not cut the fence. Instead, echoing ranger reports from the Marble Hall area discussed above, they took goat hides and, suspending usual customary practices, used them to aid them in overcoming the fence and circumventing state control and enclosure of the commons. The hides were tanned in such a manner that 'they remained very strong.' This was done by leaving the hair and a substantial amount of sinew and fat on the skin before stretching and drying it out in the sun over several days. Once prepared, women would then 'wrap the hide underneath their skirts… or fold it and put it on the back [of a woman] like it was a small child.'[401] Once at the fence the hide would be carefully draped over the fence and a steady log (which was kept hidden in the bushes) was placed as a make-shift stepladder so that the women could climb safely over. They also used the hides to bundle-up horizontal lines of barbed wire, twisting all the strains together at one point, thus making gaps for those who could not climb over, and their small livestock, to pass through the fence. It was during one failed attempt to twist and pull a barbed wire fence like this that Magdalene's grandmother's hand was permanently scarred.[402]

In addition to acts of resistance against betterment, it is also important to note that in Lebowa during the 1970s some women elaborated new forms of associational life that drew heavily on the discourses of self-help, mutual-aid, and the politics of care, in responding to the growing crisis of social reproduction. The social workers' and agricultural assistants' field reports from the Lebowa archives show that in this period, many villages and townships in Lebowa had some kind of local women-driven cooperative, association, organisation, club or group, providing various care services aimed at empowering local community members.[403] These village-based organisations took on many different forms, the most popular of which were: church groups (also known as *manyanos*), work cooperatives (involving for example brick-making, weaving, knitting, and sewing, amongst other income generating activities), farmers associations (which often had a mostly female membership but were usually controlled by elite males), traditional music/dance groups and savings clubs (also known as stokvels).[404]

[400] Magdalene (pseudonym), interviewed by author, Apel village, 19 October 2019.
[401] *Ibid*.
[402] *Ibid.*
[403] See, LPA LDOH, 28 (18/2/4-A), Social Workers' Annual Reports, 1986-1987; and, LPA TEMO, 1146, 6/4/3/2/2/7 (1), Individuele Kooperasies, 1977-1981.
[404] LPA TEMO, 1146, 6/4/3/2/2/7 (1), Individuele Kooperasies, 1977-1981.

For example, in the Mokerong district women's work groups, with an average membership of between 15 and 20 members, in Makotopong, Mothiba and Sebayeng villages established communities creches. In Motholo village, women established the Motholo Homebuilders Association in an attempt to help themselves and other women in their community (the main homebuilders in rural South Africa) in accessing materials and funds for building their homes. In the Ga-Sekhukhune district women came together and formed the Dilokong Centre for the Handicapped, the Gowe Play Centre for Children, the Mashabela Workshop 'for slightly mentally retarded and poor people', Maandagshoek Vegetable Garden 'for indigent individuals' and Motsepe Vegetable Garden for poor people.[405] Some of these women's associations were able to extract resources from the Lebowa state by formally registering as a cooperative. Once registered, however, women had to shift their energies away from the everyday work of their organisations, which for most members was their only source of regular income, and focus their efforts instead on the work of reorganising themselves according to the model of cooperative as dictated by government policy.[406] Many organisations were unable to navigate this process of formal registration and the state-dictated process of organisational realignment it entailed. The problems that arose as a result of this process of local women's organisations in Lebowa becoming formally recognised co-ops is captured in Kate Philip's study of the Hulisani weaving co-op which was started by a group of 27 unemployed women from a cluster of villages north of Tzaneen in 1974.[407]

The project was supported by the local Catholic church from the start and, between 1974 and 1987, the weavers were able to earn an average of about R200 a month, which at the time was roughly four times more than what they could have earned as farm workers. However, in 1987 the Hulisani weaver's group was helped by the church in registering as a co-operative. As Philip explains,

> [T]here have been difficulties in converting Hulisani into a co-op. Firstly, this is because the conversion was initiated from outside. For the weavers, earning an income was the priority, and "the women believed that time spent on committee work detracted from production." Because they earn piece-rates, the time spent on management tasks and democratic processes cut directly

[405] LPA, LDOH, 28 (18/2/4-A), *H.C. Boshoff Welfare Agency's Annual Report: April 1986 – March 1987*, Social Workers' Annual Reports, 1986-1987.
[406] See, LPA TEMO, 1146, 6/4/3/2/2/7 (1), Individuele Kooperasies, 1977-1981.
[407] Kate T. Philip, 'Producer Co-Operatives in South Africa: Their economic and political limits and potential', *SWOP Labour Studies Research Report* 4 (1987).

> into their income. The payment scheme was altered to include managerial tasks, but democracy is still seen as a costly process.[408]

This bureaucratic process of internal restructuring sometimes also saw businessmen and men connected to the chieftaincy using their superior education and experience of dealing with the Lebowa state as a means by which to side-line women and capture the top decision-making positions within many of these organisations. This was the case with the Magosebo Welfare Society which was founded by women in Strydkraal village near Apel during the 1970s. By the early-1980s this society, which had been active in creating and leading community garden projects and skills-development workshops, ceased to function. The collapse came about because the treasurer, a man who had only been appointed by the local chief into the organisation because he believed 'none of the women were qualified to manage the books', had mismanaged the funds and stolen money from the organisation.[409] Most women's organisations in Lebowa, however, were not recognised by the Lebowa government and dealt with the state only at the local level via their everyday relationships with local traditional authorities.

The gendered division between social reproductive labour and productive labour in the Lebowa bantustan (and, indeed, in modern capitalist economies across the globe) is reflected in its archival records. The DOH social workers' records hold many traces – albeit usually in the form of brief snap-shots frozen in time – of women-driven organisations involved in the provision of social care services in rural communities during the 1970s. In the TEMO collection, which includes reports of formally registered cooperatives engaged in modes of productive (as opposed to reproductive) labour in Lebowa, written by agricultural extension officers, advisors, and rangers, I only came across records indicating the extensive participation of women as members, but never as leaders, of such organisations. From the available archival evidence, it appears that women's groups had more success in maintaining relative autonomy when involved in social reproductive labour and care work than in productive modes of labour in the 1970s. Although Lebowa's women's organisations of the 1970s were neither overtly contentious nor anti-apartheid in any obvious way, I argue that they were politically important because, as feminist scholars have argued in the case of

[408] *Ibid*, p.89
[409] LPA TEMO, 1146 6/4/3/2/2/7 (1), *District Extension Advisor's trip report dated 22//1/81 and co-op complaint letters*, Individuele Kooperasies, 1977-1981.

women housing activists in Chicago, they embodied a commitment 'to join together out of the needs of people, to work together as neighbours, and to overcome the real and present danger of annihilation'.[410]

As far as Lebowa's civil servants in the Department of Health and Social Welfare and the Department of Agriculture and Forestry were aware, most community-based organisations, such as those discussed in this section, appear to have ceased to function in the insurrectionary climate of the mid-1980s. However, elsewhere in South Africa women-made grassroots organisations persisted and even grew during the 1980s, albeit often obscured by more insurrectionary movements.[411] Thus, the observation that all such organisations ceased to function in Lebowa during the 1980s is possibly more an outcome of what appears in the archive than a comprehensive reflection of what actually took place. Nonetheless, it is clear that this mode of grassroots women-made politics and its organisational forms were eclipsed in state discourses (captured in the archives) and popular memories (reflected in oral histories) of the 1980s in Lebowa. In chapter six I show that it was during a later period, within the '1994 moment', that potentially emancipatory modes of rural women's associational life and grassroots organisations began to re-emerge on a large scale in Lebowa.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the question of what happens to the spaces of women's emancipatory politics in Lebowa during the period of bolstered Bantu Authorities-style chiefly rule, forced removals and resettlement, and betterment planning in the 1960s and 1970s. Chuene's rise and fall within the Lebowa bantustan government illuminates the extent to which women bore the brunt of violence produced by the conflicts waged between local governing elites over the control of land in the bantustan as well as high-ranking positions

[410] Roberta M. Feldman and Susan Stall, *The Dignity of Resistance: Women Resident's Activism in Chicago Public Housing*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. xiii.

[411] Consider the extensive body of scholarship on the central role played by the grassroots women's organisation at Crossroads squatter camp in Cape Town in leading popular struggles for freedom since the late-1970s and early 1980s. See, for example, Koni Benson, 'A "Political War of Words and Bullets": Defining and Defying Sides of Struggle for Housing in Crossroads, South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 41 2 (2015), pp. 367-387; Josette Cole, *Crossroads: The Politics of Reform and Repression, 1976–1986* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); Temma Kaplan, *Crazy for Democracy: Women in Grassroots Movements* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Keith Kiewiet and Kim Weichel, *Inside Crossroads* (Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill, 1980).

within its burgeoning administration. The abusive nature of chiefly rule under Bantu Authorities, the socio-economically devastating impacts of betterment planning, the apartheid state's effective crackdown on the South African national liberation movement in the early-1960s, and the subsequent processes of forced removals and resettlements, were all decisive factors in constraining and conditioning the possible expressions of emancipatory politics by women in Lebowa during the 1970s.

It was during this period of intense repression that the underground networks of the ANC were being rebuilt inside South Africa. By focusing on the Nchabeleng activist household in Apel, I showed that the remaking of the ANC underground network in Lebowa during the 1970s relied on the support and involvement of women like Gertrude Nchabeleng who transformed their rural households into safehouses for MK cadres and ANC comrades in the Northern Transvaal. This, I argued, was an important expression of emancipatory politics for the small number of women but one which was significantly limited as a result of their everyday burdens of reproductive labour involved in maintaining rural households. Women who established and maintained safehouses for the ANC underground in Lebowa were, as a result of unequal gender relations and prevailing patriarchal norms, often prevented from being equally involved, in comparison with their male relatives and comrades, in the political discussions and decision-making processes secretly taking place inside their homes.

Far more popular than involvement in the ANC underground were the everyday modes of resistance practiced by women in Lebowa against the policies and infrastructure of betterment during the 1960s and 1970s. This involved groups of women, or individuals, engaging in subtle but persistent, widespread, and illegal praxes such as cutting down fences, harvesting resources from enclosed lands, flouting betterment regulations, and defiantly joining the migrant labour system, in an attempt to mitigate against the growing crisis of social reproduction in the bantustan. With reference to these praxes, I argued that women's resistance in the extremely repressive context of the making of the Lebowa bantustan took the form of a nonmovement subaltern politics of encroachment.[412]

[412] Bayat, *Life as Politics*, p. xi.

By focusing on broad changes in the political economy of Lebowa, as well as some of the everyday experiences of state violence and exploitation suffered by women in the bantustan, I have attempted to show how and why women's emancipatory politics in Lebowa shifted from participation in organised, collective, and often militant struggles against land dispossession and the imposition of Bantu Authorities in the 1940s and 1950s; to more subtle, non-collective and everyday forms of resistance politics against the policies and infrastructure of betterment and to support of and participation in the making of the ANC underground in Lebowa during the late-1960s and 1970s. Lastly, I showed that during this period in which the possibilities for praxes of resistance politics were severely constrained, another important expression of emancipatory politics was in the proliferation of women's cooperations, self-help groups, and clubs practicing a subaltern politics of care aimed at creating and defending dignified ways of living in Lebowa's crisis-ridden villages.

CHAPTER FOUR

Women, the youth movement, and emancipatory politics in Lebowa in the 1980s

This chapter explores the lived experiences of young women who were politically active in Lebowa's student and youth organisations in the 1980s. I begin by outlining the history of the expansion of formal education in South Africa, and the associated increase of the numbers of young women attending school, including in Lebowa, from the early-1970s onward. Attention is given to young women's everyday experiences in rural schools and the significance of these experiences in shaping their conceptions of freedom and, in some cases, their decisions to join local political youth organisations. In order to understand the history of student and youth politics in the former Lebowa bantustan, it is necessary to adopt an analytical framework that considers the historical particularities of this local space as well as the major events and transformations unfolding elsewhere in South Africa and at the national level. It is also important to note that while from a national perspective a focus on youth organisations in Lebowa may seem relatively narrow and simple; from a local, subalternist or 'history from below' perspective, such a focus area is incredibly complex. This is because of the geographic scale and heterogeneous spatial-political composition of this archipelagic bantustan as well as variations in the local youth organisations and praxes that proliferated in Lebowa during the late-apartheid period. In light of these factors, I have attempted to cast the research net as widely as possible, drawing on available historical sources – both new and old – to shed light on the lived experiences of young women activists, also known as 'female comrades', from both village and township-based youth organisations/congresses that were active in Lebowa.

As will be shown, young female comrades in Lebowa generally became politically active in village-based youth organisations and congresses that operated outside of the rural schools from the early-1980s before becoming politically active in school-based student organisations, such as Student Representative Councils (SRCs). It was only around 1986 and 1987, in the aftermath of the popular uprising in Lebowa, that young female comrades in villages became more politically active in school-based student organisations than community-based youth congresses. This change was largely the result of the violent

repression of the youth movement by an often-combined force of Lebowa and South African policemen, SADF soldiers and right-wing vigilante groups mobilised by conservative chiefs and white populations, operating under the shadows of the state of emergency. The extremely violent and highly gendered praxes of witchcraft accusations and killings by some youth congresses and groups of so-called *comtsostis* in particular parts of Lebowa during the 1985-1987 period, it will be shown, was another important contributing factor in female comrades becoming more prominent in the school-based SRC structures than the village-based youth organisations/congresses in the late-1980s. The late-1980s was also the moment in which many young women in Lebowa who had been involved in the politics of the youth movements moved on to become involved in other spheres of liberatory politics, especially the radical trade union movement (see chapter five), and also the political underground (see chapter three). By placing my research into conversation with women-centred literature from other contexts, especially historian Emily Bridger's work on Soweto's 'female comrades', as well as the wider literature on the mid-1980s township and rural uprisings, this chapter will analyse the relationship between women, the youth movement, and emancipatory politics in Lebowa.[413]

One of the key aspects of this political period is the fact that young women were almost always a minority in the South African youth movement, in both its organised and unorganised forms, and at both the national and local levels. As Bridger observes, women only constituted between 10 and 30 percent of the membership of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS) in the decade leading up to 1994.[414] Thus, for young women in 1980s South Africa it was an 'unconventional decision to join the liberation struggle while still teenagers and school students'.[415] Nonetheless, the small groups of young women who did identify themselves as 'comrades' and participated alongside young men in youth organisations are a significant set of historical actors whose role in the popular conception

[413] The experiences of young women in Soweto who were members of the South African Students' Movement (SASM) and COSAS during the late-apartheid period (1976-1994) forms the focus of Bridger's recent book, *Young Women Against Apartheid*. Bridger's work does not deal with the Lebowa bantustan, or any rural area in South Africa, but its explicit focus on 'female comrades' and questions of gender in 1980s South African youth politics makes it an incredibly useful piece of literature for thinking about a similar topic in a rural bantustan context. In particular, Bridger's thorough critique of the silencing of women in South African historiography, especially in those parts pertaining to the youth movement, and her use of oral history sources collected in the form of interviews with former women student and youth activists, as a means by which to overcome aspects of this silencing, has been extremely instructive.

[414] Emily Bridger, *Young Women against Apartheid: Gender, Youth and South Africa's Liberation Struggle* (Johannesburg: James Curry, 2021), p. 49.

[415] Bridger, *Young women against apartheid*, p. 48.

and praxis of emancipatory politics deserves closer scholarly attention. This chapter explores young female comrades' own recollections of their time in the radical youth movement, as presented in oral history testimonies, and focuses on what their participation in the everyday praxes of emancipatory politics by local youth congresses/organisations actually looked like historically, and in practice, in Lebowa's villages and townships during the 1980s. My research finds that in the rural Lebowa bantustan, the gender ratio in the youth movement was similar to Soweto's, and that it was uncommon for young women to join politically contentious youth organizations in the 1980s, regardless of urban or rural contexts. However, there are important differences between the experiences of female comrades from Soweto and the rural areas of Lebowa bantustan, which will be discussed further in the chapter.

The expansion of formal education in Lebowa

In 1962, in the immediate aftermath of the Ga-Sekhukhune uprising, the Lebowa Territorial Authority was created and the system of tribal authorities was imposed throughout the region. The nefarious consequences of the Bantu Affairs Department's struggles to control and redesign rural societies through the newly restructured system of tribal authorities, as well as those societies' resistances against such attempts, resulted in major transformations of the political landscape of rural South Africa. These transformations, discussed in the previous chapter, were highly racialised in both process and outcome; however, they were also less visibly but no less importantly gendered – meaning that black women and men experienced the dramatic changes differently.

The expansion of education in Lebowa started slowly in the 1950s and mainly consisted of primary schools, and only a few secondary schools, situated in the largest villages of the region.[416] Over the next three decades, however, a rapid proliferation of schools took place throughout Lebowa. The mushrooming of schools in Lebowa was part of much broader process of secondary school expansion taking place throughout South Africa. As historian Clive Glaser argues, the expansion of secondary schools and the dramatic increase of black school students in the 1970s and 1980s 'coincided with the most militant phase of South African youth politics' in which high schools became the epicentre of contentious student

[416] Delius, *A Lion amongst the Cattle*, p. 155.

politics in the country.[417] The proliferation of schools in Lebowa was directly related to the imposition of Bantu Education, tribal authorities and the associated processes of forced removal, resettlement, and rehabilitation, which took place unevenly but consistently throughout the region from the early 1960s onwards.[418] Newly appointed chiefs were compelled by the Bantu Affairs Department to establish 'properly functioning tribal authorities' in their areas and building schools was an important aspect of meeting this criterion.[419] However, the responsibility for building the school – including fundraising and construction – fell on the local communities themselves. The apartheid state's policy was to contribute on a Rand for Rand basis once a school building had actually been completed by a local community but in practice this hardly ever happened and the state 'found a wide variety of ways to minimise its obligations'.[420]

Despite this absence of financial and material support from the state, bantustan residents invested considerable time, money and labour into building schools in their communities during the 1960s and 1970s in the hope that it would give the younger generation access to a better future. In the 1970s, most villages in Lebowa had a primary and junior secondary school and, following a surge in the period 1977 to 1982, the number of senior secondary schools – offering classes up to matric – in the bantustan shot up from 38 to 146.[421] However, despite the rapid expansion of schools in Lebowa during the 1970s and 1980s, the number of students enrolling into them far exceeded the capacity of the apartheid or bantustan state to provide adequate resources and enough teachers. As Delius observes,

> The consequence was a proliferation of schools with massively congested classrooms, often lacking doors, blackboards, desks and windows, which froze in winter and baked (and leaked) in summer. Many classes, particularly in primary schools but also in secondary schools, were conducted outdoors. Schools lacked libraries and even the

[417] Clive Glaser, 'Youth and generation in South African history', *Safundi*, 19 2 (2018), p. 117. In addition to Glaser, scholars such as Johnathan Hyslop, Colin Bundy, and Jeremy Seekings have analysed this process, as well as the consequent exponential increase in the social weight attached to the identity category 'student' which it entailed, in the lead-up to and aftermath of the Soweto uprising of 1976. See, Johnathan Hyslop, *The Classroom Struggle: Policy and resistance in South Africa, 1940 – 1990*. (Durban: KwaZulu Natal University Press, 1999); Colin Bundy, 'Street Sociology and Pavement Politics: Aspects of youth and student resistance in Cape Town, 1985' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 13 3 (1987), pp. 303-330; Jeremy Seekings, *Heroes or Villains? Youth Politics in the 1980s* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993).
[418] Delius, *A Lion amongst the Cattle*, pp. 155-157.
[419] NASA, BOA 1549 A18/1608 (1), Department of Bantu Administration and Development memo titled 'Segregasie: Sekhukhune' by the Deputy Secretary for Labour and Housing, Pretoria, 21 June 1973.
[420] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 156.
[421] *Ibid*, p. 156.

> most rudimentary scientific and technical equipment. In contrast to white students, school fees were charged and pupils had to purchase their own stationery and uniforms in a context of intermittent and expensive local supplies. Students who failed to pay their fees were excluded from schools and those who came to school improperly dressed ran the risk of a similar fate.[422]

As was the case in the rest of South Africa, in Lebowa up to the 1960s few girls attended school. This began to change in the 1970s and by the early 1980s the sex ratios in Lebowa's schools shifted to the extent that girls slightly out-numbered boys in most classrooms.[423] The divisions of labour and education in black schools under apartheid produced uneven gender relations within these spaces. Female students were, unlike their male counterparts, forced to do the reproductive labour of cleaning classrooms and teacher's rooms and were given limited access to studying subjects from the so-called 'hard sciences' such as Maths and Science.[424] Furthermore, while corporal punishment by teachers and principals was an oppressive feature of school life for both young women and men – the phenomenon of sexual harassment and assault was a predominantly gendered form of violence enacted against female students. As will be discussed later in the chapter, a central demand of the youth organisations in the 1985-1986 mass school boycotts was for the abolition of corporal punishment and sexual harassment in schools.

As alluded to in the quotation from Delius, many of the students came from impoverished backgrounds and this had an impact on their experiences of schooling. As Sauwe Maditsi, a member of the Sekhukhune Youth Organisation (SEYO) explained about her experiences of attending school in Apel village during the 1980s:

> I was grown in a poverty-stricken family… So, it was very tough. Sometimes when I was going to primary and high school, I can go to school barefoot and without food… It was hard because as a human being, you happen to come from this poorer family and then you also wish for a better life. And, you know,our wishes by then were just small. I remember when I was still in high school,you know the teachers would send you to go and clean their rooms and then they will give you an apple, you know an apple was that big thing then. So, your dream of freedom then is: I just also wish I could also have my own room. My own room with work and have my own bed and can just eat a red apple, you can imagine. So, it was hard, you can imagine, that was our dreams,

[422] Delius, 'Migrants, comrades and revolts', p. 17.
[423] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 159.
[424] Bridger, *Young women against apartheid*, p. 50.

> they were just like this, dreaming for an apple, eating a red apple because you can't even afford that.[425]

Maditsi's recollections are an indication of the ways in which inequalities experienced because of both gender – having to clean the teacher's room because she was a girl – and class – having to attend school hungry on an almost everyday basis, and viewing an apple as a luxury item – shaped her experiences of school. They are also an indication of the way in which these everyday experiences at school shaped young women's conceptions of freedom and, in somecases, their decisions to join local youth organisations and participate in the wider struggle for freedom.

For most young women in 1980s South Africa, schools – despite their gender-based inequalities and violence – were the first and main space in which they began to engage in conversations and debates about emancipatory politics and the national liberation struggle.[426] In addition to the shared lived experiences of students inside Lebowa's schools, major protest events taking place elsewhere in South Africa, and organisational developments in the liberation struggle at the national level, also played a significant role in shaping the local youth movement.

The political resistance landscape in 1980s South Africa

In the mid-1980s, the South African national liberation struggle entered its final and most robust decade of opposition against the apartheid state and its bantustans. The significant role of independent trade unions and youth organisations, alongside many other progressive organisations, in driving the popular protest politics is a defining feature of the decade.[427] The independent trade union movement that proliferated in the wake of the Durban strikes of 1973 was subsequently given huge organisational impetus by the establishment of FOSATU in 1979, CUSA in 1980, and COSATU in 1985.[428] These events and the numerous local struggles

[425] Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022.
[426] Bridger, *Young women against apartheid*, p. 55.
[427] David Hemson, Martin Legassick and Nicole Ulrich, 'White Activists and the Revival of the Workers' Movement', in SADET, eds., *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2, (1970–1980)* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2006), pp. 243-244.
[428] For key texts on the revival of the labour movement and the role of workers in the South African liberation struggle during the 1970s and 1980s, see Johann Maree ed., *The Independent Trade Unions, 1974-1984: Ten Years of the South African Labour Bulletin*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); Jabulani Sithole and Sifiso Ndlovu, 'The Revival of the Labour Movement, 1970-1980, in SADET, eds., *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2,*

waged by trade unionists in their workplaces and wider communities in the 1970s brought black workers to the fore of the South African liberation struggle during the 1980s. Similarly, the 1976 Soweto uprising signalled the emergence of the radical student and youth movement as another key component of the liberation struggle in South Africa.[429] The movement held strong roots in Black Consciousness ideology and the black university campus-based politics of the late-1960s and early-1970s. However, it took on its most popular, organised and radical form following the establishment of COSAS in 1979.[430] Although initially a space of mutual coexistence and cooperation between Congress and BC activists and ideologies, COSAS adopted the Freedom Charter as its guiding political document and firmly aligned itself with the ANC by 1982.[431] A year later, in 1983, it became the largest affiliate of the newly created United Democratic Front (UDF).[432] A UDF report from 1985 claimed that the Northern Transvaal, including the Lebowa bantustan, had the largest number of UDF-affiliated local youth congresses/organisations of any region in South Africa.[433] Activists in the Ga-Sekhukhune region of Lebowa interviewed by Delius recalled that by March 1986 'there wasn't a village anywhere that hadn't formed its own youth congress'.[434]

(1970–1980) (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2006) and Hemson, Legassick and Ulrich, 'White activists'. For an in-depth discussion of the independent South African trade unions in the 1980s, with a special focus on the formation of COSATU and the federation's major campaigns during its first five years (1985 to 1990), see Jeremy Baskin, *Striking Back: A History of COSATU* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1991).

[429] For some of the key texts within the extensive body of literature on the 1976 uprising, see Julian Brown, *The Roadto Soweto: Resistance and the Uprising of 16 June 1976* (Oxford: James Currey, 2016); Sifiso Ndlovu, *The Soweto Uprisings: Counter Memories of June 1976* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2017); Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, *'I Sawa Nightmare…': The Soweto Uprising, June 16, 1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); S Mkhabela, *Open Earth and Black Roses: Remembering 16 June 1976* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishers, 2001); and Ali K. Hlongwane, 'The Mapping of the June 16 1976 Soweto Student Uprisings Routes: Past Recollections, Present Reconstructions', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 19 1 (2007), pp. 7-36.

[430] For a discussion of the Black Consciousness roots of student activism at the Turfloop campus of the University of the North in the late-1960s and 1970s see Heffernan, *Limpopo's Legacy*.

[431] Anne Heffernan, 'Blurred Lines and Ideological Divisions in South African Youth Politics', *African Affairs*, 115 461 (2016), pp. 664 – 687.

[432] The UDF was launched in 1983 as a direct response to the Botha administration's reforms, particularly the creation of the tricameral parliament, and rose to national prominence as the most popular resistance organisation in the context of the mid-1980s uprisings. There is a large body of historical literature concerning the UDF and its role in the South African liberation struggle. Key texts include Jeremy Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2nd edition, 2015); Ineke van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*; and Gregory Houston, *The National Liberation Struggle in South Africa: A Case Study of the United Democratic Front, 1983–1987* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

[433] WHP, A2496, Ineke Van Kessel: UDF Material, 'Rural Report, presented to the National Working Committee Conference of the UDF on 29-30 May 1987'.

[434] Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt'*s*, p. 23.

In the extremely rich and extensive body of historical literature about the mid-1980s township uprisings, COSAS members (often referred to as the 'young lions' and/or 'the comrades') are commonly presented as the 'shock troops' of the UDF's strategy of 'ungovernability' that involved opposing existing local government structures in the townships, replacing them with 'organs of people's power', and thereafter defending the newly created 'liberated zones' from counter-revolutionary state and vigilante forces.[435] Less literature is available on the rural uprisings that occurred in the mid-1980s in the north-eastern region of Transvaal. However, they were just as significant, and the youth played a key role. The regional literature focusing on the Northern Province and its bantustans – especially the works of Peter Delius, Ineke Van Kessel, Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, Ramadimenje Phaladi and Anne Heffernan – is important for understanding the role of the youth in the rural uprisings as well as the significant influence of activists and organisations outside of the dominant congress tradition in shaping the popular politics of the 1980s in this part of South Africa.[436] For example, this scholarship shows that the townships of Mahwelereng, Seshego and Lenyenye, amongst other spaces in the former Lebowa bantustan, were important strongholds of Black Consciousness associated organisations such as AZAPO and its youth wing AZASO in the 1980s.[437] Young activists from AZAPO and AZASO as well as those from COSAS and AZASM were all key players in the creation and proliferation of organised modes of youth politics in the schools, villages and townships of the Lebowa bantustan. Equally important were activists in Lebowa who were not members of any school or community-based student or youth organisation, but who made vital contributions to the creation and shaping

[435] The historical literature dealing with the 1980s township uprisings is extensive. For a detailed discussion of the events and actors involved in the 1980s township uprisings, see Belinda Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2004); and Tom Lodge and Bill Nasson, eds., *All, Here and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (London: Hurst, 1992). For an in-depth overview of the histories and historiography of the township uprisings, see Hilary Sapire, 'Township Histories, Insurrection and Liberation in Late Apartheid South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 65 2 (2013), pp. 167-198; and Jeremy Seekings, 'Whose Voices? Politics and Methodology in the Study of Political Organisation and Protest in the Final Phase of the "Struggle" in South Africa', *South African Historical Journal*, 62 1 (2010), pp. 7-28. For a more overly theoretical study of the township uprisings centered on the question of emancipatory politics, see Franziska Rueedi, *The Vaal Uprising*.

[436] See, Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*; Van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*; S Lekgoathi, 'Ethnicity and Identity: Struggle and Contestation in the Making of the Northern Transvaal Ndebele, ca. 1860-2005', (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2006); Ramadimetje J. Phaladi, 'The role of the youth in the struggle against the apartheid regime in Thabamoopo District of the Lebowa Homeland, 1970 – 1994: A Critical Historical Study', (MA thesis, University of Limpopo, 2008); and, A Heffernan, *Limpopo's Legacy*.

[437] See Tsoaledi D. Thobejane, *The Fight for an Egalitarian South Africa/Azania: Towards Politics of Racial Harmony and Equality* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2012).

of the politics of such formations. Such activists included veterans from national liberation organisations such as the ANC's Peter Nchabeleng and AZAPO's Dr Francis Hlahla, who involved themselves directly in the creation of political discussion groups for young people in the bantustan from as early as the mid-1970s.[438] In many parts of Lebowa, small groups of mostly young men and some young women holding regular political discussion groups in the early-1980s became the core members of local youth organisations which took on a mass form, sometimes mobilising thousands of young people in protest action, during the 1985–1986 period.

