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1999-09-18
University of the Witwatersrand. History Workshop.
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/20235

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18 - 19 SEPTEMBER 1999
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND



Secrecy and violence in rural Tsolo

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A symposium hosted by the History Workshop,
the University of the Witwatersrand

Paper presented to South African Historical Association,
University of the Western Cape,
14th July 1999.

" SECRECY AND VIOLENCE IN RURAL TSOLO"

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A casual observer of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings could be forgiven for thinking that the actual participants, whether perpetrators or victims, do not share the high ideals of the Commissioners. The perpetrators seem far more interested in amnesty than in truth, whereas the victims seem more interested in redress than reconciliation. Perhaps one should not be unduly surprised or alarmed by this. The healing objective of the TRC is far more important at the national than at the personal level. The perpetrators and the victims barely inhabit the same universe. They do not mix socially or economically. They would never meet if not in the context of the TRC hearings.

The question of reconciliation is far more critical with regard to the devastating violence which has swept the black rural areas of Tsolo/Qumbu in the Eastern Cape between 1993 and the present day. This violence is not faction-fighting in the normal sense of one ethnic group against another, or one locality against another locality. The extreme nature of the violence is precisely due to the fact that it takes place between different villages of the same locality, between members of the same clan, often between members of the same family. Whatever the origins of a specific outbreak, the vengeance factor soon takes over, and people start to kill other people not for any other reason than to revenge the deaths of others. And unless some form of reconciliation takes place the violence will never end, because these are remote villages, far from roads, police or electricity. Isolated homesteads can never be secured against their neighbours except by genuine reconciliation, and if this does not take place they

will fight until the end of time.

This paper seeks to explore the means whereby the culture of violence is nurtured by a culture of silence and untruth and, conversely, to show the critical importance of truth as an essential prerequisite to reconciliation. It does so by making known the extraordinary and significant events which recently occurred at Jenca Administrative Area, Tsolo District, in the hope that these can guide us towards the elimination of violence in the black rural districts of South Africa as a whole.

The paper opens with a historical sketch of anti-stocktheft violence in Tsolo/Qumbu with a view to isolating the differences between the 1957/60 violence and that of the present day.[2] It then moves on to a detailed examination of how these problems were resolved at Jenca, and concludes with a consideration of the relationship between secrecy and violence, and their converse, truth and reconciliation.

I

The district of Tsolo, which is adjacent to Umtata, consists of 49 Administrative Areas. It has a population of about 150 000 and a population density of about 70 to the square kilometre, about average for an Transkei district of its size.[3] Geographically, the most striking feature of Tsolo is its mountainous nature, its high rainfall and the numerous small rivers which feed into the Inxu and the Tsitsa, and thereafter into the Umzimvubu. Although now very badly eroded, Tsolo's abundant water and former sweetveld grazing once made it ideal for stock-farming. But its rugged mountains and inaccessible kloofs also made it a natural abode for stock-theft.

Tsolo and its neighbouring district of Qumbu were inhabited during precolonial times by the Mpondomise, one of the four original Nguni entities which settled in the Transkei region of the Eastern

Cape some time before 1500. The Mpondomise kingdom once extended from present-day Lady Frere in the west to Tabankulu in the east, and from the Drakensberg to Port St Johns and the sea. But it was very broken up early in the nineteenth-century during the Mfecane period, not only by invaders from Natal but also by its own internecine rivalries. Matiwane, the senior chief of the Mpondomise in the 1830s, was actually killed by his own relatives. "If you are afraid of him move off," these Mpondomise said to their Thembu allies. " We will kill him. We are accustomed to killing each other."[4]

In 1880 Mhlontlo, the senior chief of the Mpondomise, engineered the murder of Hamilton Hope, the magistrate of Qumbu. Mditshwa, the senior chief of Tsolo, stood by Mhlontlo in the ensuing war which was disastrous for the Mpondomise. Large sections of Tsolo/Qumbu were confiscated by the victorious colonialists and allocated to their African allies. Even worse, the colonial government determined ever after to suppress the chieftainship of those who had dared to kill a brother magistrate. The Anglican church stepped in to preserve the line of Mditshwa, but at the expense of cultural and religious blackmail, thereby initiating the kind of spiritual trauma expressed in A.C. Jordan's classic novel, The Wrath of the Ancestors, which is set in Tsolo.