This two-year period (1985 – 1986) is referred to as the 'Lebowa uprising' and is described by various scholars as the most significant rural uprising in South Africa since the Sekhukhune and Mpondo uprisings of the late-1950s and early-1960s.[439] In this period, the struggle for freedom in Lebowa, as in the rest of South Africa, was pursued in myriad ways by an array of local and national activists as well as ordinary people with few or no links to the broader structures of the national liberation movements. By 1985 many of the political slogans, tactics, and organisational forms of the UDF and its affiliate COSAS had beenadopted by youth organisations and congresses in Lebowa. Lekgoathi, Phaladi, Heffernan and Delius, have shown in their work how this process was aided by young activists from urban areas – including COSAS members – who toured schools in parts of Lebowa, holding political meetings with local students, during their visits to friends and family in the rural areas during the school holidays. As Delius notes,

> The message that they carried - that whites got free education and free books in properly equipped schools and that black students should get the same - was one which struck a powerful chord with pupils in local schools, as did the condemnation of corporal punishment and their call for elected SRCs to give students a voice in the running of schools.[440]

It is important to note, however, that not all youth organisations in Lebowa were rooted in small political discussion groups clustered around older activists which emerged in the 1984–1986 national context of heightened political activity in South Africa. Many village-based

[438] For a discussion of the role of Peter Nchabeleng in Ga-Sekhukhune district see, Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*. For a discussion of the role of Dr Hlahla in the Mokopane area, see Thobejane, *Fight for an egalitarian SA*.
[439] Tom Lodge, 'Revolt in a Homeland: Lebowa' in T. Lodge *et al*, eds., *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (London: Hurst, 1992).
[440] Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt'*s*, p. 21.

youth organisations were created in Lebowa both before and after the mid-1980s and had a much broader and more popular base of origin in wider rural community politics. For example, the first youth organisation to capture local media attention in Lebowa was the Batlokwa Youth Organisation (BAYO) which was established in 1978 as a part of the residents' struggle against forced removal and resettlement.[441] In other parts of Lebowa, like Ga-Matlala, village-based youth congresses were only founded in the months following the unbannings of 2 February 1990. These were amongst some of the latest youth congresses to be formally established in Lebowa.[442]

There were also parts of Lebowa in which workers involved in trade unions contributed crucially to the organisation and political praxes of local youth congresses. On the southern border of the bantustan, in the chrome mining area known as the Steelpoort River Valley, the United Metal, Mining and Allied Workers of South Africa (UMMAWOSA) – a break-away union which split from the Metal and Allied Workers' Union (MAWU) in 1984 – union members played a leading role in the establishment of the Steelpoort Youth Congress (STEYCO).[443] Similarly, members of the Chemical Workers' Industrial Union working in Phalaborwa helped establish a youth congress and a parents' crisis committee in Namakgale township and surrounding villages.[444] In the villages of Lebowa where small local groups of young activists had not been formed in the early-1980s, and where links with trade unionist or national liberation activists were weak or non-existent, the increasing availability of political literature circulating in villages within the heightened context of national political mobilisation from 1983 onwards – notably the publications *Learn and Teach* and *New Nation* – was crucial in providing the conditions of possibility for the creation of youth congresses.

Some scholars have argued that the first youth congresses in Lebowa were established in the bantustan townships of Mankweng and Seshego after which village-based youth

[441] Khangale Makhado interviewed by author via phone call, 21 July 2021. Also see, *Lebowa Times*, 'Confusion surrounds removal situation', 12 October 1979; *Lebowa Times*, 'Food parcels for refugees', 7 December 1979; *Lebowa Times*, '"We go nowhere" – Matoks', 1 December 1978. For a detailed discussion of the forced removals in Botlokwa, see WHP, AK2117, J7. DA151, Aninka Claassens, 'The Myth of Voluntary Removals', *The Black Sash*, 27 1 (May 1984) p. 21.
[442] Shadrack Ramasobane interviewed by author, Kgomoschool village, GaMatlala, 24 August 2019.
[443] Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt'*s*, p. 21.
[444] *SASPU National*, 'Youth, workers are working together', 7 2 (April/May 1986).

congresses began to emerge in the neighbouring rural districts of the bantustan.[445] However, Phaladi's study suggests that youth congresses were set up in some villages of the Thabamoopo district at the same time that MACYO was established in October 1983.[446] The timeline of events presented in Phaladi's study complicates the idea of a neat movement of youth congresses in Lebowa from the townships to the villages. My research also suggests, as indicated before, that a youth organisation was established in the rural villages of Botlokwa in as early as 1978.[447]

The youth movement and the mid-1980s Lebowa uprising

The 1985 to 1986 period is generally considered to have been the height of the youth movement in Lebowa.[448] It certainly represented its most popular and violent phase of existence. In 1985 student boycotts ripped their way through at least half of the high schools in Lebowa. Particularly violent confrontations between young activists and Lebowa police took place in Mahwelereng, where the school boycott dovetailed with the consumer and worker boycott of white businesses in the notoriously racist town of Potgietersrus led by AZAPO and CCAWUSA activists in the township.[449] The primary demands of the school boycotts were an end to corporal punishment and the presence of soldiers in Lebowa's schools, the provision of free textbooks, the removal of the age limits for student enrolment, the recognition of democratically elected SRCs, the dismissal of authoritarian and/or corrupt teachers and principals, as well as transparency over school finances – specifically, over how the monies collected from students and parents were actually being spent by school

[445] See, for example, Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, 'The United Democratic Front in Lebowa and KwaNdebele during the 1980s' in SADET, eds., *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 4, Part 1 (1980–1990)* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010), p. 623; and Heffernan, *Limpopo's Legacy*, p. 157. In October 1983 the Mankweng Youth Congress (MAYCO) was formed as an umbrella body which incorporated all youth congresses in the Mamabolo area such as the Dikgale, Mathapo, Mothiba, Molepo and Solomondale youth congresses. The iconic AZASO/COSAS student activist Peter Mokaba was a leading figure involved in the formation of MAYCO and many other village-based youth congresses in Lebowa. See, Phaladi, 'The role of the youth', pp. 85 – 86.

[446] Some of the largest youth congresses established during late-1983 and 1984 in the Thabamoopo district included the Mafefe Youth Congress (MAFEYCO), the Maja Youth Congress (MAJYCO), the Mphahlele Youth Congress (MPHAEYCO), and of course, the Mankweng township based MAYCO. See Phaladi, 'The role of the youth', p. 95.

[447] *Lebowa Times*, '"We go nowhere" – Matoks', 1 December 1978. Also see Claassens, 'The Myth of Voluntary Removals'.

[448] See, for example, Lodge, 'Revolt in a Homeland'; Van Kessel, *Beyond our wildest dreams*; Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*.

[449] Thobejane, *Fight for an egalitarian SA*.

authorities.[450] In addition to these, the youth organisations in Lebowa also engaged in various campaigns that challenged the modes of local governance beyond their schools. In February 1986, SEYO organised a mass march to from Apel to Masha in an attempt to resolve a land dispute between the communities. The Lebowa police intercepted the march, however, and arrested several young men. They also shot and killed one of them, Solomon Maditsi, whose subsequent funeral became the first of many to serve as mass political rallying points in the Ga-Sekhukhune district throughout 1986. As Delius observes, 'Heavy-handed police action fanned the flames of revolt and set in motion a corrosive cycle of death and defiance'.[451]

The studies of the mid-1980s political resistance landscape in Lebowa represent one of the richest and deepest parts of the historiography of the bantustan.[452] The existing historiography shows that in the mid-1980s it was the youth organisations in Lebowa that took up the UDF's call to 'isolate the police' and replace apartheid structures of separate development with the structures of 'people's power'.[453] Youth congresses and organisations throughout Lebowa staged mass marches and demonstrations, threw stones at police and Lebowa government cars, and in some cases completely destroyed government buildings and other infrastructure. By mid-1986 schooling – and, indeed, almost every single institution and service of the Lebowa administration – came to an almost complete standstill throughout Lebowa and local youth congresses found that the attendance levels at their regular meetings shot up dramatically.[454] The massification of the youth congresses was also marked, as is often the case in South African history, by moments in which the Lebowa police, security branch, and/or SADF, murdered young people participating in protest marches and assassinated older activists with important positions in the national structures of the liberation movement.[455]

Historical narratives which depict the 1980s South African youth movement as starting in educational institutions and then bleeding out into wider township politics need to be

[450] Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt's, pp. 16 - 17.
[451] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 185.
[452] These include the numerous studies by Delius referenced throughout this paper as well as, S Lekgoathi, 'The UDF in Lebowa and KwaNdebele'; Thobejane, F*ight for an egalitarian SA*; Phaladi, 'The role of the youth'; Lodge, 'Revolt in a Homeland'; and, van Kessel, *Beyond our wildest dreams*.
[453] *Ibid*, p. 185.
[454] Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt's, p. 21.
[455] Examples of two prominent activists who were murdered by security forces in Lebowa during the state of emergency in 1986 include UDF Northern Transvaal Regional Chairperson Peter Nchabeleng and AZAPO activist Makompo Kutumela.

adjusted slightly when rural village spaces in the former bantustans are brought into consideration. As Maditsi recalls of the founding branch of SEYO in Apel and Nkoana, 'we started with having our meeting during the night, sometimes on the mountains or under a big tree, and only after time we progressed and could sometimes do it at the local schools'.[456] In these villages, and many others in Lebowa, the popular youth movement first took root outside of schools in conjunction with wider political mobilisations in rural communities before extending into the schools in the form of democratic SRC driven student politics.[457]

It was only in the late-1980s that the youth movement in Lebowa made significant headway into the majority of village-based schools and was able to form SRCs. By this time, historians agree that the youth movement in Lebowa had lost the character of 'a generational revolt against all authority' led by uncontrollable groups of comrades engaged, above all else, in the contentious and extremely violent politics of witchcraft killings.[458] Delius observes that the diminished presence of young women in the youth movement, and the fact that over two-thirds of all people accused of being witches and killed in rural Lebowa during this time were older women, indicates that this exceptionally violent political expression was deeply gendered.[459] According to Delius, by mid-1987 'after months of shootings, beatings, arrests and detentions the youth movement had effectively collapsed' in the Ga-Sekhukhune area.[460] My research suggests this was not the case in the Lebowa bantustan more broadly (including parts of the Ga-Sekhukhune district). Instead, as previously mentioned, it underwent a transformation whereby its main site of political organisation and mobilization in villages shifted from residential spaces and adjacent natural environments to high schools.

This change in character was largely the result of the repression of the youth movement by the violent campaigns of right-wing vigilante groups, conservative chiefs, the

[456] Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022.
[457] This point was echoed in a number of my other interviews. See, for example, Maphuti Hlahla, interviewed by author via phone call, 12 July 2021; Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022; Richard Sekonya, interviewed by author, COGHSTA Provincial Offices, Polokwane, 5 March 2019; Malebo Mphahlele interviewed by author, SACCAWU offices, Mokopane, 14 March 2022; Maureen Mulamo, interviewed by author via phone call, 19 July 2022; Pinky Nchabeleng interviewed by author, Apel village, Ga-Sekhukhune, 19 April 2019.
[458] This popular conception of the youth movement in South Africa's rural north is evident in almost all academic writing on the 1980s but is most clearly discussed and articulated in Van Kessel, *Beyond our wildest dreams*, pp. 298 – 300.
[459] Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*, p. 199.
[460] Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt', p.25.

SADF, and the police, operating under the shadows of the state of emergency.[461] Indiscriminate mass beatings and arrests during night-time raids of villages by Lebowa police operating under the command of SADF soldiers are remembered as a regular and horrifying occurrence of the mid-1980s.[462] Seeing the close working relationship between the SADF, Lebowa police, chiefs, and principals, in their villages helped legitimise in the minds of older residents some of the youth organisations' more militant political praxes which targeted these institutions. However, the inability of young activists in Lebowa to distinguish themselves from the unorganised groups of young people who called themselves 'comrades' while committing unethical acts, such as rape, murder and the theft of non-governmental property (which were inherently at odds with the politics of the organised South African youth movement both locally and nationally) resulted in most rural residents –including some young women activists – seeking out alternatives to the youth congresses.[463] This is the perspective given in the interviews I collected in which a hard distinction is maintained between the identity and political praxes of the comrades, on the one hand, and the excessively violent actions of young men (interestingly never women in either secondary literature or primary sources) who did not participate adequately in the democratic structures of youth organisations, and who were at the fore of excessively violent praxes such as witchcraft accusations and killings.

The issue of whether violent phenomena such as witch killings were common political praxes of youth congresses or if those who perpetuated them were 'self-contained' groups of so- called *comtotsotsis* acting 'independently of the local youth congresses' is still contested in both popular and academic historical discourses.[464] Paul Holden and Sello Mathabatha show that in the Brooklyn and Bushbuckridge areas of the Mapulaneng district, comrades of the Brooklyn Youth Organisation (BYO), were directly involved in the killing of five elderly

[461] *Ibid*, pp. 16 - 17.
[462] During the national state of emergency, the South African Defence Force (SADF) occupied parts of Lebowa where the youth – sometimes in alliance with older rural residents and migrant workers – pursued militant campaigns in line with nationalist rhetoric to render their villages ungovernable. SADF camps were set up outside most of Lebowa's major townships and in serval parts of the interior including outside the boarding schools at Zebediela – where students from urban areas had been engaged in contentious politics since the aftermath of the 1976 Soweto uprising – and outside the neighboring villages of Apel and Nkoana which constituted the core branch of SEYO. The SADF also set up camps in many of the traditional authority's offices and schools in Lebowa's villages during the state of emergency. Maurice Nchabeleng interviewed by author, Apel village, Ga-Sekhukhune, 20 April 2019; also see, Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*.
[463] van Kessel, *Beyond our wildest dreams*, pp. 120 – 126.
[464] Lodge, 'Revolt in a homeland', p. 122.

women accused of practicing witchcraft in 1986. They argue that the campaign against witches was just one indication 'that while youth organisations were an immensely powerful transformative force, they could also act in negative ways'.[465] They also claim that in this part of Lebowa during 1986, 'youths also tried to regain or maintain patriarchal control over women' as evidenced in the fact that 'many women were press-ganged into resistance activities'.[466] However, from the testimonies of female comrades from youth organisations in other parts of Lebowa my research suggests this was certainly not a characteristic feature of the politics of the organised youth movement in the whole of the bantustan.

Although the issue of witchcraft killings is perhaps the most researched aspect of the 1980s rural uprisings in the northern Transvaal and is often written about as a defining feature of the politics of the South African youth movement in its rural form, the majority of the former youth activists that I interviewed for this study distanced themselves from this form of political violence. Only one of them claimed to have been directly involved in such an act – she asked to remain anonymous in the telling of this story.[467] She was ten years old at the time and had snuck out of her mother's house during one evening in the early-1980s, following her older brother to a secret meeting being held in the bush outside the village where plans were being made to organise against the repressive officials of Kgoshi B.K. Matlala's chieftaincy who had been engaged in a violent campaign of terror against suspected 'congress' people in the Ga-Matlala area since 1980. She remains 'haunted' by the memories of what she witnessed and was part of on that day. The meeting was informed that one of B.K. Matlala's supporters who had been responsible for the destruction of several homes in the area had been

[465] Paul Holden and Sello Mathabatha, 'The Politics of Resistance, 1948-1990', in Peter Delius, ed., *Mpumalanga: History and heritage* (Durban: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal Press, 2007), p. 437.
[466] *Ibid*, p. 437.
[467] Studies focused explicitly on the phenomenon of witchcraft accusations and killings in Lebowa include, for example, Edwin Ritchken, 'Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge: Struggles to Define Moral Economies Within the Context of Rapidly Transforming Political Economies, 1978-1990' (PhD Thesis, Wits University, 1995); Edwin Ritchken, 'Burning the Herbs: Youth Politics and Witches in Lebowa.', *Work in Progress*, 48 (July 1987), pp. 17-22; Niehaus, 'Witchcraft and the South African Bantustans', pp. 41-58; Niehaus, 'Witchhunting and Political Legitimacy', pp. 498-53; Gerhard Schutte, 'Understanding Ritual Killings: Witchcraft Accusations and Social Transformation', *Indicator South Africa*, 2 4 (1985), pp. 14-16; Ron L. Anderson, 'Keeping the Myth Alive: Justice, Witches and the Law in the 1986 Sekhukhune Killings' (B.A. thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1990). The issue of witchcraft is also a major component of the main texts on the 1980s rural uprising in Lebowa, such as: Jeremy Keenan, 'Reform and Resistance in South Africa's Bantustans' *South African Review, 4* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*; van Kessel, *Beyond our wildest dreams*; and Lodge, 'Revolt in a homeland'. For other studies which discuss the subject as part of broader analyses of the youth movement and the South African liberation struggle in Lebowa, see S Lekgoathi, 'The UDF in Lebowa and KwaNdebele'; A Heffernan, *Limpopo's Legacy*; and Phaladi, 'The role of the youth'.

apprehended and taken to the mountains. She proceeded with the group to the mountain where they proceeded to kill the man and set his body alight. Although he was called a witch, there was nothing spiritual or otherworldly about this label. In this instance, like many others, a witch was simply an ally of the apartheid regime who set themselves against the will of the people.[468] The rest of the women and men I interviewed all insisted that they had never participated in witchcraft killings and that such acts were perpetuated first and foremost by the apartheid and Lebowa state agents and, secondly, by groups of young people in the villages who called themselves comrades but who did not attend the regular meetings nor participate in the everyday, non-violent political praxes of local youth organisations.[469] It is to these everyday political praxes of rural youth organisations, and comrades' recollections thereof, that attention now turns.

Female comrades and everyday emancipatory praxes in rural Lebowa

According to oral history testimonies, being a female comrade in rural Lebowa meant more than simply turning up to the mass demonstrations, protest events, political funerals, and all-night vigils,that characterised mass modes of popular politics in the 1980s. There were many young women and men growing up in Lebowa during the 1980s who found themselves as part of the crowds at such events. However, it was only by attending the regular political meetings, which mostly took place at night in the natural environs on the outskirts of townships and villages, and by participating fully in the less spectacular everyday activities of local youth organisations (including the organisation and mobilisation for such events) that a far smaller number of young women became known in their communities as comrades. In discussing the role of women in the Manganeng Youth Congress (MAYCO) Rudolph Phala, former secretary of MAYCO, explained in an interview,

> You see, we must distinguish between the tribal authority's way and our way. With us, women were there participating and active, they were talking, they were loud, there was none of this gender division in decision making or discrimination that women cannot talk on this or participate in this forum, they were there. Even in night meetings they were there, even in mass meetings

[468] Anonymous interview, 2019.

[469] See, for example, Raesibbe Engelina Matheba interviewed by author and Kefuoe Maotoane, Linteng village, Lebowakgomo, 17 February 2022; Sarah Leje interviewed by author and Kefuoe Maotoane, Linteng village, Lebowakgomo, 17 February 2022; Zebediela Traditional Authority Women's Unit group interview, Maureen Mulamo interview, Pinky Nchabeleng interview, Maurice Nchabeleng interview, and others.

> they were allowed, and very radical themselves in fact in their own right, in things they were doing themselves. I remember one time they were blocking a road from police, young girls of the youth congress, and they were very active and radical.[470]

The everyday political praxes and campaigns of youth organisations in rural villages brought them into varying levels of confrontation with chiefs and officials of the Lebowa administration. A well-documented aspect of this in the existing secondary literature is the way in which youth congresses put pressure on chiefs to hand over the books detailing the tribal authority's expenditure of funds collected from taxes on the local populations. Details of such events taking place in the villages of south-eastern Lebowa during December 1985 are provided by Delius.[471] Phaladi's study focuses on the Chuene area of south-western Lebowa, where the extractivist tendencies of the local traditional authority were so extensive in the 1970s and 1980s that almost every aspect of community life was commodified and taxed by the chieftaincy. In Ga-Tšhwene location there were six taps installed, with the use of funds collected from a special levy placed on all households, which were supposed to supply water to the residential area on a communal basis. However, the local chief, Kgoshi Simon Tšhwene, imposed a rule that 'every time, a drawer of water had to pay 10 cents for a tin [of water] and that money was taken to the royal house'.[472] Phaladi shows that the issue of financial accountability and the commodification of resources historically treated as commons, such as water, were the main grievances that fuelled serious conflict between comrades and the chiefs in the Chuene area in 1985.[473] A similarly unpopular practice of water taxation was in place in Dithabaneng village in Ga-Mphahlele and became the central grievance articulated in the first campaign of the Dithabaneng Youth Congress (DAEYCO).

A less frequently explored aspect of the interactions between the organised youth and chiefs in existing literature relates to the challenges made by the former towards the gendered forced labour practices of the chieftaincy. It was common practice in the villages of the Lebowa bantustan – and in some parts of present-day Limpopo – for the chieftaincy to regularly demand unpaid labour by female residents. This work was predominantly

[470] Rudolph Phala, interviewed by author, Parliamentary Village, Polokwane City, 6 March 2019; Also see, SRWA members, group interviewed by author, Komani Disability Centre, Apel village, 19 October 2019; and, Maurice Nchabeleng, interviewed by author, Apel village, Ga-Sekhukhune, 20 April 2019.
[471] Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt', pp. 21 – 22.
[472] Phaladi, 'The role of the youth', p. 106.
[473] *Ibid*, p. 109.

agricultural and involved labouring on either the chief's enclosed fields or white owned farms without compensation. However, it sometimes also entailed constructing, cleaning and maintaining government buildings (such as hospital and clinic grounds), digging trenches and laying foundations for roads, clearing out commonages for future development projects, and many other tasks.[474] During the mid-1980s, village-based youth organisations throughout Lebowa began to challenge – and in some cases successfully put an end to – this particular aspect of the exploitative relationship between women and the chieftaincy.[475]

'We said at that time that no woman is insignificant and that women should stop going to the tribal office when they were called by the chief because they were never called there to have a voice in community issues; they were only going there to be made to work for the Boers or the chief's wife'.[476] This recollection by Shadrack Ramosobane, a leading figure of the youth movement in Kgomoschool village of Ga-Matlala, was echoed by SEYO activists and ordinary people I interviewed in many different parts of the former Lebowa bantustan.[477] For example, Emily Mashilo, a resident of Sandsloot village in the Mapela area of north-western Lebowa who was never involved in political organising of any kind in the apartheid era, credits the radical youth movement of the 1980s with having done very little to improve the lot of women in rural societies aside from 'chasing away those bloody headmen who used to make us work on the Boer's farms'.[478] Archival and newspaper records also give insights into moments and spaces in mid-1980s Lebowa in which chiefs, principals, and other officials of the bantustan administration were forcibly removed from their positions of authority and homes in rural villages by local youth organisations and forced to move to other parts of the

[474] Zebediela Traditional Authority Women's Unit, group interviewed by author, Traditional Authority Office, Moletlane village. 23 March 2022.

[475] In the Thabamoopo district, in 1984, DAEYCO comrades were informed by youth from the neighbouring Maralaleng village that the chief, Kgoshi Mphahlele, was forcing mothers to work on his commercial tomato farm without any pay aside from surplus tomatoes. DAEYCO held a public meeting in Dithabaneng village where the decision was taken that they would march to the farm and close the tomato project in protest of the exploitation of the mothers from Maralaleng. This was followed by a call from DAEYCO for a complete boycott of Kgoshi Mphahlele's tribal offices and his privately owned shop because 'he was exploiting the mothers' and 'also selling water to his people'. See, Phaladi, 'The role of the youth', pp. 106-110.

[476] Shadrack Ramasobane interviewed by author, Kgomoschool village, GaMatlala, 24 August 2019.

[477] See, for example, Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022; Richard Sekonya, interviewed by author, COGHSTA Provincial Offices, Polokwane, 5 March 2019; Pinky Nchabeleng interviewed by author, Apel village, Ga-Sekhukhune, 19 April 2019; Philippa S and Freeda M, interview 24 August 2019; and Queen Nchabeleng, interviewed by author, Limpopo Provincial Treasury Offices, Polokwane City, 4 March 2019.

[478] Emily Mashilo, interview 27 March 2019.

bantustan, like Seshego, under the close protection of the police.[479] The removal of corrupt and abusive elites from positions of authority is an indication of one of the ways in which the youth movement adopted and expanded the popular political principle 'a chief is a chief by the people' that had been a central aspect of the rural uprisings of the 1940s and 1950s. For many older women in Lebowa's villages who were not part of the youth movement, such as Mashilo, the removal of abusive chiefs, headmen, and other unpopular governing elites from positions of authority, was emancipatory when it allowed them to reclaim control over their labour, regain access to the commons, and reduced their everyday experiences of violence.

The youth's desire to constitute themselves in a fashion that was antithetical to the authoritarian and discriminatory political form of the tribal authority structures – as they existed in 1980s South Africa – meant, as alluded to in the previous quotation from Phala, that excluding women from any position in or activity of the youth organisations on the basis of their gender was simply never an option. To do so would be to mimic one of the most popularly despised aspects of chiefly rule under the apartheid regime – the fact that ordinary women (regardless of social circumstances or marital status) could be taxed, policed, and have their labour forcibly extracted by chiefs but never included as equals in the decision-making forums and structures of the chieftaincy. Limpopo is one of a number of places in South Africa where elite women, both before, during and after the colonial-cum-apartheid period, have maintained a highly visible and powerful presence in leadership positions of various chieftaincies.[480] The many attempts by the apartheid state and by some quarters of the Lebowa bantustan administration to formally bar women from occupying permanent positions in local governments and, in some extreme instances (as was the case in parts of Ga-Matlala in the 1950s and 1980s as well as in Ga-Sekhukhune in the early-1960s) to prevent women from engaging in public meetings entirely, was a massive grievance amongst most

[479] See for example, *Lebowa Times*, 'Avoid bloodshed: Induna told to quit', 13 June 1986; *Lebowa Times*, 'Campaign against magoshi and MPs?', 16 March 1984; and LPA LDOH, 124, 11/3/5 (1), Accidents and Violence, 1986.

[480] See Sekibakiba Lekgoathi, 'Gender Relations, Women and Politics among the "Transvaal Ndebele", ca. 1500s to the early 1900s' in SADET, eds., *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 9: The Power and Authority of African Women in southern Africa and in the African Diaspora during 'precolonial' and colonial times* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishing, 2021); and, 'Women and political and ritual leadership in Africa since 1800: The Modjadji Rain Queens of Bolobedu' in SADET eds., *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 9: The Power and Authority of African Women in southern Africa and in the African Diaspora during 'precolonial' and colonial times* (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publishing, 2021).

women in rural communities in the 1980s and one which had a great impact on the development of the youth movement. As Phala recalls,

> essentially at the core of all of the struggles waged by the youth was a search for equality, with whites and within our own communities, because even in those villages where they fought against tribal authorities, it was a fight for equality. I remember at one time in many villages youth would fight to sit in on tribal authority meetings and bring women with them because 'youth' was both young men and women. But in Manganeng we also had a concrete layer of older women who participated in the struggles of the 1950s and who we as MAYCO and NOTPECO[481] worked with and who also come to such meetings at the tribal authority. Most of the older people we worked with were women and so I can say they were important for making this an intergenerational thing and not just a struggle for the interests of young boys.[482]

By taking a leading role in political praxes aimed at fostering a new relationship of accountability and transparency between local governing authorities and ordinary community members in rural societies the youth congresses in Lebowa, as was the case in other parts of South Africa during the mid-1980s, were self-consciously putting the emancipatory political prescription of the Freedom Charter – that 'the people shall govern' – into practice in ways that moved them subjectively far beyond their narrow interests as students or youth. In fact, on many occasions, youth organisations in Lebowa explicitly articulated their campaigns as being fought 'on behalf of the parents' or as 'our parents' struggles' and were aimed at creating stabilising features of everyday life (premised on shared ideas of what a dignified human life should look like) in rural communities.[483] For example, some youth organisations engaged in road-safety campaigns in which they erected homemade signs cautioning drivers to slow-down on parts of the roads where white farmers where known to regularly (and often intentionally) knock-down women workers waiting for transport.[484] In villages near Seshego, members of local youth congresses operating under the guidance of UDF regional organiser Rejoice Mabudafhazi, worked alongside local women's groups in creating community gardens and creches.[485] In parts of Ga-Sekhukhune, pairs of

[481] The Northern Transvaal People's Congress (NOTPECO) was formed during the 1980s as a migrant labour organisation, similar to Sebatakgomo of the 1950s, and was the only migrant labour organisation affiliated to the UDF in the 1980s. See, van Kessel, *Beyond our wildest dreams*, p. 91.
[482] Rudolph Phala, interviewed by author, Parliamentary Village, Polokwane City, 6 March 2019.
[483] Khangale Makhado interview, 21 July 2021.
[484] WHP, A2496, *Ineke Van Kessel: UDF material*. Joyce Mabudafhazi interviewed by Ineke van Kessel, Mankweng township, 2 September 1990.
[485] *Ibid*.

SEYO comrades – one female and the other male – were regularly deployed into households to try resolve conflicts between husbands and wives as well as between parents and their children. According to Maditsi, who was often partnered with Richard Sekonya in conducting this kind of conflict resolution and political care work in Apel and Ga-Nkoana, women in the community sometimes approached SEYO to assist them in stopping gender-based violence in their homes but 'this was awkward and very challenging', presumably because of existing gender and generational norms, and SEYO comrades here had more success in resolving conflicts between politically conservative parents and children who wanted to join the youth movement.[486]

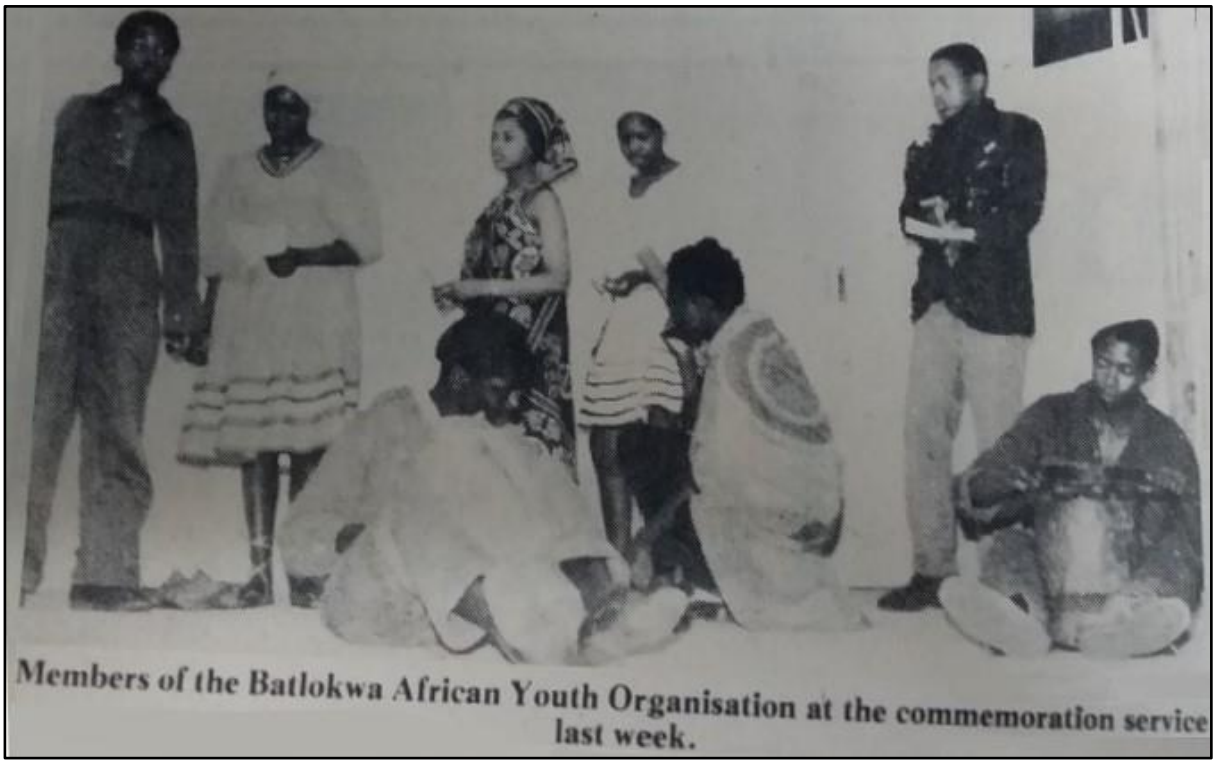


Figure 2: Performers at the BAYO event held in Mankweng township on 19 October, 1979. Photograph adapted from, *Lebowa Times*, 'Poetry tells of student feelings', 26 October 1979.

Another important insight that has come to the fore in my oral history research is the importance of what activists call, 'freedom dramas', as a main political praxis of youth organisations in Lebowa, often driven by female comrades.[487] Freedom dramas, according to

[486] Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022. Also see Richard Sekonya, interviewed by author, COGHSTA Provincial Offices, Polokwane, 5 March 2019.
[487] Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022; Khangale Makhado interviewed by author via phone call, 21 July 2021; Maphuti Hlahla, interviewed by author via phone call, 12 July 2021; Maureen Mulamo, interviewed by author via phone call, 19 July 2022.

Maditsi, were a series of plays, poetry readings, dance performances and/or monologues that members of youth congresses would plan and rehearse in their villages and then perform alongside members of other organisations during political rallies. The goal of the freedom dramas was political conscientisation and much time was spent by young activists combing through publications such as *Learn and Teach* magazine in order to understand what the major protest events unfolding inside the country were and to relate these to their audience through their artistic performances.[488]

According to Maditsi, freedom dramas were one of the regular praxes of SEYO in which young women from the local high school were often keen to participate without much persuasion from herself and the other three female comrades who were core members of the Apel/Nkoana branch.[489] Photographic coverage of an event held by the BAYO (see figure 2), the first youth organisation launched in Lebowa in 1978, showing young women participating alongside young men in an artistic performance held in Mankweng township to raise political and financial support for the struggle against forced removal in Botlokwa, suggests that 'freedom dramas' were indeed a praxis of a number of youth organisations in Lebowa in which young women were regularly involved.[490]

Aside from the importance ascribed to freedom dramas as a central praxis of the youth organisations (a point made in many of my interviews with women but only one of the men I interviewed) there is little else in my interviews regarding the everyday political work of youth organisations that distinguishes male and female comrade's recollections of the 1980s. The crowds mobilised in pursuit of other campaigns by SEYO in this area, such as against the poor quality and high fares of buses, the exploitative labour practices of the chieftaincy, and issues relating to land access, did not usually involve many young women outside of the core groups of female comrades already active on an everyday-basis in the branches of SEYO. However, it is important to note that campaigns such as these were direct efforts by the youth to ameliorate and overcome some of the everyday challenges women faced in rural communities as a result of the crisis of social reproduction produced by the imposition of betterment policies and tribal authorities during the apartheid era. Thus, despite the relatively small number of female

[488] Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022.
[489] *Ibid*.
[490] *Lebowa Times*, 'Poetry tells of student feelings', 26 October 1979. Also see Khangale Makhado interviewed by author via phone call, 21 July 2021.

comrades involved, the youth movement in Lebowa was a mode of politics that included emancipatory struggles against gendered processes of land dispossession, enclosure of the commons, and women's political and economic marginalisation under Bantu Authorities. These struggles have deep historical roots in the popular uprisings of the 1940s and 1950s, which are explored in chapter two. The youth took up these struggles in various ways and to different degrees of intensity, frequency, and duration, and brought them into the revolutionary political context of the 1980s.

Comparative reflections on female comrades' experiences in urban and rural contexts

The idea that the 1980s South African youth movement was a space of gender equality is one which was emphasised consistently by the women participants I interviewed. It is also an idea which was equally consistently articulated to Bridger in her interviews with Soweto's female comrades.[491] Young women's politicisation in the South African youth movement also included a struggle against existing gender norms, patriarchal authority and other traditional modes of controlling women. Young women were not mobilised into the youth struggle through their traditional gender roles and as members of youth organisations they were often distinguishable from other women in the rural townships and villages because of the way they dressed (appropriating masculine clothing styles), the way they spoke (entwining liberatory political rhetoric and critique into everyday conversations), and the people they associated with (the predominantly male comrades). According to Maditsi, 'As a comrade in the youth movements, there was no difference as to whether you were a woman and he was a man, we were two comrades… and we worked side by side in everything'.[492]

As was the case elsewhere in South Africa, becoming a comrade in the villages and townships of Lebowa involved the adoption of an assertive femininity by young women which challenged existing generational gender norms.[493] This often led to uncomfortable dynamics inside their own homes as relatives, particularly parents, doubted the reasons why their

[491] However, in what is the theoretically weakest part of her study, Bridger invokes a variant of the old false consciousness thesis in explaining away her participants claims in regard to the importance of their experience gender equality by inserting 'what is known' in historical writings on the township uprisings about the inequalities experienced by women in the youth movement as victims of misogyny (and sometimes sexual assault) by male comrades and in accessing leadership positions in the formal structures of the movement. See, Bridger, *Young women against apartheid*, pp. 210 – 215.
[492] Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022.
[493] *Ibid*, p. 201.

daughters were spending so much time 'in the bush, at night,' with groups of boys.[494] As Maditsi recalls of her experience of the SEYO at the time of its establishment in Apel village in 1984,

> We were only two or three women in the movement, we obviously wanted to see many more women involved, maybe ten or fifteen, because otherwise our parents would keep saying, "yoh, you are always with boys, and we don't know what you are doing with these boys". It was very frustrating. I remember one time I found my father gossiping and saying, "you know her, maybe she is in a *meeting* with those boys" – implying I was having sexual relations. I just walked in and said "Dumela", and stared at him straight. I think they understood then. Everybody then understood where I am. It's not easy as a woman to live in a rural area because remember our culture and tradition perceives women as the other. A practical example is women wearing trousers. We were the first women wearing trousers. I used to like wearing my brothers' kaki uniform trousers. You see, they don't see women wearing that. In fact, every day, even today, they still have certain patriarchal perceptions.[495]

There was no gendered division of labour or formal separate structures for women in any of the youth organisations in Lebowa prior to 1988. In that year, and in line with the national policies of the South African Youth Congress (SAYCO), some branches of SEYO – specifically, the Manganeng, Nachabaleng, Apel and Nkoana villages – attempted to create women's structures in their youth organisations. The aim of this was to provide a new space in which female comrades, a noted minority in SAYCO structures throughout the country, could gain a stronger foothold and voice within the movement and, in so doing, forge connections of solidarity between the youth and women in communities.[496] However, as previously mentioned, by the late-1980s many of the young women who had first been politicised in these youth organisations/congresses became increasingly involved in SRCs and other school-based structures, such as religious student organisations, which had finally taken off in most of Lebowa's villages by this period, and little by way of formal youth organisation continued outside of the schools.[497]

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[494] Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022.
[495] *Ibid*.
[496] Rudolph Phala, interviewed by author, Parliamentary Village, Polokwane City, 6 March 2019; Maurice Nchabeleng interviewed by author, Apel village, Ga-Sekhukhune, 20 April 2019. Also see, WHP, A2496, *Ineke Van Kessel: UDF material*. Danmaris Maditsi, Sauwe Idah Mamaganyane, and Shirley, interviewed by Ineke van Kessel, Ga-Sekhukhune, August 1990.
[497] WHP, A2496, *Ineke Van Kessel: UDF material*. Danmaris Maditsi, Sauwe Idah Mamaganyane, and Shirley, interviewed by Ineke van Kessel, Ga-Sekhukhune, August 1990. Also see, Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022.

Bridger argues that almost all female comrades in South Africa were first politicised inside schools as members of SRCs before joining local youth congresses and national organisations, such as SASM and COSAS.[498] This argument only holds true for one of the female comrades that I interviewed, Maphuthi Hlahla, who first joined student politics as a member of the Shikoane High School SRC prior to joining the regular meetings of the Seshego Youth Congress.[499] However, most of the women I interviewed describe different trajectories in which they first became active in local youth organisations and activist networks outside of their schools before joining SRC structures. Maditsi, for example, was a member of SEYO in the neighbouring villages of Apel and Ga-Nkoane from 1984. She only became involved in the SRC politics of her local high school in 1989 up until she matriculated in 1992.[500] Maureen Molamu, a founding member of the Mahwelereng Youth Congress (also launched in 1984), describes herself as having been 'deeply involved' in Azapo activist networks and campaigns in Mahwelereng prior to becoming involved in the efforts to establish an SRC at the boarding school she attended near Jane Furse in the early-1980s. She never held a position on the SRC.[501] The oral testimonies I have collected suggest that the idea that SRCs were the most common first point of entry for most young women into organised modes of emancipatory politics in South Africa is an over-generalisation of what transpired across the country. In many of Lebowa's villages, local youth organisations composed of both schooling and non-schooling youths were active prior to the establishment of SRCs in local high schools.

One of the key claims made by Bridger is that the liberation movement was a double-edged sword for most female comrades. While most women felt liberated from conventional gender roles as a result of their participation in the youth movement; since then, they have experienced 'stigma and judgement' within their township communities because of their previous breach of gender norms.[502] As Bridger explains, 'many find navigating personal, romantic relationships with either activists or non-activists difficult' and this is reflected in that fact that two-thirds of the female comrades she interviewed are unmarried 'and cite their involvement in the struggle as the primary reason for this'.[503] This is contrasted with the male

[498] Bridger, *Young women against apartheid*, p. 56.
[499] Maphuti Hlahla, interviewed by author via phone call, 12 July 2021.
[500] Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022.
[501] Maureen Mulamo, interviewed by author via phone call, 19 July 2022.
[502] Bridger, *Young women against apartheid*, p. 193.
[503] *Ibid*, p. 201.

comrades she interviewed who *are* married but, specifically, not to female comrades. According to Bridger, 'female interviewees openly discussed their rejection by male comrades' as well as their wider communities' judgement of their militant political pasts in their interviews. Many lament the fact that they were unable to go further in their studies because of their role in politics. However, she notes that 'despite all this stigma they have been subject to, female comrades otherwise generally looked back on their pasts positively'.[504]

In my own interviews with Lebowa's female comrades, involvement in the liberation struggle is not represented as having been a 'double-edge sword'. None of my interviewees suggested that women's adoption of assertive femininities and challenges against gender norms during their participation in the youth organisations resulted in their stigmatisation in rural village and township communities. All of the women I interviewed were (or had been) married and several of them actually met their husbands in the youth movements or shortly thereafter. Furthermore, in the rural bantustan context of Lebowa, female comrades do not report their involvement in the youth movement as being a barrier to them furthering their academic studies. The issue of one's class background and one's individual capacity for classroom-based academic learning were the primary reasons why some comrades were unable to continue as successful students after their involvement in the youth movement and others were not. For example, when asked if involvement in the youth organisations had negatively impacted female comrades' ability to continue their studies and secure good jobs in the post-apartheid period, Maditsi explained,

> Luckily, I think most of them went back to school. Like Windy,she was coming from a better background than me because her father was owning his own business and her mother was working in a factory and she came from Soweto originally. And Damarisa also went to a teaching college. And Sekonya also went to a college and kept on studying. I think it was not that hard for them. Remember in those days it wasn't everybody who came from a poverty-stricken family, because other comrades were having fathers who worked in factories in Johannesburg, they could eat well and they were not struggling to afford basics. My comrades who were able to go to college, they were able to afford, myself when I came during break at home, I find no meal on the table and I have to go back to class without anything to eat. And even if I want to go to school, even if I had a dream about going to tertiary, no one could afford to help me do that anyway… But if I think back in terms of individual comrades, I can say that career wise and skills development and how people view things is

[504] *Ibid*, p. 204.

> different. Either 90 or 80 percent of people who were comrades back then, now they are independent and working. It didn't produce a redundant generation.[505]

Like Soweto's female comrades, Lebowa's female comrades generally highlight the ways in which their individual lives have improved as a direct result of their involvement in the struggle. The experience that they gained as organisers in the youth movement – even those like Maditsi who were unable to go further than matric in their studies – created the conditions of possibility for many of them to gain positions in trade unions, NGOs, and government departments in the post-apartheid period. Beyond this, female comrades emphasised that participating in the male dominated youth movement gave them a lasting sense of empowerment which they have carried into their adult lives. This sense of empowerment, however, is narrated in contrast to the other women of their generation who did not join the struggle, and who remain subject to feelings of inferiority and confinement because of their gender.[506]

The radical gender equality experienced between male and female comrades during the 1980s youth movement is no more a general feature of the contemporary political landscape of rural South Africa than the youth organisations and congresses themselves.[507] Gender-based violence against women in households – not just perpetuated by men but also very commonly by women against other women – is, according to the women I spoke to, stark evidence of this.[508] However, the narratives of female comrades also report that because of the 'inner- strength and self-value' they gained during their time in the youth movement, none of them have allowed such violent relationships or patriarchal discourses into their homes and families as adults.[509] All the women interviewed for this project reflected on their time as comrades in the student and youth political formations of the 1980s as emancipatory – a

[505] Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022.
[506] See, for example, Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022; Maphuti Hlahla, interviewed by author via phone call, 12 July 2021; and Maureen Mulamo, interviewed by author via phone call, 19 July 2022.
[507] See, Itumeleng Mafatshe, 'Gender Politics and Activism: A comparative study of African National Congress Youth League branches in Seshego (Limpopo)' (MA thesis, Wits University, 2015).
[508] The issue of violence in the relationships between young wives and their sisters-in-law and mothers-in-law in many rural households was highlighted in a number of interviews but especially by Maditsi. See, Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022.
[509] See, for example, Maureen Mulamo, interviewed by author via phone call, 19 July 2022; Sauwe Maditsi interviewed by author via phone call, 7 April 2022; Maphuti Hlahla, interviewed by author via phone call, 12 July 2021; and Queen Nchabeleng, interview 4 March 2019.

moment in which they engaged in a self-fashioned movement out of a position of subalternity and took control of their own lives and destinies.

Conclusion

This chapter offered a gendered and subaltern perspective of the history of the South African youth movement in the Lebowa bantustan during the 1980s. In keeping with radical feminist methods, I have attempted to understand and narrate this history from a perspective which centres the political experiences of women. I began by outlining the process of secondary school expansion in South Africa during the 1970s and noted that by the end of the decade the number of girls in Lebowa's rural schools had dramatically increased. This process that unfolded in the 1970s, as Delius observes, created the conditions of possibility for the development of a new collective subjectivity or 'generational consciousness' amongst young men and women in the villages, closer settlements and townships of Lebowa.[510] It was this collective subjectivity, based on shared experiences and popular discourses of youth culture – aspects of which travelled to the bantustan schools from the urban townships of South Africa and the wider world – which was mobilised and expressed in the political praxes of local youth organisations/congresses during the 1980s. In the Lebowa bantustan – an archipelago of several non-contiguous territories with different settlement types and modes of local governance – there were hundreds of local youth organisations established during the period late-1970s to early-1990s.

In considering the everyday political praxes of local youth organisations, I have argued that despite the relatively small number of female comrades involved, the youth movement in parts of Lebowa sometimes gave significant organisational impetus to popular struggles against abusive forms of chiefly rule, land dispossession, forced labour, excessive taxation, and enclosures of commons, that were previously championed by older women in past decades. Rural women's struggles for equality, dignity, and socio-economic survival in the crisis-ridden contexts of bantustan villages are an important part of the history of the youth movement in Lebowa even though they were not of the same scale or level of intensity, frequency, or duration, as they had been in the context of the rural uprisings of the 1940s and 1950s. Finally,

[510] Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, pp. 153-158.

by placing my research into conversation with Bridger's work on Soweto's female comrades, I have shown that gendered accounts of the 1980s youth movement, based on the oral testimonies of the women who participated in it, often vary significantly in rural and urban South African contexts. However, a strong sentiment expressed by women in both spatial contexts is that being a female comrade in the 1980s South African youth movement was an emancipatory political experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

Women wage workers, the labour movement, and emancipatory politics in Lebowa in the 1980s

The revival of the South African labour movement in the wake of the 1973 strikes and its subsequent role in the mass anti-apartheid politics of 1980s and early-1990s is a well-documented subject in the historiography of the South African liberation struggle.[511] Many of the key studies of the 'emerging' trade unions and black workers' politics in South Africa since the early-1970s are by activist scholars who were involved in the radical labour movement.[512] As a result, the evolution in the thematic concerns and debates in South African labour history mirrored the transformations in the workers' movement since its revival in the early-1970s. For example, scholars in the 1970s such as Phil Bonner and Jon Lewis, were primarily concerned with organisational issues, union structures, and relations between organised workers and the state.[513] During the 1980s township uprisings, the issues of race, nationalism, gender, and the relationship between unions and communities, came to the fore of South African labour studies.[514] Scholarship from within the new school of labour history, which emerged alongside the broader tradition of South African social history, uncovers and explores the ways in which space, gender, and generation, shaped different forms and experiences of black working class self-organisation during the late-apartheid period.[515] In the 1980s and 1990s, South African labour studies was dominated by positive readings of the role

[511] For key texts on the revival of the labour movement and the role of workers in the South African liberation struggle during the 1970s and 1980s, see Maree, *The Independent Trade Unions*; Sithole and Ndlovu, 'The Revival of the Labour Movement'; and, Hemson, Legassick, and Ulrich, 'White Activists'. For an in-depth discussion of the independent South African trade unions in the 1980s, with a special focus on the formation of COSATU and the federation's major campaigns during its first five years (1985 to 1990), see Baskin, *Striking Back*.

[512] As mentioned in the introductory chapter, examples of such activist scholars who have written about the emerging unions and played active roles in such unions and associated organisations include Phil Bonner, Ari Sitas, Eddie Webster, Johan Maree, Steven Friedman, Rob Lambert, David Lewis, and Sakhela Buhlungu. See, Ulrich, 'Only the Workers', p.14

[513] See, for example, Phil Bonner, 'The Decline and Fall of the ICU: A case of self-destruction?' in Eddie Webster, ed., *Essays in Southern African Labour History* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1978); and Jon Lewis, *Industrialisation and Trade Union Organisation in South Africa, 1924-55: The rise and fall of the South African Trades and Labour Council* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 227.

[514] This is reflected in Helen Bradford, *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in rural South Africa, 1924- 1930* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1988).

[515] For an excellent overview of the old and new schools of South African labour history, see Nichole Ulrich, 'Only the Workers Can Free the Workers: The origin of the workers' control tradition and the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee (TUACC), 1970-1979', (MA thesis, Wits University, 2007), pp. 36-39.

of trade unions in society. However, as labour historian Nicole Ulrich observes, more recent scholarly literature has begun to challenge these optimistic perspectives.[516] In the post-apartheid period, debates in labour history have been largely concerned with the relationship between trade unions and the ANC government as well as the relationship between unions and community-based 'social movements' which emerged in South African townships and shack settlements during the early-2000s.[517] A dominant argument within this literature, as Ulrich explains, is that 'under the new democracy COSATU has become bureaucratic and is too closely aligned to the ANC to challenge government policies and play a transformative role in society'.[518]

The nexus or relationship between community struggles and workers' struggles has been one of the key concerns and central debates in South African labour history since the early-1970s. However, historical analyses have seldom considered the re-emergence and growth of the democratic labour movement in South Africa from the vantage point of women workers in the peripheral spaces of the former bantustans.[519] Nor has sufficient scholarly attention been given to the question of how the ideas and practices of women labour activists dovetailed with, and in some cases shaped, the political praxes and conceptions of freedom of other radical movements and community struggles in this period. This chapter aims to provide a gendered perspective of the labour movement, and women workers' involvement in struggles for freedom more broadly, in the Lebowa bantustan during the late-apartheid period. In so doing the chapter explores the issue of gender and the experiences of women in Lebowa's labour relations systems at different scales – between workers and managers,

[516] Ulrich, 'Only the Workers', p. 39.

[517] Much of this scholarship on the social movements of the early-2000s has been critical of COSATU's relationship with the ANC government and accuses trade unions in democratic South Africa of failing to provide organisational impetus and institutional support to the ongoing struggles of working class and poor South Africans. See, for example, Prishani Naidoo and Ahmed Veriava, 'Re- membering Movements: Trade unions and the new social movements in Neoliberal South Africa' *Centre for Civil Society*, Report No. 28 (2005). and Mthetho Xali, 'Seeking Trade Union and Community Organisation: Linkages in the Cape Town Metropolitan area: possibilities of new trade unionism and new social movements', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 41 1-2 (2006), pp. 123-147.

[518] Ulrich, 'Only the Workers', p. viii.

[519] This is in line with Iris Berger's conviction that South African labour history has been too narrowly conceived to deal with the issue of gender and the experiences of women in particular. However, Berger's women-worker-centred perspective has also been critiqued by scholars, such as Nichole Ulrich, for failing to fully consider the impact that gendered identities may have had on the organisational forms and praxes of emerging trade unions. See, Iris Berger, *Threads of Solidarity: Women in South African industries 1900-1980* (London: James Curry, 1992); also see, Ulrich, 'Only the Workers', p.80.

amongst workers, and at a wider structural level – in Lebowa and adjacent 'white' areas. Throughout this exploration attention is focused on the ways in which space shaped the conditions of possibility for women wage workers' mobilisation and engagement in radical modes of resistance politics in their workplaces and communities.

The two areas of the South African economy in which the majority of African women are employed, both during apartheid and in the post-apartheid era, are domestic work and farm labour.[520] In this regard Lebowa was no exception. In this chapter, however, I focus on two other areas of the economy in which women from the bantustan villages and townships constituted a significant portion of the workforce. These are factory work in the firms of the decentralised/border industries and retail work in the so-called 'white' towns adjacent to Lebowa.

Industrial decentralisation and women factory workers in Lebowa.

Outside of Seshego and Lebowakgomo, both former political capitals of the Lebowa bantustan, are two of the largest industrial parks created as a result of the apartheid government's policy of industrial decentralisation and 'homeland development' in the Northern Transvaal.[521] Most of the buildings were constructed during the late-1970s and occupied by a wide range of industries in the 1980s, under the auspices of the LDC, as part of the ruling National Party's (NP) revitalised programme of industrial decentralisation. This programme aimed to entice local and international businessmen (never women) to relocate or establish their industries closer to the 'large pools of resettled labour' in the bantustans.[522] The labour force employed at firms and factories in decentralised areas had two notable characteristics. Firstly, they had prior experience of acute dispossession, forced removal, and resettlement in closer settlements and townships adjacent to the industrial areas. Secondly, most companies employed an equal number of women as men, and in some cases, women

[520] See, Judith Nolde, 'South African Women Under Apartheid: Employment Rights, with Particular Focus on Domestic Service and Forms of Resistance to Promote Change', *Third World Legal Studies*, 10 10 (1991), p.211.
[521] Most other white towns bordering the bantustans also had industrial parks. For example, Mahwelereng and Lenyenye both have significant industrial parks located between themselves and formerly 'white' towns of Potgietersrus (Mokopane) and Tzaneen, respectively.
[522] William Cobbett, 'Industrial decentralisation and exploitation: The case of Botshabelo', *South African Labour Bulletin*, 123 (1987), p. 95.

workers commuting daily from the closer settlements and townships of the bantustans dominated factory lines in border industries.[523]



the Murder and Robbery Unit in Brixton launched an intensive search for her and her car, a Mazda, which had also disappeared.

The detectives, under command of Colonel Floris Mostert, found the stolen car on the evening of Monday, January 2 in the Modjadji district. The vehicle had been where the vehicle was found.

At midday on Tuesday the body of Mrs Levy was found in a plantation just north of Tzaneen. The arrested man will appear in court in Johannesburg this week, and an inquest into the cause of death of Mrs Levy will also be held this week. R.E.

Back to work for most

SESHEGO — Thousands of factory workers streamed back to the Seshego industrial area this week as most factories reopened for the new year. Many more will open next week.

The Seshego industrial centre is the largest in Lebowa, according to the Lebowa Development Corporation (LDC).

With the help of the LDC, a total of fifty large and small industries are housed in this area, creating almost 4 000 jobs. An LDC brochure states that this constituted 44% of industrial employment in Lebowa and an investment of R46 million, which is 70% of the entire industrial investment in Lebowa.

Black and white factory owners in the area engage in the manufacture of a wide range of products such as clothing, radio components, metal frames and leather articles. Others engage in repair work, such as upholstery, mechanics, motor rewinding and tyre retreading.

The employees come from Seshego and the outlying areas of Moletji, and are ferried from their homes in the mornings and back in the evenings in buses of Lebowa Transport.

The factories are seen to be providing a highly essential service, absorbing the large number of unemployed people in the rural areas.

Workers at one of the factories in Seshego, Audiopower, assemble parts of a microphone.

Figure 3: Newspaper article with photographs of women factory workers in the Seshego industrial area. From *Lebowa Times*, 'Back to work for most', 6 January 1989.

Research on Ciskei and QuaQua shows that while black workers in general were paid low wages in the decentralised industries, 'it is women's wages that are so extremely low, for the simple reason that women [were] legally blocked, through the implementation of influx control measures, from marketing their labour outside [the bantustans]'.[524] Employers in the decentralised industries took advantage of women's lack of freedom of movement which was often maintained by authoritarian relationships with husbands and in-laws within their homes and not just by the apartheid state.[525] In addition to maintaining low wage levels, a common reason why employers preferred to employ women in the bantustan factories was that rural

[523] Cobbett, 'Industrial decentralisation', p. 97.
[524] Alan Hirsch, 'Bantustan Industrialisation with specific reference to the Ciskei, 1973 – 1981' (MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1984), p.180.
[525] A Hirsch, 'Bantustan Industrialisation', p. 180.

women offered a more 'docile' and 'stable' workforce because 'clearly they could not afford to lose their jobs'.[526] The photographs of factory workers in the Seshego industrial area depicted in the *Lebowa Times* newspaper clipping above (figure 3) are a good visual indication that, similar to QuaQua and the Ciskei, Lebowa's factories employed a significant number of women from the bantustan.

Unlike women in betterment villages, women living in closer settlements did not have rights to even the most basic subsistence agriculture either as wives or as heads of their own households. This meant that survival strategies such as backyard vegetable growing or the harvesting of wood, grasses, soil and food sources from village commonages were either heavily restricted or prohibited entirely.[527] In this way women in closer settlements near industrial growth points in the former bantustans were more adversely positioned in the South African labour relations system than both their rural and urban counterparts. Despite being doubly exploited on the basis of both their race and gender, women who worked in Lebowa's industrial firms and factories explained in an interview that keeping hold of their jobs was important because it was their 'way of fighting against the poverty, hunger, hardship, and endless hours of purposeless sitting around', awaiting them at home if they were to lose their jobs.[528] This was the major pull of the decentralised industrial areas for cheap black labour in the bantustans. The preference for employing women was based on racist colonial discourses as expressed by a factory manager, 'This (African) society is a women's society – the women work. The men are very lazy'.[529] This, coupled with the fact that women could be paid less because of their gender, meant that factories and firms in the bantustans were spaces where many women from the bantustans joined the formal workforce in the late-apartheid period.

By the mid-1980s most production lines in the factories of the Ciskei and QuaQua bantustans were overwhelmingly dominated if not exclusively composed by women workers. Oral testimonies from factory workers and labour activists suggests that the gender balance of the workforce in the Habakuku and Seshego industrial parks of Lebowa was more even.

[526] Mr J. Day quoted in *Ibid*, p.180.
[527] Habakuku women workers, group interviewed by Kefuoe Maotoane and Sarah Bruchhausen, Lebowakgomo, 17 February 2022.
[528] *Ibid*.
[529] Cobbett, 'Industrial decentralisation', p. 104.

This can be seen in a passage from Raesibe Engelina Matheba's interview about her experience in Habakuk industrial park during the 1980s:

> I worked at Lebowa Brian Beef in 1980. I can't remember until which year. We worked with white people from Pots'rus [Potgietersrus]. We used to call them baas Ben and baas John. It was a butchery, we used to take the meat to Pots'rus, what is now called Mokopane, and we would bring the meat to the butchers there. We were 100 workers in total: 50 men, 50 women. I was treated the same as the men at Lebowa Brian Beef. We were all only getting paid R35 a month and every Friday we would just get a bit of meat. And we could only walk to that place because we didn't have transport. The men were cutting the meat and we, as the women, were packaging it and sending it to customers… I then worked at another firm run by some Chinese[530] bosses who were making china. I'm sure it was more than 2000 of us workers there and maybe 70 percent of us women… We were there for so long until [around 1987] they let us go after saying that the Chinese need to go back to China.[531]

A defining characteristic of the apartheid policy and project of creating decentralised industrial areas was the exclusion of their workforces from the rights and benefits extended to black workers in South Africa as part of the legislative reforms of the late-1970s and early-1980s. One of the most significant changes in legislation brought about by the 1979 Wiehahn Commission was that independent trade unions with African workers were once again 'allowed' to operate in the factories and other work places of South Africa. Initially, under the new legislation, men and women deemed migrant workers were excluded from this right to join trade unions and to engage in legal strike action as were those employed in the two most important sectors of the economy for black women workers – agricultural and domestic labour.[532] However, as Roger Southall explains, 'the progressive union movement… was utterly opposed to the exclusion of migrants, not only as a matter of principle but also because some of them (notably AFCWU, GWU and several FOSATU affiliates) had a majority of migrants in their ranks'.[533] As a result of a strong and unified push by the independent unions against the exclusion of migrants from the right to join unions, these restrictions were removed under the Labour Relations Act of 1981.[534] However, it was a decade later, in the

[530] In reality Taiwanese.
[531] Raesibe Engelina Matheba, interviewed by Kefuoe Maotoane and Sarah Bruchhausen, Linteng village, 17 February 2022.
[532] Roger Southall, 'Migrants and Trade Unions in South Africa Today', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 20 2 (1986), p. 171.
[533] Southall, 'Migrants and Trade Unions', p. 173.
[534] *Ibid*, p. 173.

early-1990s, that workers in the decentralised industries of Lebowa finally defeated the bantustan government's attempts to bar them from the right to trade unionism.