In the 1950s, the deep internal tensions of Tsolo/Qumbu boiled over into the disturbances called Makhuluspan in the literature, but usually referred to in Tsolo as Tuntselana (the name of the first thief to be killed).[5] These disturbances actually began in Mount Fletcher, where they were called *tshisa-tshisa* (burn-burn), but they were more prolonged in Tsolo/Qumbu due to the weakness of both the colonial and the traditional authorities. On the one hand, the colonial courts were palpably unable to convict stock-thieves and the incidence of stock-theft was verifiably on the increase. On the other hand, there was a breakdown of traditional authority. In Qumbu, Chief Sigidi Matiwane had been deposed for drunkenness and defiance in 1954. In Tsolo, Chief Dihza Mditshwa manipulated the crisis by playing off the opposing factions to eliminate his personal enemies. National politics played a limited role as migrants from Cape Town wrote threatening letters, but the anti-theft movement was firmly rooted in the rural areas throughout.

The Tuntselana disturbances lasted from 1957 to 1961. The colonial state responded with a more vigorous prosecution not of stock-thieves but of anti-theft activists. The Makhuluspan in Tsolo/Qumbu was easily conflated in the official mind with other anti-government protest movements, and it was crushed in 1961, alongside the Mpondoland revolt. In 1963, the so-called self-government of Transkei created a new entity which was far more adept at managing internal black conflicts than its colonial predecessor. Anti-theft movements occurred sporadically buy they did not last long. As one senior Transkei policeman recalled [6]

> I myself was stationed at Tsolo as a Sergeant there, '80-81. There was no violence at Tsolo, crime at Tsolo was just like any other place. Stock thieving was there, but people were not killed.

Appearances were deceptive however. Like much else in the homeland state, corruption was managed rather than eliminated. Thieves and theft inhabited the rural areas just as clerks and bribery permeated the government offices. The state and the police were naturally cognisant of these things, and also benefitted personally from time to time, but were always able to contain incidents which threatened the security of the state. The rural population treated thievery with the same stoicism which they bore to other social ills. They knew who the thieves were, but individuals always tried to keep on good terms with them personally, in the hope that they would be exempted from theft. If one of your cattle did get stolen you could always ask one of your thieving friends to get it back for you.

The situation began to change after 1990 when the Transkei homeland became affected by the democratic ferment that was convulsing the rest of South Africa. On the one hand, revolutionary activists, particularly among the youth, were urging the population to rise up against all forms of oppression including thieving. On the other, the police themselves were progressively demoralised and alienated from the Holomisa regime. The results are starkly revealed in the performance statistics of the Tsolo police. Between January 1993 and July 1995, over 720 incidents of serious violence including 285 of actual murder were reported to the Tsolo police station. But not even one case of

kidnapping, arson, pointing of firearms, attempted murder or murder was even brought to trial![3]

And this during a period when the violence at Tsolo had already provoked an extraordinary level of activity among the authorities.

The popular uprising against thieves and corrupt police actually began in Qumbu, and events in Tsolo continued to be influenced from time to time by events in its sister district. But as this paper is about Tsolo, and as I have partially dealt with Qumbu elsewhere, I will restrict the following narration to Tsolo only.