As Cobbett's work shows, industrial areas like the Seshego and Habakuk industrial parks in Lebowa were established and maintained as 'state-subsidised sites for the exploitation of workers, devoid of any meaningful protection for workers such as Industrial Councils, health and safety legislation, control of wages, regulation of overtime etc'.[535] The demise of apartheid and the bantustans in the early-1990s signalled a sudden end to the state subsidies offered to businesses in the decentralised industrial areas and a consequent process of massive de-industrialisation involving widespread factory closures and large-scale job losses.[536] Nevertheless, in 2005 Lochner Marais *et al* argued that some formerly decentralised areas in or near the former bantustans continued to act as 'relatively vibrant' sites of industrial development and their factories remained an important space of wage employment for rural dwellers, particularly women, despite the generally low wages and poor working conditions which also remain as characteristic features of these workplaces.[537] Since the time of the research published by Marais *et al*, however, factories in the bantustan industrial areas, such as Botshabelo in former QuaQua, have continued to close down and, while the few remaining factories do continue to provide an important source of income to groups of women and men living in the rural peripheries, these spaces can hardly be called vibrant sites of industrial development.[538]

[535] Cobbett, 'Industrial decentralisation', p.97.
[536] Lochner Marais *et al*, 'Manufacturing in the Former Homeland Areas of South Africa: The Example of Free State Province', *Africa Insight*, 35 4 (2005), p. 39. For additional studies of the firms and factories of the former bantustans in post-apartheid South Africa see, for example, Moserwa R. Phalatse, 'Abandoned industrial spaces in post-apartheid South Africa: The implications for women in Mogwase', *South African Geographical Journal*, 83 2 (2001), pp. 167-172; and, Rachel Slater, 'Deindustrialisation, multiple livelihoods and identity: Tracking social change in QuaQua South Africa', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 19 1 (2001), pp. 81-92.
[537] Marais *et al*, 'Manufacturing', p. 39.
[538] See for example, Teigue Payne, 'Lots of factories, no jobs', *Mail and Guardian*, (15 August 2011). Accessed online at: https://mg.co.za/article/2011-08-15-lots-of-factories-no-jobs/.

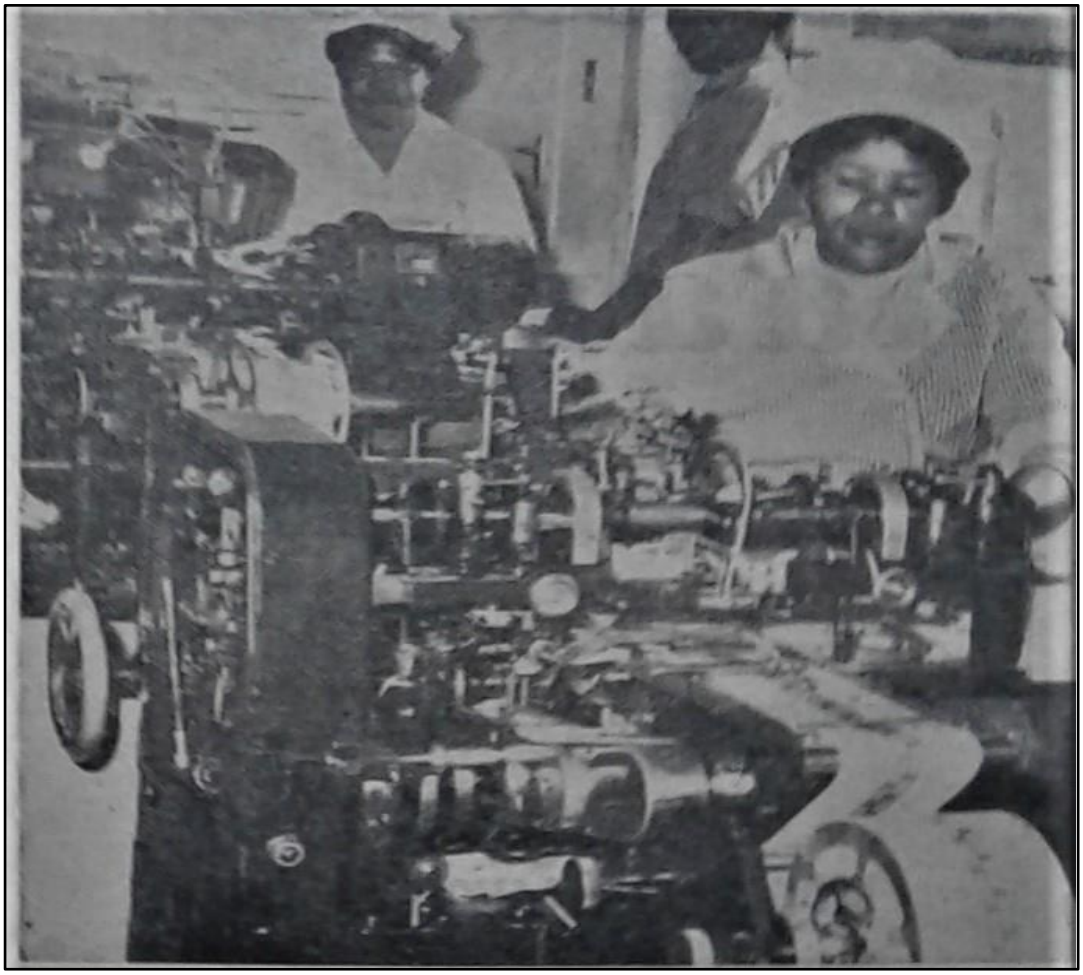


Figure 4: Photograph of women factory workers from the Border Confectionary Industry firm in the Seshego industrial area. Adapted from *Northern Review*, 'One big happy family: Border Confectionary go from strength to strength', 28 June 1974.

The Seshego industrial park resembles a huge assembly line of industrial buildings – warehouses, processing plants, and factories – stretching along a bulk of the 9km road separating the township from Polokwane. The Habakuk industrial park (commonly called 'Habakuku' by residents of nearby villages) is located at about the same distance outside Lebowakgomo, a former 'internal growth point' of Lebowa, situated 56km from Polokwane. Today, more than half of the buildings and warehouses in the Seshego industrial park are either under-utilised or entirely empty. The situation is even worse in Habakuku. In 2013 the Lepel-Nkumpi municipality reported that the Lebowakgomo industrial area (which includes Habakuk industrial park) had 'a vacancy rate of approximately 95%'.[539] Since then, despite

[539] Kayamandi Development Services, *Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality: Local Economic Development Strategy*, (2013). Accessed online at: http://www.lepelle-nkumpi.gov.za/?q=idp_20_21.

repeated public statements by local government in support of reinvigorating the former decentralised industrial parks in order to help off-set the devastating levels of unemployment in the municipality, they still only have about 5 percent rate of occupancy.[540]

Unlike in Seshego, the Habakuk industrial area is hardly visible from the main road between Lebowakgomo and Burgersfort from which it is accessible. The derelict factory buildings are set off at a distance from the main road, in what was historically residential and communal land of Mphahlele communities prior to the massive resettlements of the 1960s and 1970s which allowed for the creation of the industrial park. At the junction between the main road and the Habakuk industrial area is a petrol station adjoined by an extravagant double story house both of which are owned by the infamous black industrialist, Habakuk Shikoane, after whom the industrial park is named. The municipality explains the main cause of the 95 percent vacancy rate in Habakuku as being 'greatly due to the fact that there is limited to no infrastructure and services available in the industrial area'.[541] Yet numerous police cars, ambulances, fire trucks, construction vehicles and mini buses are parked neatly in a chain at the front of Shikoane's house, itself situated at the very top of the road leading into the industrial park. With a tall guard hut looming over the property gate, it would probably be impossible to access the industrial park by car without Shikoane knowing about it.

Outside of Shikoane's mansion, there are few signs of state services or a functioning local economy aside from one or two working factory sites, a small police station and a few backyard vegetable gardens. Most commercial buildings are empty and in a state of ruin. People have transformed some factory sites into residential areas by building houses on them. Only a few kilometres down from Shikoane's house, the road through the park becomes impassable by car. Huge piles of garbage forming small koppies have grown over decades along the road. When I visited the industrial park in February 2022, these dumps were by far the most active sites of labour – aside from the petrol station at the park's entrance – as about 30 people, mostly women, were engaged in the informal work of waste picking. In the period between 1994 and 2019, 95 percent of the firms and factories in Habakuku stopped functioning. With the loss of state subsidies there was little incentive for

[540] *Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality: 2020-2021 Reviewed Integrated Development*. Accessed online at: http://www.lepelle-nkumpi.gov.za/?q=idp_20_21.
[541] *Ibid*.

companies to continue their operations in such a remote part of the province. Many relocated their operations to the industrial areas outside Mokopane and Polokwane, where they are much closer to markets and transport networks, while others sold off their equipment and shut their doors entirely. According to Engelina Matheba, during the post-apartheid era, workers at the few remaining factories in Habakuku continued to face severe repression:

> We couldn't even consider a strike because if he [Habakuk Shikoane] saw you in a group, he would tell you to never come back to his firms. There were people who attempted a strike, I wasn't involved because I was working in the kitchen, they went on strike and he simply told them they no longer worked at his firm. He fired them and replaced them and acted like a Boer in the times of apartheid. He used to have a lot of apartheid in him.[542]

The above description of the coercive relationship between management and workers is familiar of the apartheid past. Yet, the strike mentioned by Matheba took place at the Habakuk Cane Furniture factory in the early-2000s, almost a decade after the transition to state democracy and the ascent of the ANC to the status of ruling party in 1994. In Linteng, a closer settlement village established about 10km south of Habakuku as a result of processes of forced removal and resettlement in the early-1960s, Matheba and some of her former co-workers, shared their memories of Habakuk Shikoane as a quintessentially exploitative capitalist with little or no regard for the dignity or wellbeing of his workers. Their memories are a stark contrast to the image of Shikoane portrayed by the ANC. When Shikoane died in a car crash outside Lebowakgomo in 2016 the ANC described him as:

> one of the foremost black industrialists who was widely known for his business acumen and innovation through his Habakuk Cane Furniture which employed hundreds of our people. Developed under difficult conditions, his cane furniture entity survived harsh conditions under apartheid and became one of the flagships of black entrepreneurship.[543]

The eulogy goes on to discuss Shikoane's rise within the ranks of the Communist Party and later the ANC in Orlando, Soweto, prior to the banning of the ANC in 1960 at which time he was detained and placed under a five-year banning order forcing him to relocate his cane furniture operations to Hammanskraal. No mention is made of his decision to take advantage of the incentives of the decentralisation programme by moving his cane furniture business to

[542] Raesibe Engelina Matheba, interview 17 February 2022.
[543] ANC, 'ANC extends condolences to the family of struggle veteran Habakuk Shikwane', *Polity*, (4 March 2016). Accessed online at: https://www.polity.org.za/article/anc-anc-extends-condolences-to-the-family-of-struggle-veteran-habakuk-shikwane-2016-03-04.

the newly established industrial area outside Lebowakgomo in 1978. However, the personal wealth he was able to accumulate as manager of the company once relocated to the Lebowa bantustan remains central in the ANC's narrative of his continued role as a 'distinguished cadre and stalwart of our glorious movement' in the late-apartheid period:

> Habakuk never used to miss an opportunity make financial contributions to the ANC in exile from proceeds of his cane furniture. Until his untimely death, Habakuk remained a member in good standing of the ANC and SACP. He remained committed to the ideals of a higher and better social order in which all persons live in harmony and in peace.[544]

My interviews with women who worked at Habakuk Cain Furniture confirm my argument that the ANC's portrayal of Shikoane as a struggle veteran dedicated to universal emancipatory ideas, and his company as a 'flagship of black entrepreneurship', is a type of symbolic violence and historical erasure of truth.[545] In response to the claims made in the ANC's eulogy, one woman who wishes to remain anonymous, insisted that from the time of his arrival 'Shikoane made it impossible for us workers to get freedom here'.[546]

The Habakuk industrial park and the closer settlements outside Lebowakgomo which supplied its workforce constitute one of the spaces of the former Lebowa bantustan with the bleakest history of the labour movement and organised modes of liberatory politics more generally. 'You must remember', Matheba explained, 'the unions were not there in Habakuku because if one person would join a union, they would fire all of you. I only saw unions actively much later [in the late-1990s], before we were scared that you could all get fired because they didn't want people joining unions. So, we just hung on because we knew they didn't want unions'.[547] In my research the only evidence of direct worker action in the firms of Habakuku I have uncovered is a report in the *Lebowa Times* of a boycott and strike at the Habakuk Cane furniture factory in 1986. The article does not shed light on what actually happened during this strike. Instead, it reported the Lebowa government's allegation that the strike had been initiated by two officials of the Black General Workers' Union (BLAGWU) who

[544] *Ibid*.
[545] Sarah Leje, interviewed by Kefuoe Maotoane and Sarah Bruchhausen, Linteng village, 17 February 2022.
[546] Anonymous, interviewed by Kefoue Maotoane and Sarah Bruchhausen, February 2022.
[547] Raesibe Engelina Matheba interview 17 February 2022.

operated out of the offices of the Northern Transvaal Advice Office (NTAO) in Pietersburg and its branches in the Seshego and Mahwelereng townships.[548]

Khangale Makhado, a former organiser for NTAO, recalled that, 'it was a different challenge organising the women in the bantustan factories where [the Labour Relations Act] did not apply and we had a big challenge in Lebowakgomo, at Shikoane Industries, for example.'[549] Recalling the immense authority Shikoane had over workers in Habakuku, Matheba explained, 'Yes, he was the one that started all these firms and he would tell everyone else that black people are not to be paid well here. He would say, "here at Lebowakgomo we don't pay black people well", and all the bosses listened to him.'[550] In the 1980s, the average wage earned by workers in the firms of Habakuku was R35 per month – which was very much in line with the wage policy of decentralised industrial areas in other bantustans at the time. By the early 2000s it had only increased to an average rate of R100 per month – about R20 more than the minimum monthly wage of metal workers in apartheid South Africa in 1975.[551] During apartheid, the ability to pay workers in the decentralised industrial areas extremely low wages was guaranteed by the repressive labour laws of the bantustans. In the post-apartheid period, labour legislation is supposed to protect all workers in South Africa from such forms of hyper-exploitation, and yet the coercive practices of Shikoane and other managers combined with a near total lack of trade unionism or other collective modes of worker activism, both past and present, in Habakuku have ensured that such practices continued well into the democratic era. In light of the dearth of organised modes of resistance politics in this space during the apartheid era, women workers described their past conceptions and practices of emancipatory politics as having been very much limited to inner domains of personal freedom and the pursuit of individual self-determination and human dignity through wage work and upward class mobility. Continuing her explanation of the repressive conditions of work and the limited prospects for any kind of collective organising in Habakuku, Matheba recalled that when working at Lebowa Brian Beef in the early-1980s,

[548] The two BLAGWU officials arrested were Theo Ramanulela, an organiser for the union, and Moss Mphahlele, the union's secretary. See, *Lebowa Times*, 'Unionists in Court', 10 July 1987.
[549] Khangale Makhado, interviewed by author via phone call, 21 July 2021.
[550] Raesibe Engelina Matheba interview 17 February 2022.
[551] In 1975 the minimum wage allowed for metal workers in South Africa under the Industrial Council agreement was R20.25 per week. See, Hirsch, 'Bantustan Industrialisation', p.172.

> Sometimes we wanted to strike, we would discuss what we dreamt we would like to do to force the bosses to see us, but we calmed each other down and said, "we must all just keep working". We would speak to the workers from Chickbelt [a partner firm in Habakuku] but we agreed we should not strike because they said they would fire all of us. We spoke and walked with those workers often. I remember a time when there were six of us talking about these things, considering a strike, but we had all been told they would fire all of us so we carried on until that firm closed down and went to Mokopane. If you had experienced that kind of poverty we were facing at home, it was very difficult to risk going on strike, you would just tell yourself you need to hold on because if you ever went on strike, they would just replace you. So that was what held us back from engaging in strikes – our plan was just to hold on.[552]

As mentioned earlier, the centrality of wages to women's survival strategies in closer settlements of the bantustans was accentuated by their severely limited access to agricultural rights in these spaces. Both betterment policies and customary law under apartheid were designed to throttle rural women's subsistence lifestyles and push them into wage labour. In theory, women residing in all closer settlements were subject to the loss of rights to, and the extreme taxation of, practices of subsistence agriculture and commoning. In practice, however, most bantustan administrations lacked the capacity – or in some cases the will – to actually police such draconian anti-poor policies in practice. For the women workers at Habakuku, the proximity of their homes to the political capital of Lebowa, Lebowakgomo, meant that both theory and practice were firmly aligned and their communities were under near constant surveillance by Lebowa authorities. Sarah Leje, whose experience of working in Lebowa was mainly as a farm worker for Lebowa Agricultural Corporation (LAC)-run agricultural schemes, moved from her grandmother's house in Botlokwa to Linteng village in the early 1980s when she got married.[553] She recalls the regular instances in which Lebowa police and administrative officials came from Lebowakgomo to Linteng and other villages designated as closer settlements to inspect people's homes and tax receipts:

> You would see this a lot when recruiters would come and hire people, the police at that time were very strict. If they found you had planted something on your land they would ask where you had gotten those things, you would be arrested and have to pay. Things such as firewood, you would be arrested if you were found with it and you would have to pay… I don't know [why], they

[552] Raesibe Engelina Matheba interview 17 February 2022.

[553] For more information on the LAC and some the initiatives it drove see, Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo', pp. 57-59; For an excellent study of various bantustan development corporation managed agricultural schemes see, Michelle Hay, 'South Africa's Land Reform in Historical Perspective: Land settlement and agriculture in Mopani District, Limpopo, 19th century to 2015', (PhD Thesis, Wits University, 2015), p. 187-188.

> probably thought we were just finishing trees, but I do not know. And remember, this was our form of electricity. Here we used to also build using soil and if you had a pile at your stand and couldn't account for that, you would also be arrested. If they found you on the road holding things like a bag of soil or wood you would get arrested… Also, before I forget, the municipal officers would enter the villages and you would have to explain where you got the things you had planted. You would be arrested and have to pay. You know, sometimes you would find wet wood and you would be arrested if found with that. They used to have boundaries, if your animals crossed those boundaries they would be taken and you would have to pay for that. This was done by the Lebowa police.[554]

The proximity of the bantustan capital to Linteng probably contributed to this heavy policing of the area. The violent curtailment of women's access to alternative strategies for feeding their families and maintaining their households in Linteng, coupled with their inability to secure better jobs outside of the industrial area, were, according to those whom I interviewed, two key reasons why women workers at Habakuku felt they had little choice but to 'hold on to our jobs' and not engage in strikes or other contentious modes of worker politics.[555] This, however, was not the case for all industrial areas in Lebowa. In the Seshego/Pietersburg industrial area, women factory workers, often aided by NTAO organisers, were involved in strikes and other forms of contentious workplace politics during this period.

For example, in 1987, 50 women workers from the Rupwin Clothing factory staged a three-hour sit-in of the factory floor in demand of a pay increase to supplement their salaries which at the time were between R16 and R20 per week.[556] A year later, 450 weavers were fired from the Masana Textile plant for staging a strike demanding the recognition of their trade union, the South African Textile and Allied Workers' Union. Eventually, most of the weavers were reinstated, but 90 of them, including two shopstewards, were permanently fired as a result of their role in the strike.[557] While many of the strikes in the Seshego industrial area were violently repressed and unsuccessful in terms of meeting workers' immediate demands, their regular and cumulative occurrence had a significant impact on the labour relations system in the entire bantustan. After a meeting of the Seshego Industrial Association

[554] Sarah Leje interview 17 February 2022.
[555] Habakuku women workers, group interviewed by Kefuoe Maotoane and Sarah Bruchhausen, Lebowakgomo, 17 February 2022.
[556] SALDRU Collection, *Sowetan*, 'Clothes factory workers sit in', 12 August 1987.
[557] SALDRU Collection, *Rand Daily Mail*, 'Weavers find a helper in Lebowa MP', 7 July 1988.

(SIA), COSATU and members of the Lebowa government held at Lebowakgomo in August 1990, it was announced that due to growing concern about 'the high rate of strikes in Seshego' the SIA 'had decided to recognise trade unions'.[558] This was the first time that companies operating inside Lebowa agreed to recognise trade unions and, as such, was a pivotal moment in the history of the labour movement in the bantustan. It was in large part driven by the political praxes of the women dominated workforces in the Seshego industrial area.

From the perspective of the industrial areas discussed in this section, the history of the labour movement appears as largely bleak, with few collective victories for workers. However, this history looks entirely different when considered from the perspective of women workers living in the townships of Lebowa and working in the retail stores in the so-called 'white' towns bordering the bantustan during the 1980s.

CCAWUSA and Advice Offices in Lebowa

Although seldom acknowledged in existing academic studies of popular politics and the liberation struggle in the Northern Transvaal, during the 1980s, the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers' Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA) was the most politically active and militant independent trade union operating in Pietersburg and Potgietersrus on the border of the Lebowa bantustan. CCAWUSA provided an organisational platform for women workers in these violently racist towns to launch radical and sustained challenges to both the apartheid composition and management of stores as well as their inferior position as women in workplaces. Furthermore, in the present day Mokopane area especially, women retail workers played a leading role in forging links between worker and community struggles and mobilising these networks of solidarity into a series of successful worker and consumer protest actions culminating in a general strike and near total consumer boycott of Potgietersrus in 1985.

In March 1984, legendary trade unionist, Emma Mashishini – CCAWUSA's first full-time national organiser and vice-president – was one of the national organisers sent from Johannesburg to address a crowd of over four hundred workers that packed into the Community Advice Bureau (CAB) meeting space at the Phudutitsithaba Lutheran Church Hall

[558] SALDRU Collection, *Sowetan*, 'Lebowa companies agree to unions', 30 August 1990.

in Seshego to attended the inauguration of the Northern Transvaal regional branch of CCAWUSA.[559]



Figure 5: Photograph of part of the women-dominated crowd of more than four hundred people who attended the inaugural meeting of the Northern Transvaal Region of CCAWUSA. Adapted from Lebowa Times, Hundreds attend CCAWUSA inauguration, 23 March 1984.

As depicted in figure 5, the workers who attended this inaugural meeting were almost all women. A week after the inauguration of CCAWUSA's Northern Transvaal branch, the union held its inaugural meeting for the Potgietersrus/Mahwelereng branch, which was attended by over a hundred workers – the majority of whom, once again, were women. According to labour historian Kally Forrest, one of the defining characteristics and greatest organisational strengths of CCAWUSA in the 1980s were its exceptionally 'vibrant' and 'active' shopsteward structures. This was the organisational tier of the union (outside of general membership) which often included a significant number of women activists.[560] The 'power-base' of the Mahwelereng branch of CCAWUSA was amongst the women and men who worked at the OK Bazaars in the notoriously racist, Conservative Party (CP)-dominated town of Potgietersrus. According to Rehab Lebelo, the first CCAWUSA shopsteward for the OK Bazaars workers in

[559] *Lebowa Times*, 'Hundreds attend CCAWUSA inauguration', 23 March 1984.
[560] Kally Forrest, *Asijiki: A History of the South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union (SACCAWU)*. (Johannesburg, STE Publishers, 2005), p. 49.

Potgietersrus, 'in this town, everything started at OK Bazaar'.[561] Oral testimonies from residents in Mokopane, Mahwelereng, and in villages as far away as Sandsloot in Mapela and Linteng near Lebowakgomo, also suggest that the workforce at OK Bazaar in Potgietersrus included a particularly radical and courageous group of women who were leaders of protests and struggles for freedom in Lebowa during the 1980s.[562] As former CCAWUSA shopsteward Rebah Lebelo explained in an interview,

> I don't know how to say it but my understanding is that OK Bazaar, the staff of OK Bazaar, I can say in this language: they were controlling this whole town in terms of politics. Because when we started this boycotting, it was OK staff who started that. Because the ANC was banned but we understood where we are, where we are going, and what we wanted.[563]

CCAWUSA did not have its own offices in the Northern Transvaal. As such the union's shopstewards, administrators and organisers, operated alongside a broad range of other political activists from shared offices in the NTAO offices in Pietersburg and its branches in Mahwelereng and Seshego. It was a group of young Azapo activists including Sello and Jasser Rasebatha, Khangale Makhado, Monhla 'Winky' Hlahla, Maureen Molamu, Tsoaledi Thobejani, and a few others, who started the NTAO in 1982 with financial support from the Northern Transvaal Council of Churches (NTCC) and organisational assistance from the Black Sash and the Black Lawyers' Association (BLA). Heavily influenced by the boycotts of the Lebowa Transport Company (LTC) buses in Seshego between 1980 and 1982 – during which the struggles of workers in the industrial areas and white towns had come to the fore of public discourses – the idea behind the NTAO and its branches was to create a local organisation aimed at politically organising workers and educating them about their rights in the workplace and the need to form trade unions. This was very much in line with a characteristic feature of Azapo's politics, which posited workers the vanguard of the liberation movement. It was also in line with the discourses of the Congress tradition in the 1980s, and especially the politics of the UDF, which placed great emphasis on forging solidarity and unity between worker and community struggles in South Africa.[564]

[561] Rehab Lebelo, interviewed by Joel Pearson, Mahwelereng township, 12 March 2020.
[562] Emily Mashilo, interview 17 May 2019. Habakuku women workers group interview 17 February 2022.
[563] Rehab Lebelo, interviewed by Sarah Bruchhausen and Joel Pearson, Mahwelereng, 14 March 2022.
[564] For more on the history of the UDF in Lebowa see chapter four. Also see, van Kessel, *Beyond our wildest dreams*; and, Delius, *A lion amongst the cattle*.

Lebelo describes herself as having always been an ANC supporter – 'I've grown up in the ANC, and I like to assure you I still like the ANC'.[565] But, she recalls that during the mid-1980s, 'when we [CCAWUSA] planned an administration for boycotting the town, we used Azapo because they were operating [above ground]. We were just a few members of staff, by that time we were about seven or eight, and we were using our own money to buy the materials, not going to try raise money because we would be arrested, we were using our own money to go to Azapo's office here at Hlahla's place'.[566] The surgery of Dr Francis Hlahla, a prominent Azapo stalwart and community physician who remains a well-known figure of the liberation struggle in Limpopo, was the building in Mahwelereng that housed the Mokerong Advice Office (MAO) branch of NTAO. The women activists, like Lebelo, who operated out of the advice offices held overlapping affiliations and memberships with multiple political organisations involved in liberatory politics. Lebelo and her fellow CCAWUSA shopstewards, organisers and administrators conceptualised a variety of tactics to mobilise mass support for workplace struggles in the 'white' towns and national-level campaigns while working at the MAO office. With the help of other non-union activists at the advice office, they were able to develop strategies to support campaigns driven by Azapo and the UDF, such as consumer boycotts and the free Mandela campaign.[567]

CCAWUSA activists in the Northern Transvaal had a significant degree of autonomy from union leaders based in Johannesburg. However, the victories won by CCAWUSA at a national level were important in guiding and bolstering local struggles. For example, in 1982 CCAWUSA was able to achieve recognition agreements with several major retailers, including OK Bazaars, at a national level. A year later, in 1983, the union won a major victory at OK Bazaars when it brokered a maternity agreement – the first of its kind in South Africa – which stipulated that women workers could not be dismissed for falling pregnant and were allowed one-year unpaid maternity leave, after which they could return to their jobs.[568] It was only in 1984, once CCAWUSA had gained an organisational foothold in the townships of Lebowa, that the managers of OK Bazaars stores in the Northern Transvaal were forced by their workforces

[565] Rehab Lebelo interview 14 March 2022.
[566] *Ibid.*
[567] *Ibid.*
[568] Adrienne Bird, 'Working Mothers win new rights', *The South African Labour Bulletin*, 13 (4/5), 1983, pp. 2-5.

to recognise CCAWUSA and abide by the stipulations of agreements brokered between the union and the company at a national level.

When it came to organising campaigns at the OK Bazaars in Potgietersrus, Lebelo and her colleagues were entirely responsible for deciding what kind of action they would engage in, what demands or prescriptions they would be issuing to the store managers, and how they would mobilise community support for their struggles:

> We decided everything of what we print in terms of content… [and] our approach [for] meeting with women in the community was simple and straight forward. We just said, 'look man, eish, are you aware that we as women are very much oppressed'. We start by the working environment, because that time I was CCAWUSA/SACCAWU [South African Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union], we talk about the working environment… we started as conscientizing other women regarding our oppression starting at work with salary… Money is the only thing that can rise up everybody, and everybody can relate, so we started with discussing the workplace. [Then] we talk about how no woman was allowed to have a house in Mahwelereng. My mother when she got this house, they said 'you can't get this house because you are a woman'. She went to my brother and took his ID to come and submit it at the [superintendent's] office. That is how we had a house by that time. Yes, then we started from that level that we have been saying we have triple oppression. Then we show them number 1, 2 and 3, so it's important that we rise up… It was difficult but the things that I like from that time, you know that thing of 'an injury to one is an injury to all'. That idea started from the union side of it. And it was very, very, useful by that time because that 'injury to one is an injury to all' it was very reasonable. People understood it and believed it. I don't know how to put it, but it was very, very, very important. The only thing that we didn't like by that time was this thing of saying 'pass one pass all'.[569]

By 1985 the pace and intensity of popular protest was picking up rapidly in the Lebowa bantustan. Spurred on by the organisational efforts of COSAS and the Azanian Students' Movement (AZASM) activists from 1982 onwards, young men and some women in Lebowa's townships and many of its villages began to form themselves into youth organisations and congresses which organised various campaigns against particular local grievances and in line with national political praxes of the UDF and other organisations in the liberation

[569] Rehab Lebelo interview 14 March 2022.

movement.[570] AZAPO, which had its stronghold in the Mokopane area, at this time was organising consumer boycotts in 'white' towns all over the Northern Transvaal.[571]



Figure 6: Photograph of a black woman being searched by a white police officer outside the OK Bazaars in Pietersburg. Adapted from the *Northern Review*, 'Publiek deursoek: Polisie gee rede', 30 September 1988.

In April 1985, the activists at the MAO issued pamphlets and held meetings throughout Lebowa – some in the name of CCAWUSA, others AZAPO – calling for a consumer boycott of Potgietersrus in protest against the discriminatory practices of white managers and customers against black workers and customers in the stores. The activists at the advice office were named in the local press as the Mahwelereng Action committee, and their role in organising the consumer boycott – which was immediately followed by class boycotts in which students at various high schools in Mahwelereng 'took to the streets in support of their

[570] See chapter four for a discussion of the youth movement in Lebowa.
[571] Thobejane, *The fight for an egalitarian South Africa,* p. 46.

parents who demanded living wages from various companies in town' – was vital in helping retail workers to win major concessions from the store management.[572] The primary grievances CCAWUSA submitted to OK Bazaars' management on behalf of the workers during this boycott were 'the searching of Black people, the behaviour of the manager and security staff, and the treatment of the Black staff and customers' (see figure 5).[573] The consumer boycott was effective and after a few weeks OK management reacted to the situation by dismissing the Potgietersrus branch manager and the head of security staff as well as reinstating a worker 'who was earlier sacked when she protested against the searching of people'.[574]

The school boycotts and marches by students initiated in solidarity with the workers were violently repressed by the Lebowa police but not before students, armed with Molotov cocktails, set fire to all government buildings in the township as well as the houses and vehicles of several members of the Lebowa government and police force. As Tsoaledi Thobejani recalls of these events: 'The mayhem that students caused were a foretaste of more deadly confrontations that would follow'.[575] The declaration of the state of emergency in 1986 and the violent wave of state repression and vigilantism it unleashed upon black people and the spaces in which they lived and worked throughout the country greatly impacted upon all existing modes of resistance politics, including the labour movement.

The biggest national strike of OK Bazaars spearheaded by CCAWUSA took place during the state of emergency. The strike began in December 1986 and lasted three months into 1987. It was the largest retail strike in South African history at the time and, like its local forerunners, it combined militant worker action, consumer boycotts, as well as solidarity strikes by workers in several of OK Bazaars' suppliers and the wider retail industry. The primary demand put forward by CCAWUSA in the context of the OK Bazaars strike was that 'workers should not be victimized and the gap between salaries of management and that of workers should be lessened'.[576] The strike continued despite the heavy-handed responses of

[572] Thobejane, *The fight for an egalitarian South Africa*, p. 46.
[573] *Lebowa Times*, 'Boycott to continue until…', 5 July 1985.
[574] *Ibid*.
[575] Thobejane, *The fight for an egalitarian South Africa*, p. 46.
[576] Bridget Kenny, *Retail worker politics, race and consumption in South Africa: Shelved in the Service Economy*. (Johannesburg, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 84.

store managers and state authorities and after a period of 10 weeks CCAWUSA eventually 'won a record across-the-board [wage] increase and the reinstatement of many dismissed workers.'[577] In the end, the strike involved over 10 000 CCAWUSA members at more than 500 OK Bazaar shops and warehouses throughout South Africa. An estimated 400 retail workers employed in the Northern Transvaal were actively involved.

By that time Lebelo was a member of the CCAWUSA Coordinating Committee for the Northern Transvaal and was responsible not only for generating awareness and mobilising support for the strike. In particular, she was tasked with forging solidarity with consumers who came from distant villages in Lebowa to shop in stores in 'white' towns in order to access a wider range of products at lower prices. She was also responsible for managing the relief fund established to support the hundreds of workers on strike in the region. At the same time, she was also using her union work as a platform to conscientise rural women about the ANC and encouraging them to form local women's groups to discuss and understand the organisation, which according to Lebelo, at least since the ascent of the Mandela generation in the 1950s, has been explicitly concerned with the question of women's emancipation.[578] In this regard Lebelo was quite exceptional, as she was one of the few women who were ANC-aligned in the CCAWUSA branch structures of the Northern Transvaal which, as a region, fell firmly on the Black Consciousness (BC) side of the Congress versus BC split which gripped the union at all levels between 1986 and 1989.[579] Reflecting on her experience of simultaneously being a trade unionist, a supporter of the banned ANC, as well as a working mother and head of her household, Lebelo provides the following illuminating insights into what the everyday work of political organisation actually entailed for women activists involved in the liberation struggle in the Lebowa bantustan during the state of emergency:

> I would get the bus here at the Mahwelereng bus stop and take a seat at the back. I was wearing like a green doek and long dresses by that time I was 30 years old or so, if I'm not wrong, maybe 28 or 29. So I was wearing big dresses like a granny. I covered those materials, those pamphlets calling for boycotts, in the dook and then I got onto the Lebowa bus. I would sit on one of the back seats where there is a window in the corner. When the bus stopped, I prepared them in the dook, to see how many I had, and as the bus started to move, I would just throw them out the window. To each and every bus stop. At the

[577] *Ibid*, p. 84.
[578] Rehab Lebelo interview 14 March 2022.
[579] Forrest, *Asijiki*, pp. 105-106.

> same time, this was happening by another one on the line to Zebediela, the other one on the line to Mashashane. Yes, each stop must get some, and then at the end of the road of the bus, when all the material was finished and by that time its night deep in the rural areas, and I don't know where to sleep. I would go to another house next to the bus stop and say, 'eish, I'm lost and stranded and blah blah blah blah'. And then in morning when the bus goes back, I get on and I've got nothing in my hand now. That's how we survived for boycott and how we manged to reach everybody… It was not very difficult, but it *was* difficult, but not very difficult because, if you are a leader, you will be informed, you need to be, you know, generally informed, and when you are informed you realise, no I don't have enough information or enough power because information is power of course. So, I don't know how to put it: yes, I've started to be a leader of SACCAWU and when time goes on, I became a member of the ANCWL, but secretly. And even after 1994, yes, I was chairperson of the ANCWL branch for some 3 years. So, these things [SACCAWU and ANCWL] were two alliances, yet we are just one and the same, but initially I started to be active in the Saccawu. Unfortunately, in the Saccawu there was not a forum of Basadi [women]. Everything was done together. But I learned a lot when I was coordinating this, Northern Transvaal region, something like that, so I learnt a lot doing coordinating, going up and around everywhere, that is when I realised that politically when I am outside the workplace, I must also take care of the community and not just the workers at the work place. So, when I am out from work, I continued my leadership. I think it was worth it. That I should as take care of the community and not just stand as an individual. That's how we started to organise Basadi.[580]

The collective nature of both the conceptions and practices of emancipatory politics by CCAWUSA retail workers, as illustrated in the quotation above, are very different to the ones that dominated the discussions and practices of factory workers in the decentralised industrial areas. The women working in the Habakuku industrial area were ultimately unable to mobilise collectively, whereas, by being part of the labour movement, women workers in Mahwelereng and other townships were able to connect community struggles and local women's issues with their union's campaigns and, in so doing, mobilised political support on a mass scale. Furthermore, the women workers at OK Bazaars and other stores in the white towns, with the assistance of their union and a broader alliance of local and national activists, were the ones who brought highly visible and disruptive modes of emancipatory politics out of the bantustans and into these notoriously racist spaces.

[580] *Ibid.*

Another ANC activist woman from the Lebowa bantustan who found a political home in the union was Maphuthi Hlahla – a relative of AZAPO activists Monhla Hlahla and Dr Hlahla in Mahwelereng – who joined the Pietersburg branch of CCAWUSA as an organiser in 1987, when internal disputes over the adoption of the Freedom Charter were at their highest in the union.[581] The division in CCAWUSA came to the fore publicly during a national conference in June 1987 in which the union was merged with the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Union (HARWU), and the Retail and Allied Workers' Union (RAWU), despite the objections of the Johannesburg, Western Cape and Northern Transvaal branches. In explaining the complicated history of how these divisions, which broadly took the form of a Black Consciousness camp versus a Congress-allied camp, emerged within such a strong and well-organised union like CCAWUSA, Forrest states that it is crucial to remember that at the point of the split in the union South Africa was in an intense and historically unparalleled process of political upheaval. In the early 1980s, as fierce multidimensional black political resistance erupted in townships, the banned ANC,

> reasserted its influence in the country over other political formations such as the black consciousness movement [and] the Nationalist government's response to this surge of resistance was to impose a national State of Emergency in 1986 which continued until 1989.[582]

It was in this context that the ideological and organisational political divisions deepened in the union and the two factions which emerged became known as the 'Mtwa faction' and the 'Kganare faction' – named after their respective general secretaries – with the latter minority group supporting the Freedom Charter as the basis of the newly merged CCAWUSA and the former group claiming that the merger was unconstitutional and the Freedom Charter was an inadequate foundation for the union's constitution.[583]

According to Hlahla, when she joined the Pietersburg branch in 1987, it was very common for her to hear workers who spent lunch breaks at the CCAWUSA offices debating about the Freedom Charter and the growing tensions between the two factions in the union.[584] In the much larger town of Pietersburg, the capital of the Northern Transvaal,

[581] See chapter 7 of Forrest, *Asijiki*, entitled: 'It was hell: A divided union'.
[582] *Ibid*, pp. 105-106.
[583] *Ibid*, p. 106.
[584] Maphuthi Hlahla, interviewed by Sarah Bruchhausen via phone call, 12 July 2021.

CCAWUSA activists had very similar experiences to their comrades in Potgietersrus but had a power-base which extended beyond OK Bazaars and included shopstewards and ordinary members from other retail stores such as Checkers, Ellerines, Shoprite and others.[585] The dispute between the two factions in CCAWUSA was eventually resolved in 1989, after the High Court ruled in 1988 that the constitution of the union had not been properly adopted and registered with the state following the controversial merger conference of 1987, and a new merger conference was held in which SACCAWU finally came into being as one of the largest COSATU affiliated trade unions in the country.[586]

Hlahla became an administrator for the union immediately after she completed her matric at Shikwane Matlala High School in Seshego, where she had been actively involved in contentious student and youth politics in the township as both a member of the school's SRC as well as the Seshego Youth Congress (SEYCO).[587] In her youth, Hlahla was one of the few girls who attained high-ranking positions in the various SRC and youth movement structures in Seshego during the early-1980s. She recalls that although gender specific issues, such as sexual abuse of female students by teachers in schools, were addressed in the political campaigns of the SRCs and SEYCO, there were far fewer girls involved in the youth movement than boys. In terms of her attempts as a student activist to recruit other young women into the movements she recalls, 'It was hard, it was hard, because a lot of women, and I'm sorry to say this, but they don't have balls. They were afraid of the system… [especially] the mothers, the mothers were very, very, very, very, very scared because they were afraid of the system, and many they passed this fear down to their girl children'.[588] This quotation is an indication of the deep extent to which patriarchal attitudes shaped modes of popular emancipatory politics in Seshego during the 1980s and of the ways in which such patriarchal attitudes, often expressed by women and not just men, continue to shape historical narratives of the South African liberation struggle.

According to Hlahla, it was AZAPO activists operating out of the Community Advice Bureau (CAB) offices in Seshego (a branch of NTAO) and at Turfloop who took the question of

[585] *Ibid*.
[586] Forrest, 'Asijiki', p. 106.
[587] Maphuthi Hlahla, interview 12 July 2021.
[588] *Ibid*.

women's emancipation most seriously and deliberately tried to encourage and facilitate women's greater participation in struggles for freedom in Seshego: 'In AZAPO, to be fair and honest, they recommended us women more than men for political [positions]'.[589] Hlahla's perception of women's roles in emancipatory politics shifted when her own primary involvement moved from the youth congress to the labour movement when she joined CCAWUSA as an administrator for the Pietersburg branch in 1987. To her surprise, in the sphere of radical worker politics she saw that 'women workers were more stronger than male workers'. She recalls:

> Women, the female workers, they were mad, and I understand why female workers were mad. Because there was this thing – I work the same job with you as a man but you earn more than me because I am a woman. And the worst part is we as ladies we are the ones who know how to feed children. If a child is hungry, to be fair and honest, you're never gonna go to papa and say papa I'm hungry. The child comes to me as a mother, and says that I'm hungry. That's why at the time women were very, very strong, because we can't have the same grade at work and you as a man, you earn more than me, who the hell do you think you are!? We are working the same job why do you earn more than me? Thus, they used to be mad.[590]

As a local-level organiser for the union in Pietersburg between 1987 and 1993, Hlahla's everyday work involved recruiting and mobilising workers at different companies in town as well as handling labour disputes and legal cases taken to the industrial relations court. Shoprite, Checkers, OK Bazaars, Ellerines and Lubners were some of the main companies in Pietersburg at which she was involved in the creation of CCAWUSA/SACCAWU shopsteward structures and the organisation of strikes. In a similar fashion to that described by Lebelo from the OK Bazaars in Potgietersrus, Hlahla's interview indicates that she and other CCAWUSA activists in Pietersburg forged strong labour-community alliances with residents in Seshego. Her interview also suggests that gendered identities and established patterns of women's associational life in the township here too played an important role in shaping CCAWUSA's modes of activism and the popular political landscape stretching between 'white' towns and the bantustan townships more generally. When asked how she and CCAWUSA's women retail

[589] *Ibid*.
[590] *Ibid*.

workers based in Pietersburg mobilised support for their workplace struggles amongst the residents of Seshego during the 1980s, Hlahla explained:

> You know what we were doing, as women workers, we would arrange this thing, we created savings clubs. People won't realise what we are doing, they think we are just counting money on the ground, it is a very ordinary thing for women to do in the townships here, but it is where we are enjoying talking politically.[591]

These women's saving clubs, also known as stokvels, have been and remain a very common feature of the everyday political economies of townships and villages throughout Southern Africa since at least the mid-twentieth century.[592] The saving clubs in Seshego that Hlahla mentions were not merely fronts set up for the purpose of holding clandestine political discussion groups between women workers and women in the township, 'No, we were proper clubs, as women we gather funds through the year, meeting now and then to check in on each other, and in December we gather again and distribute the funds equally amongst ourselves'.[593]

CCAWUSA's women activists mobilised support from the residents of Seshego for strikes, sit-ins, boycotts, pickets and other workplace struggles, by linking their political praxes with already existing gendered patterns of everyday associational life in the township. As Hlahla explains,

> In the community there are students and young workers and mothers and the old people. Because the students they were so influential – so, so, so much influential. So, they were also helping the old people to understand what are we fighting for as workers… So, when we are on strike, ne, what we do, say on the community, there is a COSATU rep from the community, he is the one who is going to say, guys, at Pick n Pay we've got a strike, we need the community's support, please don't go buy at Pick 'n Pay, and the community are the ones

[591] *Ibid*.
[592] For more information on women's saving clubs and the role of women's associational life more broadly in shaping rural and urban political economies and social relations in South Africa see: D James, 'Women Use their Strength', pp. 1035-1052; James, 'Sister, spouse, lazy woman'; Rebekah Lee, *African Women and Apartheid: Migration and settlement in urban South Africa*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2009); Laura Evans, 'Resettlement and the Making of the Ciskei Bantustan, South Africa, c.1960–1976', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 40 1 (2014), pp. 21-40; and, Britta Eckert, 'Natural resource management and local knowledge in transition: An anthropological perspective from the Laka of Mapela', (PhD thesis, UNISA, 2000).
[593] Maphuthi Hlahla interview 12 July 2021.

> who are going to help us there. All of the women's savings clubs, if the members were around, they would be mobilised for if there was a kind of demonstration or, um, picket or whatever by the shop, they can come and support us. If you go and buy by force, community will deal with you and by then they were beating… [And] when there are consumer boycotts, by then not now, when there is a consumer boycott, *no-one* would go to town to buy what we said you must not buy. Not like the people of today… for now there is no solidarity, except older people, to be fair and honest.[594]

Another woman who ran the Pietersburg branch of SACCAWU was Malebo Mphahlele who, like Hlahla, joined the union as an administrator in 1989 (when CCAWUSA had officially merged with three other unions to form SACCAWU). Mphahlele's everyday work for the union involved managing all of the office communications – typing, posting, reserving and receiving letters – as well as being involved, albeit to a lesser extent than shopstewards and organisers, in mobilising and directing contentious worker protest politics in the town.[595] Mphahlele's description of her experiences in forging relationships of political solidarity between workers in Pietersburg and the community in Seshego echoes the perspective provided by both Lebelo and Hlahla which suggest that gender, and the identity category 'woman' in particular, was an important factor shaping these political processes. When asked in an interview who – which individuals or groups of people – CCAWUSA/SACCAWU activists, such as herself, used to hold political meetings with in the township in order to build community support for worker-oriented protest action in town, she spoke about the critical role of women's saving societies:

> Normally it is the women. Young women like us because, you know, most of us have societies, you know, where you meet maybe once a month or more if there is anything we need to discuss. So, normally, then we would put some of the information from the union to them, because we knew the day we have boycotts, sit-ins or whatever they will be the ones who come and support us for strikes. So, they must know and understand what is the union, what is the union doing for the life of its members, and how they can help us whenever there is strikes or boycotts, yes.[596]

The experiences of Lebelo, Hlahla and Mphahlele, show that in the 1980s CCAWUSA/SACCAWU was an important space of political organisation in which women from

[594] *Ibid.*
[595] Malebo Mphahlele, interviewed by Sarah Bruchhausen via phone call, 14 July 2021.
[596] *Ibid*.

the Lebowa bantustan engaged in emancipatory politics in workplaces and communities. NTAO offices provided a radically inclusive space out of which CCAWUSA operated and created the conditions of possibility for women retail workers to forge networks of solidarity and launch joint campaigns with activists from various different national liberation organisations. It has also been shown that in mobilising community support for their political campaigns, CCAWUSA/SACCAWU activists were highly successful in grafting their modes of activism onto already existing gendered patterns of everyday associational life in the Lebowa bantustan. They did this by, for example, mobilising women's saving societies for consumer boycotts, disguising their political meetings in the townships as women's tea parties, and including women-specific issues such as rights to township housing in their political campaigns. In so doing they developed effective modes of mass political organising on the basis of local struggles and concerns that affected people, and women in particular, in their daily lives.

Women workers' experiences of the 1994 democratic transition in Lebowa

As Forrest shows in her study of SACCAWU, 'After the 1994 democratic elections workers' expectations were high. A new world had dawned… But it was not long before the honeymoon was over, and workers learnt it was back to hard struggle'.[597] Today the SACCAWU branch in Mokopane, once a hive of political activism when based at the MAO offices in Dr Hlahla's surgery, is a shell of its former self. Malebo Mphahlele, having moved from the Polokwane branch to Mokopane in 1993, continues to run the office as its administrator. She believes that the lack of strong community-labour alliances in Mokopane, and South Africa more broadly, since 1994 as well as 'the general problem of organising a new kind of workforce [since] the late 1990s and 2000s', are the two main factors which have made political organisation much harder for trade union activists.

> The issues of casuals, retrenchments, and so on. That one we are dealing with it every single day. You know, like, all these companies, they want to do that because, eh, most of the time they want to get rid of the old ones [employees]. Ja, they are busy getting rid of them and the ones that they are employing, they tell them straight away, "here, we employ you as a part-timer, there is no more permanent work", they don't want permanent workers. It used to just be the big companies but now even the smallnyana companies they have

[597] Forrest, 'Asijiki', p. 141.

> joined now… [And] to be honest with you, we don't have members now because our kids they are very much intellectuals. They are from school, they know too much, they are not busy with the union. Some of them, if they join, they don't want to know more, "what is the union?", they don't even visit the office. You know, and most of them, you know what they do, they just join and sit there, they are having problems and they don't even bring their problems to us, and at the end of the day you hear them say, "Ay, ay, it's useless for us to join the union. Ay, ay, I am resigning". So, it's a problem to us. How can you call on the community to support strikes or whatever when you can't even get your workers on board?[598]

Despite the many new challenges facing SACCAWU and other trade union organisers in the present neoliberal South African context, Mphahlele cautions against any undermining of the significant gains made for the labour movement as a result of the 1994 elections.

> Ja, before 1994, ey, it was just hard because even the union was pulling very hard. You know, when we started, sometimes we were told that here we are going to have to sacrifice. You know there were some months we could not get our salaries and they would say we are sacrificing. Ja, and the next month when you are receiving your salary don't think that you are going to get it double. [laughs] No! So, they were telling us that today we are sacrificing for the life of the members, people who are oppressed at work. So, ja, we were, we were getting used to it, and we were not worried, we took it that really we are sacrificing for other people's lives to be better. Until, it became better I think, in 1994, that's when things got better and even our job became respected you know because we now always had office open everywhere, not fearing police could come anytime in the office, and when you have problems you walk straight out of the office, make an appointment, and go straight to a company.[599]

The ability of SACCAWU to hold regular meetings at formal offices spaces throughout the region without fear of constant police harassment in the post-1994 period was certainly a significant change brought about by the transition and a clear warning against a reading of this moment as insignificant or detrimental to workers' struggles for freedom. The interviews collected with women activists from the advice offices and CCAWUSA/SACCAWU structures in the former Lebowa bantustan suggest that the 1994 moment was one of both rupture and continuity in terms of workers' struggles for equality and human dignity in their workplaces and society more broadly. Narratives of the 1994 transition by women who worked in the firms of the Habakuku industrial park at the time definitively mark this moment as 'when

[598] Malebo Mphahlele interview, 14 July 2021.
[599] *Ibid*.

freedom came'.[600] As Sarah Leje explained, 'We voted for the old man [Mandela] in 1994. That's when we started to live well. We started having things like electricity, because we grew up without these things'.[601] And yet, the experience of actually casting their vote in 1994 was experience tainted with coercion for these women who were working for Habakuk Shikoane at the time. As Engelina Matheba recalled,

> I remember when it was 1994, when we wanted to go vote for Mandela, he [Shikoane] told us all to leave the firms to go vote and when we came back, he demanded to see the ink on our fingers and then he would ask you who you voted for and we would say, ANC, and he would say, 'yes that is my party', and that is the organisation he loves… We wanted to vote for Mandela but he was forcing us, because that was his organisation, if you tried to come through the gate without that black mark he would tell you to leave.[602]

In the Habakuku industrial area and its surrounding villages, including Linteng, the ANC did not establish branch structures in the lead up to the 1994 elections. Instead, the party relied on Shikoane to secure its votes in the area. Since the Covid-19 pandemic hit in 2020, only one or two of the firms in Habakuku have reopened, and the majority of the women who worked there are now unemployed and dependent upon state social grants and support from relatives in order to survive. In the face of desperate poverty and hunger many of these women now turn to xenophobic discourses in their attempts to understand how freedom could ever have become so unfree for them as South African citizens.

> They should have said, "no this freedom is for South Africans you must go back". But because it is freedom we *have* to allow it for everyone and it is now going to hurt our children. When this freedom arrived, we wanted a future, development, because so many had died, so many had been shot, so those are some of the things that do not satisfy me and now poverty is here and it is brought by all these different foreigners. All the way in Braamfontein it is chaotic: our infrastructure is not looked after, drains are left open, the municipality is not even in charge anymore. What we should be doing now as South Africans is uniting and increasing our value as things keep deteriorating. We should be building each other up because that is the only way we will see progress in our land. But in the offices people are stealing so we don't see development anymore… In the end South Africans will not have any jobs or freedom.[603]

[600] Raesibe Engelina Matheba interview 17 February 2022.
[601] Sarah Leje interview 17 February 2022.
[602] Raesibe Engelina Matheba interview 17 February 2022.
[603] *Ibid*.

The troublingly popular rise of anti-black xenophobic discourses in both public and academic debates in South Africa, as alluded to in the quotation above, is a trend that is at complete odds with the universalist conceptions of freedom (meaning for everyone) which characterised the mass democratic movement in South Africa during the anti-apartheid struggle. In sum, the women in Habakuku continue to conceive freedom – what it means, whom it should rightly apply to, and how to attain it – in close relation to wage-paying jobs, individual upward class mobility, and a functional local government that provides basic services to South African citizens. SACCAWU activists in Limpopo have become largely confined to narrow workplace struggles in large retail chain stores and have lost their radical links with communities. They have also become entangled in factional battles in local state politics. Despite this, they still long for the kind of emancipatory politics they were engaged in during the 1980s, without any sense of nostalgia for the violence of the bantustan and apartheid states that they fought against.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the experiences of women workers in the Lebowa bantustan during the late-apartheid period. It focused on women working in the factories and firms of Lebowa's decentralised industrial areas and as retail workers in the so-called 'white' towns adjacent to Lebowa. I argued that these two areas of the Northern Transvaal economy, in which women from the villages and townships of Lebowa dominated the workforce, respectively represent some of the weakest and strongest spaces – in terms of duration, intensity and frequency – of women's radical worker struggles in the region during the 1980s and early-1990s. I argued that the violent curtailment of women's access to alternative strategies for feeding their families and maintaining their households in Lebowa's closer settlements, coupled with their inability to secure better jobs outside of the industrial area, made 'holding on' to factory jobs – no matter how exploitative or poorly paid – priority for women factory workers in Habakuku. Additionally, the relative absence of the South African radical trade union movement, as well as the authoritarian and oppressive nature of factory owners and managers in Habakuku were two factors constraining the possibilities of women's praxes of emancipatory politics as wage workers in this particular industrial area situated just outside the capital city of Lebowa.

This, however, was not always the case for women factory workers in the Seshego Industrial area who, often aided by NTAO organisers with close links to independent trade unions, were involved in a number of strikes and other forms of contentious workplace politics, with uneven success levels, during the 1980s. In August 1991, the firm and factory owners in the Seshego industrial area were the first bosses in Lebowa to give official recognition to trade unions after years of worker struggles. This is a clear indication that women factory workers' struggles in Seshego are an important part of the history of the radical labour movement in South Africa, and in the Lebowa bantustan in particular, during the late-apartheid period.

Attention was then given to CCAWUSA, the most politically active and militant independent trade union operating in 'white' towns and adjacent townships on the border of the Lebowa bantustan during the 1980s. Based on the experiences of women who were members of CCAWUSA branches in Mahwelereng and Seshego, I argued that the union offered an organizational platform for women workers to launch sustained and radical challenges against their inferior positions and exploitation in the retail workplaces of these exceptionally racist towns. The chapter also demonstrated the role played by CCAWUSA women retail workers in forging solidarity and unity between worker and community struggles in Lebowa's townships. I discussed and explored the particularly gendered ways in which CCAWUSA women mobilised those networks of solidarity with Lebowa's township residents into mass boycotts and general strikes which stretched the scope of popular anti-apartheid protest politics beyond the boundaries of the bantustan and into 'white' towns in the Northern Transvaal during the 1980s. It has also been shown that in mobilising community support for their political campaigns, CCAWUSA women were highly successful in linking their modes of activism with already existing forms of women's everyday associational life, such as savings clubs, in the Lebowa bantustan. In so doing, they not only played a significant role in driving the trade union movement in Lebowa but also in inserting gender specific issues into local conceptions of emancipatory politics, particularly the notion of equality between women and men as workers and heads of households, and women-centred modes of mobilisation, into local praxes of emancipatory politics. In concluding the chapter, I argued that SACCAWU activists in Limpopo today, having lost their popularity and radical links with communities, have become entwined in factional battles in local state politics, and their

activism has been reduced to narrow workplace struggles in the large retail chain stores in the province. However, like the female comrades in the 1980s youth movement, CCAWUSA women activists who were involved in the radical struggles discussed in this chapter reflect on the political praxes of the union in the 1980s as emancipatory.

CHAPTER SIX

Rural women's associations and emancipatory politics in post-apartheid South Africa.

Post-apartheid South Africa remains a country deeply divided along the fault lines of race, class, ethnicity and gender. It has been ranked the most unequal country in the world. In 2022 the World Bank reported that the richest 10 percent of South Africans, most of whom are white, owned 80 percent of the country's wealth.[604] The way South African society is organised, with many significant aspects of the colonial/apartheid political project remaining intact post-1994, is such that poor black women in rural areas are still subject to multiple, interconnecting oppressions which are embedded in historically inherited structures that have resisted radical change. Women living in the former bantustans are not only confronted by extreme economic marginalisation and ever bleaker contexts of poverty in their everyday lives, but they are also often faced with various situations of political inequality under patriarchal chiefly rule.[605] The ways in which socio-economic marginalisation intersects with the statist identity categories of race, ethnicity and gender in producing and maintaining relations of inequality in South African societies, including structural positions of subalternity for women living in the former bantustans, has been the subject of much recent scholarly analysis.[606]

Analyses of the character of inequality in post-apartheid South Africa have highlighted the rapid upward class mobility of a small portion of the black population, broadly defined as a precarious black middle class dominated by public servants, while the majority have remained poor or become poorer in the context of a declining wage-labour capitalist system with rapidly falling formal employment opportunities.[607] While the majority of literature on

[604] World Bank, *Inequality in Southern Africa: An Assessment of the South African Customs Union'*, (Washington: World Bank Publications, 2022), p. 3.
[605] James, 'Women Use their Strength', pp. 1035-1052.
[606] See, for example, James, 'Women use their strength', p. 1036; Mark Hunter, *Love in the Time of Aids: Inequality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); Claassens, 'It's Not Easy to Challenge a Chief'; and Julianna K. Rwelamira, 'Effects of Rural Inequality on Migration Among the Farming Households of Limpopo Province, South Africa' (PHD Thesis, University of Pretoria, 2009).
[607] See, for example, Nicoli Nattrass and Jeremy Seekings, *Class, Race and Inequality in South Africa* (New Haven: Tale University Press, 2015); Mcebisi Ndletyana, Pholoana Oupa Makhalemele, and Ralph Mathekga, *Patronage*

post-apartheid political economy and inequality tends to focus on urban settings there is a significant body of work which focuses on the rural spaces of the former bantustans.[608] Accounts of contemporary social change in the former bantustans written from androcentric perspectives have tended, according to social anthropologist Deborah James, 'to focus on neo-traditionalist-style rituals, express a longing to restore a more rural and more relational society, and convey a sense of loss of customary solidarities on which kinship and homestead ought to be built'.[609] However, James argues, taking into consideration the experiences of (at least some of) the women who live in the villages of the former bantustans 'yields a rather different account' of the post-apartheid order.[610]

The preceding chapters in my thesis have shown that in Lebowa during the apartheid era, changing gender dynamics as well as challenges to patriarchal authority and the subordination of women were variously expressed in popular resistance to apartheid-induced relocation and betterment procedures in the mid-twentieth century and, later, in the radical youth and labour movements of the 1980s. In this chapter attention now shifts to the question of what happens to rural women's emancipatory struggles in the '1994 moment' and the subsequent post-apartheid period.[611] The chapter begins by providing an overview of the political resistance landscape in Lebowa, and South Africa more broadly, in the early-1990s. By the time the ANC was voted into power in 1994, South Africa's wage-labour capitalist economy had been in decline for more than a decade and the post-apartheid period has since witnessed a dramatic widening of economic inequalities and a growing crisis of social reproduction. Recalling the discussions in chapters four and five, I argue that by the 1990s shifts in both the youth and labour movements resulted in a concentration of mass protest politics (and violent state responses thereto) in the form of civil servant strikes and

Politics Divides Us: A Study of Poverty, Patronage and Inequality in South Africa (Johannesburg: Mapungubwe Institute for Strategic Refection, 2013); Roger Southhall, 'Political Change and the Black Middle Class in Democratic South Africa', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 38 3 (2004), pp. 521-542; and Owen Crankshaw, 'Class, Race and Residence in Black Johannesburg, 1923-1970', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 18 4 (2005), pp. 353-393.