During the Matanzima Bantustan regime, a power clique emerged in Tsolo at the core of which were a number of prominent families whom it would be unfair to name. This conservative clique was also involved in the illicit liquor trade along with certain whites from the neighbouring district of Maclear. It had enough influence with the Tsolo police to instigate police assaults on youth militants who tried to spread the democratic message. Even after the unbanning of political organisations in 1990, the Tsolo branch of the ANC struggled to survive and its first chairperson, Comrade Forbes, was actually driven from the town.

Things changed late in 1992 with the return from exile of Dr Mahzo Mpehle, the personal physician of ANC President Oliver Tambo. Dr Mpehle had resided in Lusaka for many years, and had close links with Umkhonto weSozew. His brother Mtutuzeli Mpehle, the ANC representative in India, had been instrumental in forging links between the Transkei Defence Force and the Indian Army. Dr Mpehle started to mobilise the Tsolo community against the power clique.

And from the beginning of 1993, the killings began. Those targeted were notorious stock thieves, but women and children were also attacked. There is no evidence to directly link Dr Mpehle with these killings. They should rather be seen as a spontaneous manifestation, in keeping with the traditions of

the district, against the conservative domination of Tsolo. The conservatives hit back with police assaults on youth activists. A community leader named Same was killed, nominally in a cross-fire, but actually by the police themselves. Mysterious white men were seen driving around in the vicinity of Dr Mpehle's rural home. And in the chief stronghold of Mncetyana, the thieves formulated a hitlist and started to eliminate those who were mobilising against them.[9] The activists led by Dr Mpehle and Chief Victor Mditshwa, a Transkei diplomat and senior Tsolo chief, marched to Tsolo police station and presented a petition against police collusion with thieves. The ruling Military Council reacted by appointing a Peace Committee headed by a senior civil servant, but it was unable to control the situation.

Things changed again with the advent of the new South Africa in May 1994. General Mbulawa of the South African Police Service convened a task team mainly drawn from Umtata's crack Murder and Robbery Unit. This task team assessed that "the people who are dead and those people who are being killed were not involved in stock theft".[10] They focussed on the murders and did not concern themselves with the less serious crime of stock theft. In the eyes of many members of the Tsolo community, this was tantamount to punishing the victims while ignoring the criminals. The SAPS was, of course, a professional body with a professional chain of command reaching directly to Pretoria. But the police in the Eastern Cape also had a political head, the Member of the Executive Council for Safety and Security, and by a deep irony that political head was none other Dr Malizo Mpehle himself.

The Doctor was committed to a very different style of government and policing than the one inherited from the old dispensation. As far as Tsolo is concerned, he and his associates took two significant initiatives. First, he established a Self-Defence Unit called Unit 50 under the nominal authority of the Security Police. Second, a Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC), consisting of representatives of the ANC, the PAC, the church the police, and the Tsolo Community, was established to control the violence in Tsolo. The JMC clashed almost immediately with the Umtata-based police task team, as it sought to protect known comrades from police investigations into the murders of stock thieves. They pressurised the police task team to withdraw from Tsolo, stating that they themselves were taking over

responsibility for containing the violence in Tsolo. "And, indeed, the JMC did try to cool things to a point of organising the thieves of Malepelepe to return stolen stock in exchange for a safe return to their community. But the fighting continued.

Perhaps Dr Mpehle thought he was acting in accordance with ANC principles. But the out of control situation in Tsolo, as well as other formally unsanctioned activities of Unit 50, could not be tolerated by any government, not even an ANC government. On 13 December 1994 General Mbulawa, the senior police officer in the Transkei CID and a strong defender of the police task team against pressure from Dr Mpehle, was assassinated in front of his Umtata home. The former Transkei police were generally out of control, and National Minister Sydney Mufamadi was forced to step in. Among the questions that he raised was the way in which certain Eastern Cape politicians were interfering with the work of the police. In February 1995, Dr Mpehle was fired from his position as MEC for Safety and Security, and shortly thereafter Unit 50 was disbanded.