[608] See, for example, Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo'; Ally and Lissoni, 'Preface'; and, Ally and Lissoni, *New Histories*; Claassens and Cousins, *Land, Power & Custom*; and, Claassen, 'Who Told Them We Want This Bill?'.

[609] James, 'Women use their strength', p. 1036.

[610] *Ibid*, p. 1036.

[611] As I discuss later in this chapter, the term '1994 moment' (referring to the early-1990s in general) came up in many of my conversations and interviews with women and men in rural villages such as Apel, Linteng, Moletlane, and Kgomoschool.

civic organisation campaigns over housing rights and government services in Lebowa's townships. These two forms of popular politics, while significant for many reasons including their challenges to some aspects of patriarchal authority and women's subordination, did not take root to the same extent in Lebowa's villages and the involvement of women in their respective structures was largely limited to female civil servants and informal traders living in the townships.[612] As Phillips has observed,

> Some civil servants were able to maintain land and links to their more rural family members, and some of my informants relied on access to agriculture and livestock to supplement their government incomes. However, this was not true across the board, and in fact, their mere status as a civil servant often meant that they struggled to hold on to productive land in rural Lebowa. For the most part, civil servants were far better educated than the chief on whose land they had lived… this often produced serious tension in rural communities across Lebowa, and chiefs exercised their power over land allocation to exclude their dissidents and opponents from the community'.[613]

In many of Lebowa's villages, those spaces that form the focus of this chapter, the early-1990s were marked by a relative decline in political violence as well as a reconfiguration, albeit uneven, of the relationship between rural communities – especially women – and the local state.[614] The ANC played a decisive role in shaping both of these processes, specifically, through its embrace, as a government-in-waiting, of the institution of chieftaincy as well as the discourses of equality and women's rights during the transition.[615] As the ruling party in post-apartheid South Africa, the ANC has since maintained the close and often uneasy relationship between women and the chieftaincy in villages of the former bantustans, at least partly, through its 'somewhat gender-skewed state grant system' and its policies promoting

[612] For a discussion of the gendered experiences of Lebowa's civil servants and the struggles of women in accessing housing in Lebowa's townships see, Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo', pp. 100–108.
[613] *Ibid*, p. 101.
[614] The decline of political violence in most (but not all) of Lebowa's villages during the transitional years was not matched in the bantustan's townships nor in South Africa more broadly. In fact, it is well-known in South African historiography that the period February 1990 to April 1994 'witnessed more intense political violence than at any other time during the apartheid period during the apartheid era'. See, Laura Evans, 'The Bantustan State and the South African Transition: Militarisation, Patrimonialism and the Collapse of the Ciskei Regime, 1986-1994', *African Historical Review*, 50 1-2 (2018), p. 102.
[615] For literature detailing the relationship between the ANC and the women's rights movement in South Africa see, Jacklyn Cock and Alison Bernstein, 'Struggles around "Needs" and "Rights" in South Africa', *NWSA Journal*, 13 3 (Gender and Social Policy: Local to Global, 2001), pp. 138-152; Jacklyn Cock, 'Engendering Gay and Lesbian Rights: The Equality Clause in the South African Constitution', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 26 1 (2003), pp. 34-45; Gay Seidman, '"No Freedom without the Women": Mobilization and Gender in South Africa, 1970-1992', *Signs*, 18 2 (1993), pp. 291-320.

women's representation in the state – including in rural local government.[616] At the same time, many unequal and exclusionary gendered aspects of the chieftaincy and its patriarchal modes of governance have gone unchanged (but not unchallenged) in post-apartheid South Africa. Patriarchal relationships and heteronormative value systems, premised on the idea of men as the natural heads of households and women as rightfully subordinate and dependant, remain hegemonic.[617] However, despite the uneven success experienced throughout South Africa in terms of the institutionalisation of the constitution's gender equality clause and realisation of the women's rights enshrined in the bill of rights for the poor and working class majority of South African women, these victories in formal equality won during the negotiated transition have created the conditions of possibility for some women in rural contexts to create new, and in some cases emancipatory, forms of relatively autonomous community-based organisations in post-apartheid South Africa.[618]

It was within the effervescent context of the 1994 moment that a wide variety of women's clubs – with different forms and purposes – began to emerge, in many villages of the former Lebowa bantustan where rural women's autonomous associational life had been disrupted during the state of emergency period.[619] This chapter explores the history of one women's club in particular, the Makotse Women's Club (MWC), which emerged in a typically under-resourced and under-serviced remote village of the former Lebowa bantustan, Makotse, during the 1994 moment. Drawing upon a small but rich body of scholarly literature on community-based organisations in post-apartheid South Africa (especially the gendered perspectives provided in the works of James and Jacklyn Cock) as well as interviews I conducted with the founder of the MWC and several of the organisation's members in 2022, I argue that the MWC is an example of a grassroots rural women's organisation engaged the praxis of popular politics of care, that is not easily recognisable as resistance vis-à-vis the

[616] James, 'Women use their strength', p. 1051.
[617] Including the denial of women's rights to land in some parts of the former bantustans (but certainly not all). See, Claassen, 'It's not easy to challenge a chief'.
[618] Jacklyn Cock, 'The Climate Crisis and a "Just Transition" in South Africa: An Eco-Feminist-Socialist Perspective' in V Satgar, ed., *South Africa and Global Democratic Eco-Socialist Alternatives*, (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2018), p. 227.
[619] In chapter three I showed that women-led organisations engaged in the provision of care services to the poorest and most vulnerable members of rural communities existed in most of Lebowa's villages during the 1970s. Lebowa government reports indicate that, as far as the bantustan's civil servants in the Department of Health were aware, many of the regular operations of these organisations ceased to function in the insurrectionary climate of the mid-1980s state of emergency period. See, LPA, LDOH, 28 (18/2/4-A), Social Workers' Annual Reports, 1986-1987.

state, but contains aspects which are potentially emancipatory. The chapter shows how women in rural Lebowa leverage resources from the state and chiefly authorities under the democratic government, mobilising rights, and state rhetoric concerning development and equality to improve their daily lives.

The South African transition to democracy and the 1994 moment in Lebowa

The reforms made by the De Klerk administration in 1990 marked a decisive turning point in South African history and the beginning of a new and final phase in the struggle for national liberation. These reforms included the unbanning of anti-apartheid organisations such as the ANC, South African Communist Party (SACP) and the PAC, the release of political prisoners (including Nelson Mandela) and an end of the state of emergency that had been in place since the mid-1980s. In South African historical and political discourse this marks the beginning of 'the transition' in which a process of internal negotiations led by the National Party (NP) and the ANC resulted in the dissolution of apartheid and the creation of the post-apartheid South African political order. A new interim constitution was drawn up in 1993 and, in April 1994, the first democratic national elections were held which brought the ANC into power. This was followed by local government elections which were held throughout the newly defined provinces during the subsequent two years. In December 1996, the new constitution and Bill of Rights were promulgated by President Nelson Mandela with several important equality clauses, including one on gender, ensuring that the post-apartheid order would entail a democratic, non-racist, non-sexist, unified and pluralist South African state. These are just some of the most important events that constitute the notion of 'the transition' in contemporary South Africa but the one event with by far the most currency in both academic and popular historical discourses is the culminating event of the 1994 elections.

In the villages of rural Limpopo, the term 'the 1994 moment' is often invoked by ordinary people to describe the early-1990s period. Narratives of the 1994 moment from women and men who experienced the transition from the rural peripheral space of the Lebowa bantustan villages tend to centre on the dramatic changes in everyday life that

manifested in the lead-up to and following the national elections. Women's narratives in particular tend to label 1994 as the moment 'when freedom came'.[620]

This may seem paradoxical, as analyses of post-apartheid political economy have shown that poor and working class black women, especially those in the under-resourced and under-serviced rural spaces of the former bantustans, are still the most economically, politically and socially subordinated group and the main 'shock absorbers' of 'a crisis of social reproduction' in contemporary South Africa.[621] However, rural women's description of the 1994 moment as a temporal marker of freedom does not imply a utopian present free of social problems and inequalities – in other words a state of universal emancipation. In fact, many aspects of the crisis of social reproduction in post-apartheid South Africa – such as for example the high rates of unemployment, poverty, HIV/AIDS infections, teenage pregnancies, gender-based violence, drug addiction, and Afrophobic xenophobia – are popularly understood by many South Africans (including rural women) as apartheid legacies that have only worsened since 'freedom came in 1994'.[622] However, despite these problems, and many other contemporary challenges which have become nefarious aspects of everyday life for many in post-apartheid South Africa, the 1994 moment is still popularly remembered as an emancipatory event: expressed in phrases such as, 'in 1994, that is when things started to be better' and, 'thank God those days are over now, let us never go back to how it was before 1994'.[623]

De Klerk's reforms, the return of the ANC from exile, and the initiation of the national-level negotiations in 1990, all took place within a broader context of popular politics unfolding, continuously and unevenly, within South Africa's black communities, schools and workplaces. In many of South Africa's metropolitan townships, the early-1990s was the period that witnessed some of the most extreme levels of political violence of the apartheid era. The Bisho massacre of 1992 which took place in the former Ciskei shows that in some rural bantustan spaces too, the opening years of the 1990s were characterised by experiences of intense political violence.[624] In the villages of the former Lebowa bantustan, however, the

[620] See Sarah Leje and Raesibe Engelina Matheba interview 17 February 2022; Philippa S and Freeda M interview 24 August 2019; and, Malebo Mphahlele interviewed by author, SACCAWU offices, Mokopane, 14 March 2022.
[621] Fakier and Cock, 'A Gendered Analysis', p. 353.
[622] See Sarah Leje and Raesibe Engelina Matheba interview 17 February 2022.
[623] *Ibid*; also see, Malebo Mphahlele interview, 14 March 2022.
[624] Evans, 'The bantustan state and the South African transition', p. 102.

early-1990s were marked by a relative decline in protest politics and violence as the state of emergency was lifted, the SADF was withdrawn from villages, and Lebowa police became increasingly unable and, especially from 1993 when they joined the civil servant strikes, unwilling to enforce unpopular state regulations in rural communities.

The civil servant protests and the township-based civic movement were two new and prominent features of the political resistance landscape in Lebowa during the early-1990s. As was the case in the 1980s youth and labour movements, women who participated directly in the civil servant protests and township-based civic organisations in Lebowa were usually, aside from the nursing profession where women dominated, a minority.[625] As Philips argues, these struggles included challenges to the subordination of women as township residents and as female civil servants but they did not stretch to mobilise or include poor women in village contexts and also clearly reflected the broader processes of class stratification unfolding in the region at the time.[626] As the civil servant strikes and the civic organisation campaigns happening in the townships continued to dominate local newspaper headlines, the ANC (and to a lesser extent the PAC) began holding public meetings and establishing party structures in rural villages where few (if any) recognisable democratic structures upon which the ANC could potentially build, such as civics, existed in the early-1990s.[627]

The dramatically changed relationship between the institution of chieftaincy and the ANC in the early-1990s, from enemies in the struggle against apartheid to allies in the negotiated transition to democracy, contributed to the dissipation of violence in Lebowa's rural communities in the lead-up to the 1994 elections.[628] Whereas in the 1980s most of the traditional authority offices in Lebowa had been repurposed into SADF bases, make-shift prisons, and/or sites of collective punishment and apartheid repression, in the 1990s the ANC used these same spaces, as well as schools and churches (often the only public buildings in villages), to hold public meetings, establish branch structures, and campaign for support in the 1994 elections. During the 1994 moment, women were being called to the *moshate* on a regular basis to participate in ANC-led community meetings. It was in this way that the ideas

[625] Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo', p. 164.
[626] *Ibid*, pp. 104-108.
[627] This is the conclusion of Ineke van Kessel's study of the UDF in the Northern Transvaal. See, van Kessel, *Beyond Our Wildest Dreams*.
[628] Phillips, 'From Lebowa to Limpopo', p. 153.

of women's rights and gender equality became a feature of the discourses being espoused regularly in public village spaces from which women had been largely excluded prior to the 1994 moment. From 1991, regional organisers of the Congress of Traditional Leaders (Contralesa), one of whom was Pinky Nchabeleng – the eldest daughter of veteran activists Gertrude and Peter Nchabeleng (see chapters three and four) – began intensive consultations with local chiefs to help guide them in reconstituting their institutions in more democratic ways in preparation for its new role alongside the municipal and ward systems of local governance.[629] They encouraged chiefs to establish (or reinvigorate) structures for women in the traditional authority so that the interests of women would be represented and a structure would exist to direct and manage any women-specific community development initiatives.[630] They also encouraged chiefs to adapt traditional courts to come in-line with the stipulations of the new constitution and bill of rights. This would mean allowing adult women, regardless of age or marital status, to represent themselves in matters taken to the court (and not have to be represented by their parents, husband, brother, or other male relatives as had been the norm under apartheid legislation). It also meant that women had the right to divorce their spouses or take their in-laws to court for disputes arising within households over finances or abusive relationships.[631]

Not all chiefs complied with the democratising encouragements of ANC and Contralesa organisers in the region during the 1994 moment. Indeed, there are still many villages in rural Limpopo in which women still require a male relative to represent them in formal engagements between themselves and traditional authorities.[632] For example, in 2019 Queen Nchabeleng started a small-scale poultry business in the backyard of her family home in Kgomoschool village, Ga-Matlala, supplying young chickens to nearby villages. Nchabeleng works and lives in Polokwane and supports her older brother and several other unemployed family members who reside in her rural home in Kgomoschool. Despite the fact that she is a

[629] Contralesa was an ANC and UDF-aligned organisation of traditional leaders established by marginalised chiefs and headmen in the Moutse area of Kwa-Ndebele (once of Lebowa) in 1987. Prior to his murder in 1986, according to van Kessel, UDF Regional Chairperson Peter Nchabeleng had been the key figure involved in organising so-called 'progressive chiefs' in Lebowa on behalf of the ANC. See, van Kessel, *Beyond our wildest dreams*, p. 83. For further detail on Contralesa in Lebowa see, S Lekgoathi, 'Political Transformations in the Bantustans of Lebowa and KwaNdebele, 1990-1994', in SADET, eds., *The road to democracy in South Africa, Volume 6, 1990-1996*, (Pretoria: UNISA Press, 2013), p. 451; and Delius, *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, pp. 207-208.
[630] Pinky Nchabeleng, interviewed by author, Apel village, Ga-Sekhukhune, 19 April 2019.
[631] *Ibid*.
[632] See, for example, Claassens, 'It's not easy to challenge a chief'.

highly respected member of the community in Kgomoschool, and works for the Provincial Treasury, because of her gender she was unable to go to the traditional authority offices herself to apply for the necessary permissions to create her poultry project. Instead, she had to send her older brother who was able to apply for the permits on her behalf.[633] This is an example of a traditional authority that has failed to adapt its practices of everyday governance to be in line with the gender equality clause of the South African constitution. On the other hand, in the same year and not far away in the Ga-Mapela area of Mogalakwena, Lina, a domestic worker employed in Johannesburg and nearing retirement age, represented herself in the local traditional court and successfully divorced her husband and claimed title over her family home.[634] Viewed together, these two examples give a snap-shot indication of the huge disparities between different spaces in rural Limpopo in terms of the democratisation of the institution of traditional governance and the institutionalisation of gender equality in the local state.

However, in the 1994 moment, the concepts of equality and of women's empowerment were key components of the discourses being propounded by ANC activists, both local and national, campaigning for the elections and building branch structures in the rural villages of the administratively-crumbling and newly accessible Lebowa bantustan.[635] Even though the levels of success in regard to the institutionalisation of these concepts within the actual forms and practices of both local party and state structures have been uneven since the ANC came to power, the ANC's role in popularising a concept of 'equality as non-discrimination and social justice' (and not in the apartheid terms of 'equal as same'), alongside a less-precisely defined but highly valued notion of women's empowerment, during the 1994 moment created the conditions of possibility for some women in rural villages to reclaim public spaces and elaborate new forms of women's associational life.[636] Women's associations that emerged in the 1994 moment are diverse in both form and purpose. The

[633] Queen Nchabeleng, interview 4 March 2019.
[634] Lina (pseudonym), interviewed by author, Johannesburg, 28 January 2020.
[635] Zebediela Traditional Authority Women's Unit, group interviewed by author, Traditional Authority Office, Moletlane village, 23 March 2022; Sarah Leje, interview 17 February 2022; and, Maria Mello, interviewed by author and Kefuoe Maotoane, Makotse village, 15 February 2022.
[636] Cock, 'Engendering gay and lesbian rights', p. 35.

most common type is the stokvel or savings club, which has a long history and has become a dominant feature of the contemporary South African socio-political landscape.[637]

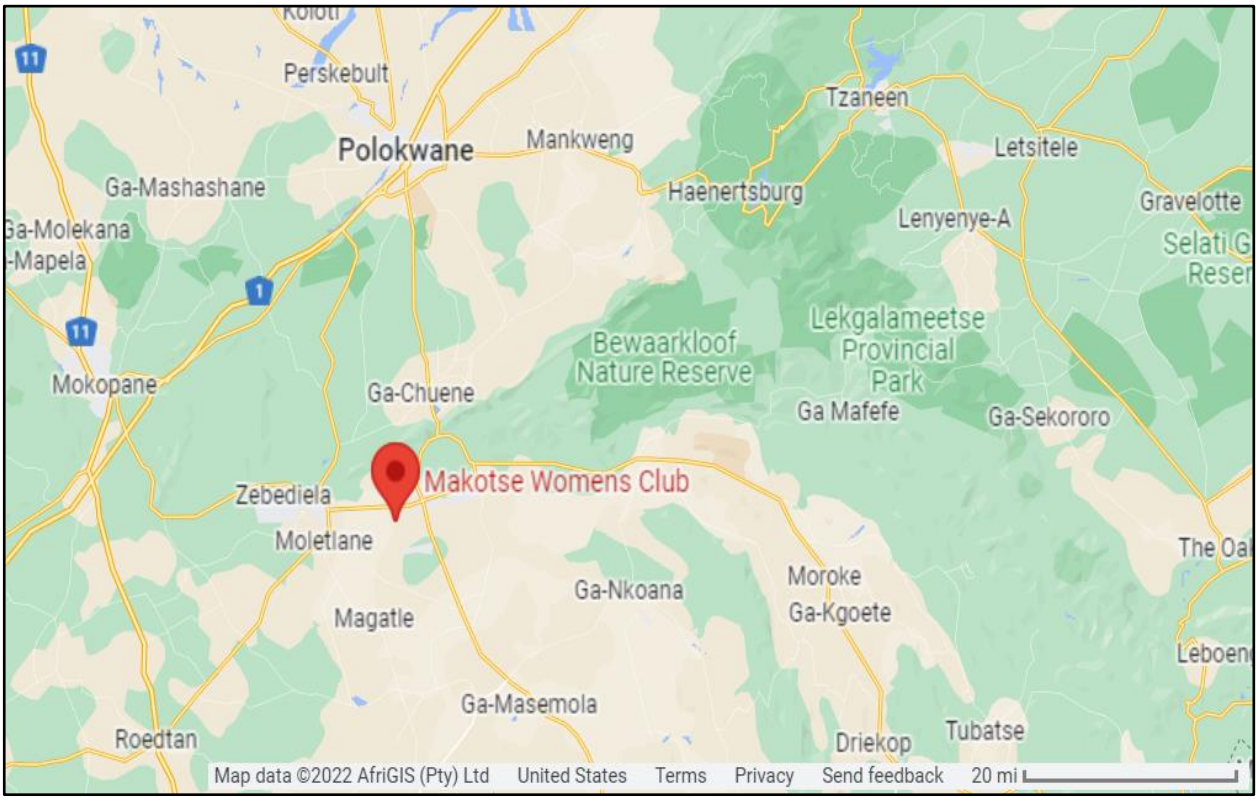
According to James, savings clubs are a manifestation of a new type of communality, created by women in settings of increased inequality, aimed to help mediate new inequalities and dependencies of the post-apartheid order whilst being mediated by such inequalities and dependencies themselves.[638] James describes women's savings clubs that were created in the villages and townships of the Lebowa bantustan during the early-1990s as an expression of 'new fabrics of intensified solidarity' woven into the post-apartheid order which hinged on 'the relative autonomy enjoyed by some female civil servants and informal traders'. However, as James is quick to note, 'not everyone can benefit equally from these sociable arrangements' and '…the clubs help members alternately accommodate and defy capitalism's imperatives, while also fending off demands made by poorer relatives, neighbours, and those with too few resources to belong to clubs'.[639]

One of the most important features of the MWC, which distinguishes it from the women's savings clubs discussed by James, is that it does not reject poor women from joining as members and, although its origins are as a savings club, its intentions from the start were always for the savings to be used for collective projects and not to be distributed back to members at regular intervals or used for private loans or investments. In fact, while containing similar elements of other forms of women's clubs (such as stokvels, burial societies, church *manyanos*, or music and dance groups), as will be shown in the following section, the MWC represents a different model of rural women's club politics that is premised on a radically inclusive politics of care. As a grassroots women's organisation engaged in the politics of care at the community level, the MWC is not exceptional in post-apartheid South Africa. However, as shown below, what is exceptional about the MWC is the way in which it scaled-up its activities, from a small group of local women running a food garden project with a tiny pool

[637] See, for example, James, 'Women use their strength'; and James, 'Money-Go-Round: Personal Economies of Wealth, Aspiration and Indebtedness', *Africa*, 82 1 (2012), pp. 20-40. In addition to the many works by James, important studies of black women's savings groups include, for example, Alpheus Masoga and Allucia Shokane, '*Sebata-Kgomo Basadi!* Emerging indigenised women leadership patterns: Selected narratives from local rural women's stokvels in Ga-Sekororo, South Africa', *Agenda*, 33 1 (2019), pp. 38-47; and Lee, *African Women and Apartheid*, pp. 136-138.
[638] James, 'Women use their strength', p. 1035.
[639] *Ibid*, p. 1035.

of self-generated funds in Makotse village during the mid-1990s, to become one of the most successful NGOs managing food relief schemes and providing a range of care work services throughout the Limpopo Province today.

Situating the MWC: Makotse Village and the crisis of social reproduction in South Africa



Map 7: Location of the Makotse Women's Club in Makotse Village, Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality, Limpopo Province. Adapted from Google Maps.

The MWC is a community-based organisation founded by Maria Mello in 1995 and operated by working class and poor women in Makotse village. Makotse village is situated in the Lepelle-Nkumpi local municipality, about 15km outside of Lebowakgomo, the former capital of the Lebowa bantustan, and 5km away from the Limpopo Legislature buildings. Despite its geographic proximity to provincial government buildings, Makotse is described in academic literature as a 'remote village' bearing all of the characteristic features of an underserviced and under-resourced rural community in post-apartheid South Africa.[640]

[640] See for example, Enniah M. Lekganyane, 'The role of food gardens in mitigating the vulnerability to HIV-AIDS of rural women in Limpopo, South Africa', (MA thesis, UNISA, 2008), p. 19.

In 2008 over 65 percent of the estimated 5000 people living in Makotse were unemployed.[641] For women, the unemployment figure was even higher at approximately 74 percent.[642] Due to the high levels of unemployment and poverty, many families are dependent on government grants which are – for a wide range of different reasons – sometimes hard for the poorest and most vulnerable of families to access regularly, if at all. More recent statistics for Makotse village are hard to come by, but municipal level surveys and newspaper reports from 2019 suggest that up to 90 percent of all households in Makotse depend on a monthly income of R800 or less that comes mainly in the form of various government grants.[643] With extremely limited access to jobs and wages, in order to sustain their households, many women, and some men, in the community engage in various practices of subsistence farming – of mainly beans, maize and millet – and some families also farm small livestock such as goats, chickens, donkeys, as well as cattle.[644] Despite these efforts, according to the women at MWC, there are still many members of poor families in Makotse who go to bed hungry on a regular basis.[645]

The community at Makotse, like many other places in South Africa, has also been dealt a devastating blow by a series of pandemics – the most notable according to health care workers at MWC being, in chronological order: HIV/AIDS (1990s to present), Listeriosis (2017-2018), and COVID-19 (2020-2022). The crisis of gender-based violence against women, which has been a particularly dominant aspect of the South African political landscape and discourse in the last decade or so, is also a characteristic of everyday life for many families in Makotse. Despite the visible presence of elite women in positions of authority in local government structures in the Mphahlele area, and the increasing number of female-headed households in the post-apartheid era, academic studies and my interviews with members of the MWC

[641] Shanya Pillay, Peter Njaramba and Samuel Oti, 'Makotse Women's Club'*: A Case Study*, (Johannesburg: Khulisa Management Services, 2008), p. 12.
[642] Over 30% of those in the area with jobs were men who work for the Lonmin platinum mine. See, Lekganyane, *'*The role of food gardens*'*, p. 5.
[643] See, Lepelle-Nkumpi Local Municipality, *2019/2020 Integrated Development Plan*. Accessed online at: TRADITIONAL DINAKA DANCE (lepelle-nkumpi.gov.za); and, *Review Online*, 'Makotse Women's Club uplifts their own', (14 November 2019). Accessed online at: Makotse Women's Club uplifts their own | Review (reviewonline.co.za).
[644] Pillay, Njaramba and Oti, 'Makotse Women's Club', p. 12.
[645] Manama Matlala interviewed by author and Kefuoe Maotoane, Makotse village, 15 February 2022.

suggest that most women in Makotse are subject to patriarchal relations of subordination by men which play out in the domestic sphere.[646]

The nature of patriarchal relations in Makotse are, according to Lekganayane, such that most women 'do not have independent decision-making powers' in their relationships with men who are still taken as the natural heads of families even if absent from the home for large periods of time or if unemployed.[647] As a result, many women 'are still economically, socially and emotionally dependent on their husbands and life-partners' and many of these women are involved in ongoing daily struggles in their own families 'to participate in household and personal decision-making in the domestic sphere' and to access the public sphere independently and on their own terms.[648]

Interviews with MWC members suggest that Makotse is one of many places in South Africa in which patriarchal gender norms often produce 'home' as an alienating, disempowering and depressing space for many poor and working-class women.[649] Even in those homes where social relations are generally positive between family members, the gendered nature of the contemporary crisis of social reproduction in South Africa is such that women in black working-class households – because of the gendered division of labour – struggle to provide the necessary care work (both material and emotional) involved in the daily reproduction of their families. As will be shown below, the politics of the MWC centres on local women's conviction, expressed in different praxes, that the crisis of social reproduction facing South Africa can be challenged when women get together outside of their homes and engage in community development projects premised on a radically inclusive politics of care.[650]

[646] See for example, Lekganyane, *'*The role of food gardens*'*, p. 4; and Manama Matlala, interview 15 February 2022.
[647] Lekganyane, *'*The role of food gardens*'*, p. 4.
[648] *Ibid*; Also see Zebediela TA Women's Unit group interview.
[649] MWC members, group interviewed by author and Kefuoe Maotoane, Makotse Women's Club, Makotse village, 15 February 2022; Maria Mello interview 15 February 2022; Manama Matlala, interview 15 February 2022.
[650] This is in line with the argument made by Khayaat Fakier and Jacklyn Cock, that black working-class households in South Africa contemporary South Africa, 'are the sites of a crisis of social reproduction' where women are the main 'shock absorbers of this crisis. See, Fakier and Cock, 'Gendered Analysis', p. 353.

The organisational history of the Makotse Women's Club



Figure 7: MWC Logo. Accessed online at: https://makotsewomensclub.wordpress.com/.

The MWC describes the village from which it operates as 'a vibrant community in the Limpopo Province of South Africa which is however troubled by soaring rates of HIV and AIDS, high unemployment, poverty and low life-expectancy'.[651] The critique of these social problems plaguing everyday life in Makotse, and the desire by women to overcome them through their own collective efforts during the '1994 moment' constitutes the origins of the MWC. In 1994 Maria Mello was working as a general assistant cleaning the offices of the government buildings in Lebowakgomo. In an interview conducted in her home in Makotse, she explained that it was on her daily walks between home and work, that she first began to think about the possibility of starting a community-based organisation in Makotse:

> What was big for me was when I would wake up in the morning and travel to work, I would see women sweeping their yards and then sitting under trees. Some of these women were totally discouraged thinking about how they were going to feed their children and being stressed about where the food for their children would come from. What concerned me outside of work was thinking about development and imagining things that could come here and thinking how those women who were usually sitting and stressing by themselves could get together, they could sit together and give each other advice and support.[652]

[651] MWC website, (2015). Accessed online at: Makotse Women's Club | Empowering the community (wordpress.com).
[652] Maria Mello interview 15 February 2022.

The outcome of a combined force of poverty, joblessness, and patriarchy in Makotse has resulted, as suggested in the quotation from Mello, in many women's productive capacities being rendered idle and their freedom of mobility severely curtailed to their own homes. Having made this observation, Mello became increasingly passionate about the idea of creating some kind of 'community development' organisation in Makotse which would bring women together, help feed their families, and improve the quality of their everyday lives. With little access to resources but galvanised by the popular rhetoric of women's empowerment in the 1994 moment, Mello set about developing her concept of a women's organisation aimed at creating self-sustaining projects for life-affirming social change in Makotse and the broader Lebowakgomo area.[653] She did this by drawing strategically upon her job as a cleaner in the government buildings of Lebowakgomo:

> I worked as a general assistant and all the information I got was picked up from the dustbins. I used to work in the social development offices and whenever I saw a paper that said, 'social development', I would pick it up and bring it home. And some of those offices were for ministers and they would buy newspapers, I love newspapers, I really like the media... I would take these newspapers and anything with the word 'development' and took it to people at home who could read it to me. I was helped by the media. When I didn't understand I asked someone to google it for me… So, working in those offices helped me so much because I was able to gain valuable information from their dustbins.[654]

With only a grade two qualification and being unable to read and write in English, Mello was reliant on the help and support of more educated community members in deciphering the documents she brought home from work and in constructing her vision of the organisation. However, as will be discussed shortly, contentious relations between the women who would come to form and operate MWC and a small group of professionals in Makotse – mainly male teachers – expressed in public meetings at the *moshate* also took root in the early stages of the organisation's existence.

In 1995, Mello approached the local traditional authority under kgoshigadi Ledwaba and was granted permission to call a meeting in order to put forward her proposal to the community. This was not the first time that she had made a proposal at the moshate to lead

[653] The term 'life-affirming social change' is taken from Ruth Wilson Gilmore. See, Gilmore, 'Forgotten Places' pp. 31-61.
[654] Maria Mello interview 15 February 2022.

a project aimed at providing essential social services to poor and vulnerable community members in Makotse. A few years before, she had made a proposal at a community meeting that those who could, should contribute R10 each so that a funeral fund could be created to cater for those in the community who could not afford to bury their loved ones with dignity. Mello explains, 'By doing that I was able to buy the community 300 chairs, they are in my garage right now… I [also] bought 10 tables and stove tops to help the community because not all families are the same'.[655] Again, in 1995, she sought to use the moshate as a site to put forward a proposal to the community, but this time it was a far more ambitious proposal for an autonomous organisation that would run multiple projects. 'I called the women to the moshate, and we gathered, and I spoke to them about women development. They were happy with it. I suggested that every Friday we all come with 50c, for starting a project, and we selected a committee'.[656] These are the origins of the MWC.

After this first meeting at the *moshate*, about 16 women agreed to take part in the future project and began making a 50c contribution every Friday.[657] Mello collected the contributions every week and opened a bank account – something that had not been possible for women in the bantustans before 1994. With the small amount of funds collected through the stokvel the women began a food garden project in Mello's backyard growing vegetables. At the same time Mello recruited five young women who had just passed their matric exams to be administrators for the organisation – which at this stage still did not have a name. She converted a room in her house into an office in which these younger women began to keep all the financial and operational records of the Friday 50c fund and the Bakone Gardening Project. The main aim of the food garden was to provide an additional food supply to the women involved in the project and other poor families in Makotse whose members, particularly children, were going to sleep hungry on a regular basis.[658] As the food garden continued to produce, the women were able to sell the surplus vegetables in Makotse and four other nearby villages at reasonable prices, and more women began to join the project. At this early stage of the organisation's existence (1995-1996), only the women who worked in the food garden (who had no access to any other source of independent income) took

[655] *Ibid*.
[656] *Ibid*.
[657] Lekganyane, 'The role of food gardens', p. 33.
[658] *Ibid*, p. 1.

home a small portion of the profits accumulated from of the sale of vegetables. Unlike some other stokvels, the income generated from the Friday 50c fund was put directly back into the organisation's bank account and 'no one was taking money for their own pockets'.[659]

As the food garden project was beginning to take off in late-1995, MWC's members continued to attend meetings at the moshate and gave regular updates on their progress. They approached Kgoshigadi Ledwaba and requested that she donate a plot of land to the organisation so that they could expand the gardening project and start a bakery. The request was granted and a plot of land adjacent to Mello's home in Makotse was given to the women free of charge. As Mello recalls,

> I suggested we start a bakery; I took one group and assigned them to the bakery. We used to pick up cow dung and with that we built the baking oven... We used to use the funds from the Friday 50c fund for the bakery. We used the funds, divided to buy flour and other ingredients, some would walk around the community picking up the cow dung for the fires.[660]

Using their own skills and knowledge of construction work, the free resources of the village commons, and the plot of land allocated to them by the *kgoshigadi*, the women built the bakery which would – alongside the expanded food garden – become an income generating project that has since ensured the basic sustainability of the MWC even during 'dry seasons' in which the organisation receives no donor funding at all.[661] The portion of the profits from the food garden sales that the women involved in the project take home is not always stable or guaranteed as it is entirely dependent on how good the harvest and sales of that month had been. When such profit shares are available, they are usually well below minimum wage rates, averaging around R300 per month in 2008.[662] What has been stable and guaranteed since the initiation of the project, however, is the consistent supply of nutritional food from the MWC garden (supplemented with purchases from the Friday 50c fund) to poor and vulnerable families in Makotse village, including many of its own members, as well as the MWC day care and drop-in centres established in 1997 and 2001, respectively.

[659] MWC members group interview, 15 February 2022.
[660] Maria Mello interview 15 February 2022.
[661] Manama Matlala interview 15 February 2022.
[662] Lekganyane, 'The role of food gardens', p. 55.

Existing scholarship on state Poverty Alleviation Programme (PAP) projects aimed at empowering rural women demonstrates that, however well-intentioned these interventions have been, they have often problematically removed women from their everyday modes of labour – 'for which they had developed experience, skills and knowledge over years' – in pushing them to develop 'modern' cash generating strategies.[663] Even in the case of food garden projects that do overlap with existing modes of women's everyday labour, recent studies have shown that government interventions are geared 'to benefit those that are already resourced enough to have a garden themselves' and not the poorest families in rural communities.[664] As explained by an anonymous participant in Mathias Venning's study of food security in Limpopo during the Covid-19 pandemic, 'Starting a food garden sounds so lovely you'd think the input costs would be low… [but] you need a fenced area so really there are resources to be put out from the beginning and people don't have that'.[665]



Figure 8: Photograph of MWC members washing in a river en route to a CNDC training workshop in Vhembe. Accessed online at: https://makotsewomensclub.wordpress.com/.

[663] Johannes Tsheola, 'Rural Women's Survivalist Livelihoods and State Interventions in Ga-Ramogale Village, Limpopo Province', *African Development Review*, 24 2 (2012), p. 221.
[664] Mathias Venning, 'Promoting Food Security During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Community Resilience and Adaptation in Limpopo Province, South Africa' (MPhil Thesis, University of Bergen, 2021), p. 19.
[665] "Participant 201", quoted in *Ibid*, p. 17.

With only the funds they were able to collect themselves every Friday, as well as the *kgoshigadi's* support for the establishment of an autonomous and women-driven community development organisation, women in Makotse have managed to do what many other women in poverty-stricken communities throughout South Africa have not been able to do: create a care-based community development organisation that is linked to rural women's everyday modes of labour, and not against them, in developing income generating activities that are both economically sustainable and politically radical.

Receiving a plot of land from the Ledwaba traditional authority in 1995, without having to buy or pay rent for it, was a huge boost that created the conditions of possibility for the MWC to expand its operations and maintain its autonomy. However, it also marked the moment in which a small group of educated men, according to Mello, began to challenge the organisation on the basis that it could not possibly be run by 'uneducated women'. As Mello recalls,

> At moshate some people said that they had never heard of a person with absolutely no education trying to be in development. Those men saying this were teachers, nurses, and clerks, all these educated people with jobs in different places: they really gave me a hard time. They gave me trouble because they said they could not understand how I could be capable of doing such a thing… The community supported me very much, however, but about five or six of the educated men tried to persuade them against me, saying all that stuff about being uneducated and can't even write so I could never manage… [But] since 1994, when we got this new government, there was word that got out that women now have power, or have now been given power, that word is the one that motivated me and I decided that I was not going to always be led by men or have to look to a man for answers and I decided then and there that I did not want men involved in this project. Men wanted to come in and join us, but I decided that if they were ever going to be part of us, they would only exist in the background because women were now given power and were now able to hold these positions because when it comes to us as women, we tend to become passive when men are around, and we only hear the men's voices.[666]

It was within this context that the organisation was officially constituted as a women's club, the MWC, and formally registered as a Non-Profit Organisation (NPO) in 1996.[667] As the two

[666] Maria Mello interview 15 February 2022.
[667] Calling the organisation a women's club was important as it ensured that it remained under the control and direction of women themselves and, as alluded to in the above quotation, not elite men in the community who so often dominated local development initiatives.

income generating projects (the food garden and bakery) continued to grow, the MWC erected a basic shelter next to the bakery which became their first office outside of Mello's home. The young administrators were tasked with writing up the mission statement and organisational profile of the MWC which, upon Mello's advice, they handed over to officials in all relevant government departments and the private sector.

Broadening the scale and scope of the politics of the MWC

The next major organisational impetus for MWC came when Mello, who was still working as a cleaner in the provincial Department of Health, overheard a conversation about an event in Johannesburg where women who had attended a conference on social development in Beijing would be giving feedback on their trip. As Mello recalls, 'I then manoeuvred and forced myself to enter into the group going for the feedback... I was the only woman coming from the rural areas in the group'.[668] By attending this conference Mello not only received valuable information from a range of professional healthcare and social service workers but she was also able, as the only participant from rural Limpopo (Northern Province at the time), to 'explain to them some of the issues we are facing in rural areas' and to make the MWC known on a national level.[669] Two weeks after the Johannesburg conference the MWC – with Mello as its representative – was invited to attend a three-week 'Women in Development' training session in KwaZulu Natal. According to Mello, 'That is what trained me for perseverance... It showed me that it's not about money, but it is about the dreams that you have'.[670]

The experience Mello gained in these training sessions, particularly from participants in the HIV/AIDS care sector, she shared with the women at MWC. Within a year the MWC successfully secured a donation from the National Development Agency (NDA) and the Department of Education to start the Phuthanang Day Care project in 1997. This involved both the construction of a day care building and the creation of a home care programme with 22 MWC-trained caregivers providing regular physical and emotional support to people living with HIV/AIDS, orphans and vulnerable children (OVC), and other poor community members facing problems such as accessing social workers and grants. The caregivers initially received

[668] Marial Mello interview 15 February 2022.
[669] *Ibid.*
[670] *Ibid*.

a monthly stipend of R500 a month which had increased to R700 per month in 2022. The co-ordinators for each of MWC's projects started receiving stipends of R1,500 per month in the mid-2000s. This amount has not increased since then and, like the profits from the MWC's income generating projects, it is often sacrificed back into the organisation's bank account in periods when donor funding is scarce.

The MWC website describes its Home-Based Care project, established in 1998 in response to the HIV-AIDS crisis, as following 'a holistic approach' that recognises the importance of involving family members and the wider community in 'discussing care plans' for patients 'while respecting the confidentiality of the individual' and 'address[ing] such



Figure 9: Photograph of home-based caregivers at MWC. Accessed online at: https://makotsewomensclub.wordpress.com/.

crucial issues as stigma, violence against women and children, and poverty'.[671] The services provided by the Home-Based Care project's 39 caregivers in Makotse are listed on the MWC website as follows:

- Visit patients at home according to care plan.
- DOTS (Directly Observed Treatment, short course).
- Voluntary Counselling and Treatment (VCT).
- Preventing Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT).
- Support patients taking treatment at the hospital & clinic.
- Health education to family members.
- Counsel clients and give psychosocial support.

[671] MWC website, 'Community Home Based Care'. Accessed online at: https://makotsewomensclub.wordpress.com/home-community-based-care/.

- Referral to and from the clinic.
- Distribute condoms to target areas, focusing on high risk areas.
- Provide sexuality education at schools.
- Give health talks at the clinic and mobile.
- Address gender-based violence to women and girls.[672]

In 2001, with a combined source of funds from the Department of Social Development, the Department of Health, the office of the Premier, as well as the Japanese and US embassies, the MWC erected a building next to the day care containing a Drop-in Centre, a community hall, and an office.[673] In 2015, officials from the provincial Department of Social Development visited the MWC and, having been suitably impressed by organisation and all it had achieved, donated a truck to the food garden project which, at the time, was selling and donating food to poor families in 17 villages in the Lepelle-Nkumpi local municipality. Later that year the Department awarded MWC a contract to be a Principal Implementing Agent (PIA) for the newly-created Provincial Food Distribution Centre (PFDC) programme in Limpopo. Since then, the MWC has been responsible for delivering food parcels to Community Nutritional Distribution Centres (CNDCs), referred to by the women of MWC as 'traditional restaurants', in villages throughout the Ga-Sekhukhune District. The state provides the food parcels which MWC is then responsible for collecting, storing and distributing.



Figure 10: Photograph of CNDC cooks at a MWC training workshop. Accessed online at: https://makotsewomensclub.wordpress.com/.

[672] *Ibid*.
[673] Manama Matlala interview 15 February 2022.

The MWC also holds training workshops with CNDC cooks from villages throughout Limpopo at its facilities in Makotse. Between 2015 and 2019 the Department of Social Development provided funds so that the MWC could rent warehouse space in the Seshego industrial area from which they ran the PFDC project. In 2019, however, this funding was withdrawn and the MWC was unable to pay the monthly rental fee of around R35,000 for the warehouse. Since then, the MWC has been using part of its community hall as storage space for the food parcels and has begun building their own warehouse storage facility in Makotse.[674]

When the COVID-19 pandemic broke out in March 2020, the MWC was in the throes of one of its regular funding 'dry seasons', also known in MWC as 'an extended gap year', but the organisation was still able to mobilise its members and resources in response to the crisis.[675] It was one of the eight NGOs selected by the Department of Social Development to provide essential resources and services to communities during the national state of disaster and lockdown period.

As a PIA the MWC was given responsibility for servicing the whole of Limpopo and it did so by grafting its new COVID-19 relief work onto its existing PFDC infrastructure and networks in the Capricorn District and then expanding their reach CNDCs and NPOs in Limpopo's four other districts. This represented a dramatic up-scaling of the activities of the MWC from a regional to a provincial scale and it came with an unprecedented injection of funds which, Mmanana Matlala, project manager of the MWC's PFDC project, describes as having shocked her when she first heard of it from her director. According to Matlala, in 2021 the Department allocated R32 million to MWC for the continued distribution of food parcels and personal protective equipment (PPE) packages in Limpopo. 'I don't know if the Department were testing us or what, but that one was a risk', recalls Matlala adding:

> When I saw that letter, I looked at the number and said, eh! How many zeros? I looked at it and said, how can we do this? But my director said to me, "we are going to do this". I was shocked and afraid, how can we be such a kind of NGO, ready for R32 million? The Department is trusting us with this kind of millions? But, you see, we already had the skill to manage each and every record, so when we took our books to the auditor we can always qualify and apply. And, you know how we did: excellent! Wow, we did it! And we did it, in

[674] *Ibid*.
[675] *Ibid.*

> all the districts, through our commitment and our love for what we are doing. And my director, because she was in-charge of the R32million, thereafter she applied to national lottery for R30-something-million, and when she was there at the office the officials there were calling everyone saying "hey come see this lady, she is crazy!". But she said "yes, I want it, I have already worked with R32 million". She just then takes out the audit statement and said, "you see I have already done this, so don't undermine me".[676]

The PEE funding was only for eight months and since then the MWC has been in yet another 'very extended gap year' with few national or provincial contracts secured for future projects. But this is entirely normal for the MWC which relies on the voluntary work of its members, the funds from its own income generating projects, and small donations from its board of directors, far more than the state or private donors (both of which have proven unstable and unreliable) in order to sustain itself and its initiatives.[677]

The MWC's emancipatory politics of care

The political form and praxes of the MWC rely on communal rights to land and the commons. This includes, for example, uncommodified access to certain resources for fuel, food, construction, and trade, accessed through the chieftaincy. They also rely on occasional and often fleeting access to large sums of state and donor funding. These are two central features of the organisational form and material resources of the MWC that are neither guaranteed or equally accessible to all women residing in rural villages of the former bantustans in South Africa. Feminist scholars such as Shamim Meer and Aninka Claassens argue that women's interests in rural South Africa are 'pitted against the power of capital and chiefs' and this is why they remain marginalised in national policies and associated academic debates on land reform and rural development in the post-apartheid era.[678] Key pieces of legislation passed by the ANC government in its attempts at reconstructing rural governance and development policies in the post-apartheid era have been critically named the 'Bantustan Bills' and include 'the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act of 2003, the Communal Land Rights Act of 2004 (declared unconstitutional in 2010), eight provincial traditional leadership

[676] *Ibid*.
[677] *Ibid.*
[678] Shamim Meer, 'Possibilities for Redistribution: Rural Women in South Africa Today'. In T. Cruz, M. Silva, and A. Sitas, *Gathering Voices: Perspectives on the Social Sciences in Southern Africa* (Proceedings of the ISA Regional Conference for Southern Africa, Durban, July 1996), p. 137.

laws, the Traditional Courts Bill, and the looming National Traditional Affairs Bill'.[679] These laws, according to Claassens, continue to 'bolster the bantustan-era arrogance and power of traditional leaders towards their "subjects"' and has provided a new legally sanctioned basis for autocratic chiefs to continue the colonial practices of banning community meetings, extorting tribal levies, and denying rights to land and commons.[680] In the late-1990s, scholars conducting research on the socio-economic and political status of women in the former bantustans, such as Meer, found that,

> While there are common shared experiences across bantustans, needs, experiences, possibilities for livelihoods and possibilities for organisation will differ across rural areas… specific categories of women will have differing access to incomes and land in different localities. This will be determined by the local history, specific experiences of dispossession, and the social and gender power dynamics.[681]

Meer highlights that the possibilities of political organisation for most women living in the former bantustans (despite diverse experiences) are generally limited in those villages where they continue to be excluded from equal participation in public village politics on the basis of their gender and marital status.[682] For example, as my thesis has shown, in some villages of Ga-Matlala such as Kgomoschool, women – regardless of their marital status – are still prohibited from participating in community decision making structures equally alongside men and from representing themselves in dealings with the chieftaincy. It is thus unsurprising that today, women in Kgomoschool and surrounding villages are still struggling to organise themselves collectively and create life-affirming projects such as creches or drop-in centres.[683] However, in other villages of the former Lebowa bantustan, such as Makotse and Tsimanyane, women have been reclaiming and carving out new spaces of participation and authority for themselves in public village politics since the period of the democratic transition in the mid-1990s.[684] According to Meer,

> The impact this has had for women is evident in Tsimanyane women's refusal to perform the compulsory labour expected of women on the chief's fields. By

[679] Claassens, '1913 Land Act'. Also see, Claassens, 'Bantustan Bills'.
[680] Claassens, '1913 Land Act'.
[681] Meer, 'Possibilities for Redistribution', p. 132.
[682] *Ibid*, p. 133.
[683] See Philippa S. and Freeda M. interview, 24 August 2019.
[684] *Ibid*, p. 136.

> comparison women in neighbouring villages, despite their resentment of this task, did not feel they were in a position to refuse their labour. Local power dynamics between the women and the chief were thus being reshaped as a result of women's involvement in the *Kgotla*… [which provides] the conditions under which women can engage in group action to challenge chiefly authority.[685]

My own research has similarly shown that the inclusion of women in the community meetings at the *moshate* in Makotse village from the early-1990s onward was an essential factor in the creation of the MWC and its continued existence today. Having the support of their local *kgoshikgadi* has created the political conditions of possibility for the praxes of the MWC by facilitating women's collective and rent-free access to residential and arable lands as well as uncommodified access to resources held in common such as wood, seeds, soil, clay, compost. Although, it is important to note that the MWC does not enjoy free and unfettered access to water. They often must pay for private or municipal supplies when getting their own water from nearby rivers or communal boreholes is not possible.[686] Yet the fact that they have subtly managed to hold their local *kgoshikgadi* to the radically democratic prescription that 'a chief is a chief by the people' has allowed MWC members to reclaim their collective rights to the commons and to build and support life-affirming projects for social change throughout rural Limpopo.

However, the politics of the MWC is also significantly constrained by the relationship it has fostered with the chieftaincy and the local municipality. The MWC as an organisation, and its individual members, actively avoid involvement in local modes of public protest politics that directly challenge state power.[687] This includes, for example, protest marches and public demonstrations relating to issues such as poor state service delivery or succession disputes over positions within local chieftaincies. Members of the MWC, including its founder Mello, believe that if they become in any way associated with such contentious modes of protest politics – which are a common feature of the political landscape of the country in general and which have taken place with an exceptionally high frequency in the Lepelle-Nkumpi municipality in the last few years – the MWC will be compromised and embroiled in

[685] *Ibid*, p. 137.
[686] Manama Matlala interview 15 February 2022.
[687] *Ibid*; Also see, MWC members group interview, 15 February 2022; and Maria Mello interview, 15 February 2022.

the party-political factionalism that saturate such protests in present day South Africa.[688] Thus, as important as it is to celebrate the emancipatory nature of the politics of the MWC, and acknowledge everything its members have struggled to build and maintain for themselves and others under incredibly harsh socio-economic constraints; it is equally important to acknowledge the limits of the MWC's political potential to launch a sustained challenge to the powers of the state and capital that continue to marginalise the economic needs and political aspirations of rural women in the former bantustan. The MWC does not provide a readymade blueprint of an entirely emancipatory political project with universal applicability. It does, however, represent important elements of what such a blueprint for emancipatory politics might look like if the idea of women's right to the commons is placed at the centre of social movements' agendas and popular struggles for social change in post-apartheid South Africa.

I argue that Rancière's idea of emancipation as a self-determined movement out of a situation of minority, and his definition of emancipatory politics as 'the autonomous growth of the space of the common created by the free association of men and women implementing the egalitarian principle', can both be seen historically and in practice, in the politics of the MWC.[689] From a Rancièrian perspective, the political significance of the MWC is not that it provides 300 jobs through the state's Extended Public Works Programme (EPWP) or that its gardening and CNDC projects provide nutritional meals to hundreds of poverty-stricken families in rural Limpopo. Instead, the political significance of the MWC's projects is that they are operated according to an egalitarian principle. This is evidenced, I argue, along with many other emancipatory aspects of the MWC's political praxes, in the following extract from an interview with Manama Matlala, a veteran member and PFDC project director for the MWC, that deserves to be presented in full without paraphrasing. According to Matlala,

> To do the work like we do at MWC, you have to be patient because when you are working here you are with people from very diverse backgrounds, we differ and we are from different diversity, and sometimes you will be working with a strange character and you have to be patient with everybody. In fact, we were discussing just the other day how with such a big group it can be hard because you don't know all of the workers, but we said we have to go all out to know all your workers. We have to! Because knowing them is loving them, you are

[688] Manama Matlala interview 15 February 2022.
[689] Rancière, 'Communists Without Communism', p. 168 and 176.

> showing that you're caring for these people. And when you are doing this, you have to sometimes have one to one engagements. Because sometimes when people come to work, they are burdened, so as a leader you have to help that person continue to be productive but you can see, even when they wear a mask, if someone is not smiling and you know that they are burdened. As women then, we have to be there for each other. And even for the men, because you know this GBV thing, it can and does go all around, both ways, sometimes it really can be a man who is suffering at home. So, you'll advise and council him. We are able because we attended a lot of workshops for counselling training, especially at the time of the HIV when we were counselling in schools. So, we are very experienced. Ha! And I was telling those people, those NGOs and others who undermine us, I like telling them: I am a master of all. I am a social worker because I am working with vulnerable children, when they are having problems, we are doing formal psycho-social support, so I am a social worker. And then in the HIV sector, in the homecare sector, I am a nurse, because I have to work with this person, I have to explain all of the medication and lifestyle adjustments, and I have to check is she fine or what. I am a teacher also at the drop-in centre [DIC] for orphans and vulnerable children.[690]

The idea of MWC as a site of emancipatory politics, as expressed in the above quotation from Matlala, was echoed by other MWC members during my visit to the club in 2022. It can also be seen in one of the two existing academic studies I have come across which focus explicitly on the MWC. That is Lekganyane's thesis on the role of food gardens in mitigating the vulnerability of women to HIV-AIDS in rural Limpopo.[691] Lekganyane argues that the women who participate in the MWC food garden have 'become productive in an economic, material, intellectual and social sense'.[692] Not only have the women involved in the food garden become more financially independent and self-sufficient, according to Lekganyane, they have also gained the confidence to 'take control of their personal and private lives', particularly in regard to 'issues affecting their sexuality and reproductive lives'.[693] As such, Lekganyane argues, 'These women's new-found emancipation and empowerment earn them respect and recognition in the eyes of their families, including their male counterparts.[694] Adding to the observations made by Lekganyane, I argue that the MWC is not only emancipatory for the

[690] Manama Matlala interview 15 February 2022.
[691] The other study, prepared by Khulisa Management Services on behalf of several large NGOs (such as USAID) working in the HIV-AIDS sector, focuses on the OVC services of the MWC. See, Pillay, Njaramba and Oti, 'Makotse Women's Club'.
[692] Lekganyane, *'The role of food gardens'*, p.6.
[693] *Ibid*, p. 6.
[694] *Ibid*, p. 6.

way it has positively destabilised patriarchal situations of subordination in its members' homes, but also because it represents a model of political organising premised on the establishment and growth of new spaces of the common created by the autonomous association of women implementing the egalitarian principle. As discussed in chapter one, Rancière's egalitarian principle asserts that every individual has an equal capacity to think, understand and participate in politics. The MWC member's description of their organisation as one that is run '*by* poor women, *for* poor women' seems to be an important affirmation of such an egalitarian principle.[695] However, my own research into the MWC and the description of the organisation and its members provided in this chapter contains many significant gaps regarding the everyday functioning of the MWC as well as many ambiguities regarding the egalitarian and potentially emancipatory aspects of the club. To begin to address these gaps and ambiguities, future research will need to explore and analyse the everyday decision-making practices of the MWC, its relationship with non-member women in Makotse and neighbouring villages, as well as how (if at all) it's claims on the commons have served to entrench the rights of all local women to the commons. For now, however, attention shifts to a more comparative perspective of the MWC in relation to some other significant grassroots organisations and social movements in contemporary South Africa.

Some strategic comparisons

The existing scholarship on South African civil society and social movements has tended to ignore seemingly 'apolitical' or politically conservative organisations involved in community development and self-help modes of organising (no matter how radical) and focused instead on organisations that challenge existing power relations and social structures in a fundamental way that calls into question the neoliberal framework of the post-apartheid order and its ideological underpinnings.[696] Examples of the latter kind of organisations, which have received significant scholarly attention, include, the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), the Anti-Privatisation Forum (APF), and more recently the Durban-based shack dweller's

[695] Manama Matlala interview 15 February 2022.
[696] See, Luke Sinwell, 'Participation as popular agency', (PhD Thesis, Wits University, 2009), p. 31; and, Patrick Bond, Ashwin Desai, and Trever Ngwane, 'Uneven and Combined Marxism within South Africa's Urban Social Movements', in Lawrence Cox ed., *Marxism and Social Movements* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), pp. 233-258.

movement Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM).[697] These organisations, with AbM being the only one still functioning today, have all variously made political demands and prescriptions on the state in collective acts of protest that were (and in the case of AbM are) often met by state repression and police violence.

The MWC's relationship to the state, on the other hand, is not as a petitioner or protester for inclusion in state service delivery or a share of the social wage. According to the MWC, the post-apartheid ANC-led government, regardless of whether its intentions are more good than bad, is very unlikely to be able to deliver on its promises to create jobs and increase the social wage for poor people in communities like Makotse.[698] As such, the women of MWC have committed themselves to 'making our own jobs here in Makotse'.[699] When resources are made available through state contracts and tenders for community development initiatives the MWC bids for access to such resources. However, as previously noted, the MWC deliberately maintains a distance from local forms of politics, such as so-called 'service-delivery protests', that use contentious modes of politics, reminiscent of the anti-apartheid struggle, to make demands on the government or the ANC as political party.[700] According to Mello, state-centric and party-centric modes of politics are 'divisive' and if the MWC were to become involved in them they would risk alienating 'other constituencies in the community' and therefore tainting the MWC reputation as a place for everybody, a site of the common, where anybody regardless of any difference is welcome to participate in 'empowering themselves and the community'.[701] As such, the MWC presents not as a political opponent to the post-apartheid state but as an autonomous service providing partner offering the government an alternative to its own existing discriminatory and unsustainable developmental praxes in rural South Africa. The politics of the MWC forces a stretching or

[697] There is significant academic debate in South Africa about the emancipatory political nature of the TAC and APF as well as other well-known national NGOs such as Equal Education. See, for example, Neocosmos, *Thinking freedom in Africa,* p. 168 and pp. 222-236; also see, Kirk Helliker, 'The state of emancipation – with, within, without?', *Interface: A journal for and about social movements*, 2 1 (2010), p. 136. The emancipatory credentials of AbM, while also disputed in some circles of the South African academy, has gained much recognition amongst international academics. See, for example, Peter Hallward, 'The will of the people: Notes towards a dialectical voluntarism', *Radical Philosophy*, 155 (2009), pp. 17-29; and, Nigel Gibson, *Fanonian practices in South Africa: From Steve Biko to Abahlali baseMjondolo* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011).
[698] Manama Matlala interview 15 February 2022.
[699] *Ibid*; also see, Maria Mello, interview 15 February 2022.
[700] Maria Mello, interview 15 February 2022.
[701] *Ibid*.

reconsideration of the kind of thinking, dominant in strands of social movement theory, that 'posits structure and agency as opposites in ongoing struggles for self-determination'.[702]

Presently, there are over 200,000 registered NPOs engaged in the provision of care services at the community level in South Africa. The majority of community projects initiated by such NPOs involve the kinds of care work discussed in this chapter and, like the MWC, they are managed and worked by working class and poor women on a voluntary basis at the community level.[703] Some of these grassroots women's organisations have links to intermediary NGOs, of both the technical and social variety, that monopolise donor funding circles and operate at the national, regional and international levels; while most grassroots women's organisations do not hold meaningful links to the larger NGOs in civil society.[704]

The process of becoming a formal Community-Based Organisation (CBO), NPO or NGO, and thereafter maintaining rigorous bookkeeping and operational monitoring systems and practices, has been a major stumbling block for organisations similar to MWC in other parts of the former Lebowa bantustan.[705] For example, the Sekhukhune Rural Women's Association (SRWA) was formed in 1992 by women in Apel village. During the 1990s and early-2000s, the SRWA provided care services and supported community development initiates throughout the Ga-Sekhukhune district, in partnership with local traditional authorities and NGOs such as Operation Hunger.[706] In the 2000s, however, the operations of the SRWA began to decline dramatically as it struggled to register formally as an NPO and become eligible for state and private donor funding. The primary issue was that the SRWA didn't hold operational records such as meeting minutes and they did not start financial bookkeeping practices or paying for audits until 2008. As such, in the highly technocratic context of post-apartheid developmentalism, the SRWA became illegible to the state at the provincial and national levels (where contracts and tenders for care service providers are issued) and ineligible to receive funding from large donor organisations. Since then, the SRWA's projects and

[702] Gilmore, 'Forgotten Places', p. 51.
[703] Kentse Radebe and Ncedisa Nkonyeni, 'NGOS today: Competing for resources, power and agency', *Mail and Guardian*, (5 March 2022). Accessed online at: https://mg.co.za/analysis/2020-03-05-ngos-today-competing-for-resources-power-and-agency/.
[704] Helliker, 'The state of emancipation', pp. 133-138.
[705] For a useful discussion of pitfalls of the professionalisation of activism and its formalisation in not-for-profits in relation to grassroots women's organisations in marginalised socio-spatial contexts of the United States, see: Gilmore, 'Forgotten places', pp. 50-51.
[706] SRWA members, group interviewed by author, Komani Disability Centre, Apel village, 19 October 2019.

membership have scaled-down significantly to the Apel-Nkoana-Nchabeleng area of Ga-Sekhukhune where the organisation originally started in the early-1990s.[707]

When I visited SRWA members in 2019 at the Komani Disability Centre in Apel – a project set up by the SRWA at the old Roman Catholic Church which was donated to the organisation in the mid-2000s – they made it clear that their greatest challenge was in being seen and recognised as a legitimate organisation deserving of support (despite their apparent lack of bookkeeping and managerial skills) by corporates and the provincial state departments. Furthermore, unlike the MWC which received a plot of land to establish a food garden in as early as 1995, the SRWA only just received an equivalent piece of land from Kgoshi Nchabeleng on the banks of the Oliphants River in 2018.[708] Currently, the SRWA are seeking donations to get the necessary resources to establish a food garden on the land which, some members believe, was gifted to them by Kgoshi Nchabeleng because he wanted to keep it out of the hands of the neighbouring Kgoshi Pasha, and not because he thinks the women of SRWA have a right to such land.[709]

While the SRWA maintains a close working relationship with the traditional authorities and local ward councillors (as well as many other civil servants) in the area of their operations, they have failed to mobilise these social networks to foster organisational links with the state at the provincial or national levels in the way that the MWC have been able to do – especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of the SRWA members I spoke with in 2019 argued that one of the reasons why their organisation is struggling is because of the pervasive discourse of corruption in contemporary South Africa – especially in Limpopo which has received the unenviable title of being the most corrupt province.[710] They argue that the SRWA is viewed with scepticism by both businesses and the Departments because of the widespread and sometimes fantastical stories of community development initiatives in Limpopo (such as creches, old-age homes, and women's empowerment schemes) being set up, with funding of amounts in the millions of Rands, only to close down a few months later after all the money

[707] *Ibid*; also see, Maurice Nchabeleng, interviewed by author, Apel village, Ga-Sekhukhune, 20 April 2019.
[708] SRWA members, group interview, 19 October 2019.
[709] *Ibid.*
[710] See, for example, 'Limpopo labelled South Africa's Corruption capital', *Review Online*, (14 March 2019). Accessed online at: https://reviewonline.co.za/487946/limpopo-labelled-south-africas-corruption-capital/.

'had been eaten' by those people running the project.[711] It is for this reason that the SRWA has, in recent years, turned most of its attention away from the state and towards big business (including multinational corporations like Coca-Cola) in its efforts to get donations and support to start rebuilding the organisation.

While the MWC and the SRWA share much in common in terms of their organisational form and praxes, I argue that a large part of the MWC's success has been in its ability to maintain its autonomy and avoid total dependency on external funding, whilst simultaneously becoming financially and operationally legible to the state (beyond the local level) and large donor organisations, and all the while implementing the egalitarian principle. Rancière's egalitarian principle (see chapter one) can be understood as an active, as opposed to passive, conception of equality in which marginalised people demonstrate their equality with everyone else – especially in regard to their intellectual capacity to participate in the governance of society – by creating radically inclusive and participatory spaces of democratic politics in which they take control of their own lives and destines.[712] The MWC has achieved this by combining certain practicalities of customary rights of the commons with the universal ideals of self-determination, equality, and justice for all human beings regardless of difference.

The resultant living subaltern politics of the MWC is thus expressed, discursively and in practice, as a radical politics of care which supplely combines multiple – and often contradictory – discourses of neoliberal development, human rights and traditional rights (especially women's free access to land and commons), as well as popular Christian idioms. The MWC does not petition for, what Neocosmos terms, 'genuine popular accountability of power within both civil society and traditional society'.[713] It does, however, offer both NGOs in civil society and chiefs within traditional society an alternative model of what community development can look like when those with power are held accountable by those they serve,

[711] One of the most interesting stories of this nature which was shared with me in conversation with a group of SRWA members was as follows. In around 2012, a community development project was established in a village not far from Apel (the name of which was not given to me) with funding of R2 million from the Limpopo Department of Social Development. Within two months, the people involved in running the project had embezzled all the money on building houses and buying cars for themselves and, on one occasion apparently, buying KFC chicken for the entire village. See, SRWA group interview (written notes of unrecorded sections).
[712] Rancière, 'Communists Without Communism', pp. 176-177. Also see, Todd May, *The Political Thought of Jacques Rancière: Creating Equality*, (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).
[713] Neocosmos, *Thinking freedom in Africa*, p. 522.

and when a culture of radical transparency around money and resources held in common is instituted in practice, and the benefits of such resources are shared with people in need regardless of any difference such as gender, ethnicity, age, race or nationality.

Conclusion

This chapter explored the forms and praxes of rural women's emancipatory politics in rural Lebowa during the 1994 moment and the subsequent post-apartheid era. I began by showing that the absence of women in rural villages from modes of protest politics that make direct demands on the state, such as civil servant strikes or so-called service delivery protests, has been a feature of the political landscape of the former Lebowa bantustan since the early-1990s. Drawing on the works of Phillips, James and Cock, I argued that the 1994 moment created the conditions of possibility for some women in rural villages to reclaim public spaces and elaborate new forms of women's associational life. The rest of the chapter was dedicated to showing how one women's organisation born during the 1994 moment in the former Lebowa bantustan, the MWC, has been able to scale up its activism from its care-based praxes and projects in one village to running and assisting initiatives for life-affirming social change at a provincial level. I argued that the MWC is an example of a grassroots organisation that has developed itself and its radical care-work praxes in a manner that values, embraces, and relies upon rural women's everyday modes of commoning and reproductive labour. This is in stark contrast to many state-led poverty alleviation initiatives in rural Limpopo which, both during apartheid and in the more recent past, have prioritised highly technical 'modern' solutions based on consultations with 'experts' that ultimately undermine rural women's livelihood strategies.[714] The political form and praxes of the MWC rely on customary rights to land and the commons accessed through the chieftaincy as well as occasional and often fleeting access to large sums of state and donor funding. The political principles of the MWC centre on local's women's conviction, born out in different praxes, that the crisis of social reproduction facing South Africa can be best challenged when women come together outside of their homes and engage in autonomous community development projects premised on a radically inclusive, participatory, and accountable politics of care. More research and

[714] See, for example, Tsheola, 'Rural Women's Survivalist Livelihoods', p. 221; and Barbara van Koppen, Barbara Tapela and Everisto Mapedza, 'Joint Ventures in the Flag Boshielo Irrigation Scheme, South Africa: A History of Smallholders, States and Business', *IWMI Research Report*, 171 (2018), pp. 16-18.

theoretical attention must be given to the MWC before the claims put forward in this chapter regarding its egalitarian and emancipatory nature can be satisfactorily understood and validated. However, despite these limitations this chapter has attempted to present a descriptive analysis of the MWC which contributes significantly to expanding mainstream or dominant views of what constitutes progressive, meaningful, and emancipatory politics in a rural post-apartheid context.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

In this thesis I have provided a history of women's subaltern struggles for freedoms in the former Lebowa bantustan of South Africa from the late-colonial period of segregation (1940s) to the post-apartheid present (2022). Including a sociological analysis of present-day events within a History thesis, while unusual for most classical and orthodox approaches, is a characteristic feature of radical historical traditions such as subaltern studies, postcolonialism, social history, and feminism, within which my study is broadly situated. By analysing certain present realities, such as the political praxes of the MWC, my thesis demonstrates that rural women's praxes of emancipatory politics in the former Lebowa bantustan are part of a living history of subaltern politics in South Africa and not simply marginal to the national liberation struggle.

The purpose of this concluding chapter is twofold. First it aims to provide a synopsis of the history presented in this thesis with particular emphasis on the political principles, praxes, spaces, and forms that characterised women's subaltern struggles as emancipatory in different parts of the former Lebowa bantustan and during different periods. In so doing, I show that the living subaltern history of women's emancipatory politics in rural South Africa is not straight-forward. It is a messy set of stories about groups of women working creatively and tirelessly to hold on to and expand impulses of emancipatory politics under difficult circumstances. It is a history which suggests that although one may have a preconceived ideal, neat equation, or theoretical vision of emancipatory politics, in the real world, under particular constraints in specific places and historical periods, the manifestation of emancipatory politics is complex. Its evolution in collective political thought and practice is difficult to pin-point and explain, its concepts and discourses are elastic and multifaceted, and its temporal existence often only fleeting and discontinuously sequential. Ultimately, this makes it challenging for preconceived and fixed theoretical notions of emancipation to remain stable and intact when held up against the scrutiny of historical analysis based on empirical research of subaltern spaces.

However, the history presented in this thesis is also one which shows that certain characteristics of women's past and present praxes of emancipatory politics in rural South Africa – especially the close relationship between women's struggles for freedom, spaces of the commons, and praxes of a radical politics of care – do correspond with conceptions of emancipation worked out in theory with reference to political events, formations, and actors, in different world historical contexts. By showing what universal emancipatory political principles looked like historically in the former Lebowa bantustan, and when put into practice by women, my thesis provides a new gender and subaltern history against which existing theories can be tested and from which popular praxes of emancipatory politics can be identified and appropriately adapted to inform new theories of universal human emancipation that are attuned to the particularities of our present time and social contexts. The second aim of this concluding chapter is to provide some final observations on the significance of subaltern histories of emancipatory politics for contemporary debates concerning the relationship between women, the chieftaincy, land and democracy in South Africa, as well as broader theorisations of universal emancipatory politics.

The history of women's emancipatory struggles in Lebowa

As stated in the introductory chapter, the goal of this thesis has not been about inserting rural women's political experiences into existing androcentric historical narratives and theoretical debates about the South African national liberation struggle. This affirmation, expressed in the negative, is a foundational premise of radical feminist methodologies of historical knowledge production.[715] What this thesis has been about is adopting a perspective of emancipatory politics that centres the experiences of poor and working-class black women who have struggled for freedom in different historical periods, under various and changing constraints and conditions of possibility, in the rural and subaltern spaces constituting the former Lebowa bantustan. By various and changing 'constraints' – often demarcated as socio-economic, political, legal, ecological, and so on – I do not mean insurmountable structural

[715] Recall radical feminist historian Nomboniso Gasa's critique of Julia Wells and Cheryl Walker's respective histories of South African women's political struggles discussed in the introductory chapter. Gasa accuses both Wells and Walker of having problematically inserted women – whose political subjectivities and conceptions of emancipation are homogenised and misrepresented as being wholly determined by their socio-political locations and interests as working-class black women living in urban townships – into existing androcentric historical narratives and understandings of popular politics in South Africa from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth centuries. See, Gasa, 'Feminisms, Motherisms, Patriarchies', p. 227.

barriers to expressions of transformative subaltern agency.[716] Instead, I understand constraints as constituted by the interplay of structure and agency within specific – not necessarily singular – spatially and temporally defined historical contexts. This is in line with Gilmore's articulation of the Marxist formulation, 'we make places, things and selves, but not under conditions of our own choosing'.[717] Considering this observation, my thesis has attempted to celebrate rural women's praxes of emancipatory politics, while simultaneously critiquing the difficulties experienced in holding onto and expanding those praxes under changing political conditions in the crisis-ridden spatial contexts of the Lebowa bantustan.

The history presented in this thesis began with an exploration of women's emancipatory struggles during the period of mass rural resistance in South Africa from the 1940s to the early-1960s, with a focus on the Pietersburg, Ga-Matlala, and Ga-Sekhukhune uprisings in the Northern Transvaal. In each of these uprisings, women championed radical insurgent struggles against colonial-cum-apartheid processes of land dispossession, enclosure of the commons, excessive taxation, and the criminalisation of women's subsistence lifestyles in rural communities – in short, the nefarious processes and outcomes of betterment planning. Drawing on Delius, I have identified three political principles, expressed as universal statements on human freedom applicable to rural societies everywhere, that were a popular aspect of the distribution of the sensible in rural black communities in the Northern Transvaal informing women's emancipatory political praxes in this period. These were: that there should be no landless or stockless groups in rural societies; no taxation of widows or the elderly; and that commoners (including women) had the right to dismiss leaders from local governments (chiefly councils) by way of democratic consensus. When women engaged in struggles to reclaim forests, rivers, pastures and arable lands enclosed by the colonial-cum-apartheid state, these were the emancipatory principles – expressions of an alternative world they strived to create – that informed their praxes. In addition to these political principles, women's everyday lived experiences of oppression and subalternity under colonial-cum-apartheid state authority, as well as their associated experiences of socio-economic marginalisation and material dispossession under betterment, also informed their struggles to regain control over their own lives and destinies in this period.

[716] Gilmore, 'Forgotten Places', p. 36.
[717] Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*, p. 242.

Under betterment, women could no longer freely decided what crops they would plant and where they would plant them; or how many cattle, donkeys, sheep, and goats they wanted, or could afford, to keep. On the trust farms in the Pietersburg district where betterment was first imposed in the 1940s, women also resented the increasing regularity of visits from the tax and rent collectors who used to only arrive once a year and were especially aggrieved by the fact that rents and taxes were extended to widows as well as second and third wives – basically, female heads of households – who were historically exempted from making such payments under chiefly modes of governance. Betterment regulations ushered in a new era of crisis, characterised by widespread economic deprivation and socio-ecological degradation, for the rural black communities whose lands were subjected to its implementation in South Africa. It entailed the forced removal and resettlement of scattered rural homesteads into densely-clustered residential areas; the enclosure of commons and natural resources previously held in common; the introduction of a whole new host of excessive rents and taxes; the criminalisation of women's reproductive labour praxes and subsistence lifestyles; as well as the enclosure and division of communal arable and grazing lands into individual family farming plots and grazing camps. Around and within these spaces barbed wire fencing was erected to ensure that no humans or their livestock would transgress the imposed boundaries of the new spatial ordering of things.[718] In short, betterment undermined and threatened the foundations of economic and political freedom which women had historically carved out and maintained for themselves in rural black communities of the Northern Transvaal. It did so by violently curtailing women's access to communal natural resources and spaces of the commons which were the primary resources and spaces of their everyday reproductive work and collective praxes of emancipatory politics. The scale, duration, intensity, and frequency, of women's praxes of resistance against the infrastructure, agents, and practices of betterment were at their highest levels in the 1940s to early-1960s period of widespread rural rebellion in South Africa when these policies were first being applied in practice.

These lived experiences and the three emancipatory principles identified and outlined at the start of this section were, however, not the only ones informing political subjectivities of those involved in the Pietersburg, Ga-Matlala and Ga-Sekhukhune uprisings of the mid-

[718] Letsoalo, 'Survival Strategies', p.76.

twentieth century. For example, Delius has shown how the popular idea that, 'a chief is a chief by the people' (*kgoshi ke kgoshi ka batho*), was adopted by the male-dominated Sebatakgomo and Khudutamaga migrant worker organisations to democratise the Bapedi chieftaincy and use the institution as a weapon in the fight against the imposition of Bantu Authorities in Ga-Sekhukhune in the 1950s and early-1960s.[719] Women were not equally involved alongside men in the organisational structures and decision making spaces of the migrant worker movements leading the struggle against Bantu Authorities in Ga-Sekhukhune. However, they did participate in this sphere of the uprising by providing both public and private support to the movement and, in some instances, staging their own mass demonstrations and protests in support of chiefs who threw their weight behind the popular struggle and were arrested and banished by the apartheid state as a result. Furthermore, holding local elites and their governance practices up to the popular political prescription that 'a chief is a chief by the people' was an elementary aspect of the modes of resistance politics of the Ga-Sekhukhune uprising in which women were heavily involved. It is in the political sphere of anti-betterment resistance and struggles to reclaim the commons that women come to the fore as protagonists of the history of the Ga-Sekhukhune uprising.

The insurgent occupation and illegal ploughing of state-enclosed lands and commons led by women, with the support of local governing elites, was a praxis of emancipatory politics which featured in all three of the rural uprisings in the Northern Transvaal in the period which preceded the making of the Lebowa bantustan. This was first seen in the Pietersburg uprising of 1943, during which women's praxes of resistance, ranging from fence cutting to the mass occupation and illegal ploughing of enclosed lands, had the support of so-called 'headmen' governing communities in the Western Block of trust farms. By 1945 the colonial state was finally able to break the solidarity between chiefs and commoners opposing their oppression under the Trust in the Pietersburg district and the NAD began to impose its betterment measures elsewhere in the region. Its attempts to do so in Ga-Matlala were highly unsuccessful due in no small part to the efforts of Mme Makwena Matlala, regent of the Bakoni Paramountcy, under whose authority women in Ga-Matlala continued to plough lands enclosed by the Trust and defy the authority and dictates of the NAD throughout the 1940s

[719] Delius, 'Migrants, Comrades and Rural Revolt', p.10

and early-1950s.[720] With the public support of Makwena, women also refused to take their herds of stock (cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, and donkeys) to be counted or dipped by Agricultural Officers.[721] For her leading role in these many forms of resistance against betterment regulations, and her refusal to comply with the authority of the NAD, Makwena was the first woman issued with banishment orders by the apartheid state in 1950. [722]

With the resistance of the Trust farm tenants of the Pietersburg district having been crushed by 1945, and a pro-NAD Tribal Authority established at Ga-Matlala in 1955, Ga-Sekhukhune was the last remaining space of relative autonomy and independence from apartheid state control and betterment planning in the rural Northern Transvaal. By focusing on the militant occupation and cultivation of enclosed trust farms by women (with the support of local chiefs) between 1954 and 1961 in the Ga-Maepa area of south-eastern Ga-Sekhukhune, I have argued that the history of the Sekhukhune uprising is as much about women's emancipatory anti-betterment struggles for land and the commons as it is about male migrant worker's struggles against Bantu Authorities.

The popular statements which characterised the political subjectivities of women's anti-betterment struggles in rural South Africa, above all others, were the two related affirmations: 'We will plough where we like' and 'We plough because we want food'.[723] These popular political prescriptions are important expressions of women's collective struggles to deprivatise land, water, and fuel, and of their attempts to place the question of social reproduction at the centre of popular struggles for social change and emancipation in rural South Africa. Put differently, these two statements are affirmations of past emancipatory political moments in which women have taken control over their lives and struggled collectively to reappropriate the material resources and social relations necessary for the production and reproduction of dignified, sustainable, and egalitarian ways of living in rural South Africa.

[720] NASA NTS 3866 2532/702, Confidential NAD memo entitled 'Matlala land troubles', 22 March 1947.
[721] NASA NTS 3866 2532/702, Affidavit by Bantu field assistant, La Pucela Trust farm, undated.
[722] Badat, *The Forgotten People*, p. 42.
[723] The centrality of these two political statements in the mid-1940s popular uprisings in Zoutpansburg and Pietersburg is acknowledged in the titles of Jo-ann Bekker and Thiathu Nemutanzhela's respective Honours and Masters theses. See Bekker, 'We will plough where we like'; and Nemutanzhela 'We plough because we want food'.

The defeat of the Ga-Sekhukhune uprising was one of several important events in the early-1960s which marked the opening of a new and intensely repressive period in South African history in which the possibilities for collective political organisation were vastly limited and spaces of protest shrank dramatically throughout the country. Other important events marking this moment included the national banning of the ANC in the 1960, the Sharpeville and Langa massacres also in 1960, the defeat of the Mpondo revolts in 1963, as well as the wave of arrests which culminated in the Rivonia Trial of 1963/4, and the movement of the ANC and its armed wing MK into exile. In the rural Northern Transvaal, the defeat of the uprising in Ga-Sekhukhune also marked the beginning of the historical period of the making of the Lebowa bantustan in the 1960s and 1970s. In chapter two I argued that the making of the Lebowa bantustan was characterised by three main processes: the reconfiguration of chiefly rule under the newly imposed system of Bantu Authorities; the reconfigurations of rural spaces as a result of apartheid forced removals and resettlements of black South Africans into and within the bantustans; and the extensive application of betterment regulations in rural communities. These three related processes were fundamental in shaping the spaces which made up the Lebowa bantustan and in accentuating and broadening rural women's experiences of land dispossession, political disenfranchisement, excessive taxation, enclosure of the commons, and the destruction of their relatively autonomous subsistence lifestyles under abusive modes of chiefly rule in the 1960s and 1970s.

The possibility for collective political organisation was vastly limited in Lebowa during the 1960s and 1970s and there was a sharp decline in organised modes of insurrectionary politics and popular protests. The most spectacular praxes of women's emancipatory politics in the 1940s and 1950s rural uprisings, such as the mass occupation and collective cultivation of enclosed Trust farms, did not feature in the political resistance landscape of Lebowa during this period. However, this did not result in the disappearance of all expressions of emancipatory politics. In the decades after the defeat of the Sekhukhune uprising, everyday acts of resistance by small groups and individual women, such as cutting fences and harvesting resources from enclosed lands in defiance of betterment regulations, continued to be important expressions of women's emancipatory politics in Lebowa. Yet, in this period, the scale, duration, frequency, and intensity of women's praxes of resistance against betterment were diminished, uncoordinated, and much weaker when compared with the political

resistance of the 1940s and 1950s. Within the new constraints of the Lebowa bantustan, women's struggles for land and the commons took on a less spectacular and more everyday character. I argue that their political praxes against the criminalisation of rural subsistence lifestyles and everyday reproductive labour practices – elementary aspects of women's emancipatory struggles in the uprisings of the 1940s and 1950s – remained a popular feature of the political landscape but now took the form of what Bayat calls nonmovement subaltern politics of encroachment.[724] This involved groups of women, or individuals, persistently engaging in subtle but widespread illegal praxes such as cutting down fences, harvesting resources from enclosed lands, and flouting betterment regulations in an attempt to mitigate against the growing crisis of social reproduction in the bantustans. However, unlike in the preceding period, women's self-determined struggles to regain control over state enclosed lands and natural resources previously held in common no longer had the support of local governing elites during this period.

The 1970s also saw the emergence of two new modes of women's emancipatory politics in the rural spaces of Lebowa. The first was the role of a small group of women in the support of and participation in the making of the ANC underground political networks in Lebowa. This was one of the few expressions of emancipatory politics by women in Lebowa which had direct links to the organised national liberation movement in this period. However, this was not as widespread as the second expression of emancipatory politics by women in Lebowa during the 1970s which took the less politically contentious, but more popular, form of women's cooperations, self-help groups, and clubs practicing a subaltern politics of care aimed at creating and defending dignified ways of living at the grassroots level in Lebowa's crisis-ridden villages. Like the radical land occupations of the previous period, the formation of autonomous, self-managed, women-made grassroots organisations under different names in villages during the 1970s, are expressions of a mode of emancipatory politics centred on women's struggles for direct access to and control over the means of reproduction. These local women's grassroots organisations developed in response to the growing crisis of social reproduction in Lebowa's villages during the 1970s were eclipsed in the insurrectionary climate of the 1980s when the youth and labour movements came to the fore as protagonists of the popular struggle for freedom in Lebowa. As part of the 1980s radical youth and labour

[724] Bayat, *Life as Politics*, p. xi.

movements, many women from Lebowa engaged directly in the structures and programmes of the South African national liberation movement while also driving forward rural women's struggles for emancipation at the local level. In so doing, Lebowa's female comrades reanimated certain aspects of the longer history of women's struggles to create and defend socio-economically sustainable and dignified ways of living in rural spaces.

Finally, my thesis has shown that in the 1994 moment and during the subsequent post-apartheid era, certain modes of women's emancipatory politics in rural Limpopo have taken on grassroots organisational forms reminiscent of those developed by women in Lebowa during the 1970s. I argued that the 1994 moment created the conditions of possibility for women in some rural villages to reclaim public spaces, elaborate new forms of women's associational life, and create new commons. I then focused on showing how one women's organisation born during the 1994 moment in the former Lebowa bantustan, the MWC, has been able to scale up its activism from its autonomous care-based praxes and projects in one village to running and assisting initiatives for life-affirming social change at a provincial level. I argued that the MWC is an example of a grassroots organisation that has developed itself and its radical care-work praxes in a manner that values, embraces, and relies upon rural women's everyday modes of collective commoning and reproductive labour. Furthermore, I have explored the seemingly uncontentious and creative manner in which the MWC has subtly forced, or at least provided the possibility for, agents of the state and the chieftaincy in rural Limpopo to live up to their own normative principles of distributive justice that are already embedded in the discourses, policies and legislation of the democratic state, but are seldom realised in practice, especially in the crisis-ridden contexts of the former bantustans. In these ways, the story of the MWC is situated in the much longer and broader history of rural women's emancipatory politics presented in this thesis.

Rural women's living subaltern histories and emancipatory politics in South Africa

Subaltern perspectives of emancipatory politics are important for revealing moments in the South African past and present in which ordinary people, in this case black rural women, have taken control of their lives and engaged in a self-activated movement outside of their positions of subalternity in specific socio-spatial and historical contexts. Like all historical manifestations of emancipatory politics, in the rural South African context these political

moments are not only spatially bounded but they are also temporally fleeting and discontinuously sequential. However, regardless of these characteristics, I argue that the nature of social relations between commoners (including women) and chiefs, within and between families and households, as well as between people and the land (including the spaces and resources of the commons), during rare moments of emancipatory subaltern struggle – especially in the context of popular uprisings – should be a central historical reference point guiding academics, activists, and policymakers involved in contemporary land reform and social justice debates and struggles in rural South Africa. These scholarly debates are currently dominated by what I have called a critical liberal perspective which criticises rural women's lack of individual rights to private land ownership and inheritance as well as their subordinate political status under contemporary institutions of traditional authority in the former bantustans.[725] My own research, on the other hand, emphasises the ways in which women in some villages of the former Lebowa bantustan have occasionally organised themselves into autonomous grassroots women's associations and, in so doing, successfully secured access to arable land and rights to the commons through local traditional authorities. It also draws attention to the concept of the commons, an elementary aspect of rural women's everyday lives and praxes of emancipatory politics in Lebowa, which holds a peculiar place in South African historiography and has not featured significantly in these on-going debates about women, land, and democracy in the former bantustans.

Since the late-1970s, as Stephen Sparks observes, South African social historians have 'advanced a significantly less romantic vision of "the commons" than that typically found in Thompson's work or the work of his students'.[726] The pessimistic readings of the commons by South African social historians are, I argue, the result of their understanding of and concern for the so-called 'tribal commons' – meaning rural areas under chiefly modes of governance and communal forms of landholding. In sum, the idea of the commons in South African social history has been closely tied to the colonial concept of 'tribe', and historian's critiques

[725] Aninka Claassen's work represents the most extensive articulation what I have identified as the individual rights and private property centred liberal perspective in contemporary scholarship on rural women's rights and struggles for freedom in post-apartheid South Africa. See, for example, Claassens and Cousins, *Land, Power & Custom*; Claassens, 'Who Told Them We Want This Bill?'; Claassens, '1913 Land Act'; Claassens, 'Bantustan Bills'; and Claassens, 'It's Not Easy to Challenge a Chief'. Also see, Oomen, *Chiefs in South Africa*; and Myers, *Indirect Rule in South Africa*.

[726] Stephen Sparks, 'The peculiarities of South African history: Thompsonian social history and the limits of colonialism', *Social History*, 45 4 (2020), p. 445.

thereof, that it has been largely stripped of its radical autonomous content and used to refer to the former bantustans in general. With this critical historical conception of the 'tribal commons', South African social historians traced the roots of the making of the 'African working class to its rural origins' and, according to Sparks,

> In the process, they hit upon the curious, tragic irony of the powerful symbiosis between the patriarchal and ethnically defined livelihood strategies of (male) African migrant labourers and the interests of mining capital and segregationists, who were happy for the majority of the country's population (especially African women) to have no substantive claim on South African cities and remain in the reserves, or Bantustans, in their later perverted incarnation… [Social historians found that] Africans defending the (increasingly truncated) tribal commons and tenaciously resisting proletarianization unwittingly strengthened the hands of those determined to exclude them, and most especially African women, from political modernity. It is a legacy with which we are still grappling.[727]

The subaltern histories in thesis show that struggles for rights to the commons have been an elementary aspect of rural women's emancipatory politics in South Africa, in different periods, places, and forms, since the 1940s. To think beyond this pessimistic legacy of the 'tribal commons' in South African social history my thesis adopted a radical feminist definition of the commons that is cogent with the ideas and practices within rural women's subaltern histories of emancipatory politics in the former bantustans. Drawing on Federici, I have understood the commons as defined by 'shared property, in the form of a shared natural or social wealth—lands, waters, forests, systems of knowledge, capacities for care—to be used by all commoners, without any distinction, but which are not for sale'.[728] This conception of the commons is distinct from the idea of the 'tribal commons' which has been dominant in South African social history. It is also one which emphasises '[e]qual access to the necessary means of (re)production [as] the foundation of life in the commons'.[729] As such, a radical feminist conception of the commons concerns not only the communal arable lands and grazing pastures allocated to rural residents by chiefs but also the many other relatively autonomous spaces of rural women's everyday collective reproductive work such as river banks, mountains, and forests, as well as social commons. Bringing this radical concept of the

[727] *Ibid*, pp. 451-452.
[728] Federici, *Re-enchanting the World*, p. 94.
[729] *Ibid*, p.94.

commons, as understood in the historical contexts of rural women's struggles for freedom, into contemporary land reform debates contributes to Ngcukaitobi's call for 'imaginative, expanded and transformative' perspectives which critique the continued entrenchment of 'the colonial property framework in its imperial guise… under the ANC government' and think beyond 'the straightjacket of redistributing land from private hands to private hands' in post-apartheid South Africa.[730] I argue that new lines of scholarly enquiry can be opened and alternative modes of emancipatory politics, such as the radical politics of care being practiced by the MWC, can be expanded if the subaltern histories of rural women's emancipatory struggles for rights to the commons are given greater consideration in on-going public and scholarly debates concerning social justice, redistribution, democracy, and equality in the former bantustans of South Africa.

Lastly, and by way of conclusion, I argue that the significance of this thesis for contemporary theories of universal human emancipation is that it has shown what emancipatory politics actually looked like when put into practice by women in particular spatial-temporal contexts of the former South African bantustans where patriarchal institutions of chiefly rule, customary law, and communal land tenure systems, as well as neoliberal modes of development by the state, all with deep roots in local histories of resistance against colonial conquest and dispossession stretching back over three hundred years, have variously enabled and constrained the everyday lives of women and their praxes of emancipatory politics. Drawing on Neocosmos, I suggest that what is important about this history for thinking a universal theory of emancipatory politics is not simply that it has shown that rural women 'opposed their oppression and that rebellions took place'; but also that, in some places and in certain historical periods, 'an excessive subjectivity of freedom came to dominate their thinking' and women self-consciously engaged in a diverse range of political praxes aimed at radically and positively transforming everyday life at the local level in ways that were and still are, emancipatory.[731]

[730] Ngcukaitobi, *Land Matters*, p. 221.
[731] Neocosmos, *Thinking Freedom in Africa*, p. 37.

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