The government now appointed a Commission chaired by Judge F. Kroon to look into the causes of the Tsolo violence. It correctly identified the failure of justice and policing in the former Transkei as one of the foremost reasons why individuals had taken the law into their own hands. It set up new structures, especially special courts in Tsolo and Qumbu and a Special Investigation Unit, to fasttrack the many hitherto unresolved criminal cases. A would-be strong state was reasserting its authority, and Judge Kroon strongly condemned the JMC and any other organisation which sought to interfere with the work of the police.

With the normal legal processes of the state revived by Judge Kroon and functioning with unprecedented efficiency, one might have hoped that the worst of the Tsolo violence was over. But it had only been driven underground. Sadly, the fall of Dr Mpehle and the recommendations of the Kroon Commission heralded not the end of violence, but the start of a new and even bloodier phase associated with the name of Mafelandawonye.

The name "Mafelandawonye" ("those who die in the same place") is deliberately archaic in tone, and and has been part of the traditional political vocabulary of the Eastern Cape since the 1920s, at the very latest.[12] It is similar in nature to "Iliso Lomzi" ("the Eye of the Home"), the name adopted by a self-styled anti-theft vigilante group in Mqanduli in the 1990s. By adopting such archaic names, the vigilante groups apparently seek to legitimate their activities in terms of old rural customs with regard to stock theft. But there is nothing archaic about Mafelandawonye.

Although Mafelandawonye was created as a response to events in Tsolo itself, and although Mafelandawonye was comprised entirely of Tsolo people, it is above all an organisation of labour migrants. Its members live in urban hostels rather than rural homesteads, they arm with automatic weapons rather than spears, and they execute the justice of the Self-Defence Unit rather than the community court. Whereas the Qumbu Mafelandawonye remain to this day a shadowy organisation, the very existence of which is usually denied by its members, the Tsolo Mafelandawonye have a National President, a National Executive, and a written constitution. This Executive sits at Sebokeng in the Vaal Triangle, close to the ISCOR steelworks which employs many of its members. Its world-view and its modus operandi owe less to the history of Tsolo than to the bloody clashes with the Inkatha Freedom Party during the "third force" disturbances prior to the 1994 general election. It has branches as far afield as Rustenberg, Carletonville, Secunda and Welkom but it does not have any branches in Tsolo itself. The consequences of this will become apparent in the following section.

II

In analysing the 1957-61 and the 1993-99 anti-stocktheft movements in Tsolo, one discerns two tendencies. The first tendency is one of community action in which community members, frustrated by the ineffectualness of the state if not its actual collusion with the thieves, come out more or less openly to burn out and destroy the thieves. This action jerks the state out of its lethargy but, unfortunately for

the community, the newly-awakened state is less concerned with the problem of thieving than with the problem of the killing of thieves. State action drives anti-theft activity underground and thus gives rise to the second tendency, that of secret organisation. The phase of secret organisation, through its very secrecy, debases the initially high motivations of the community movement by admitting questionable behaviour and by sacrificing some of its more noble aims.

Both the 1957-61 and the 1993-99 movements exhibit the same movement away from community action and towards secret organisation. At the same time, one must concede that from the very beginning 1993-99 was a more secretive movement than 1957-61. For the purposes of analysis, however, we will divide 1957-61 into two phases: the phase of *amatshanda* (community action) and the phase of Makhuluspan (secret organisation). Similarly, we can divide 1993-1999 into two phases: the phase culminating in the JMC (community action) and the phase of Mafelandiwonye (secret organisation). The section will start by examining these different phases, and conclude by comparing 1957-61 as a whole with 1993-99 as a whole.

1957-61: the amatshanda

What I have described as the "community action" model of dealing with stock theft is expressed in its purest form by the first phase of the Tuntselana disturbances of 1957-61 which I have called the *amatshanda* phase. The Xhosa term *itshanda* means a clearing in the bush. These clearings (equivalent to *intaba* (mountain) of the Mpondoland revolt) were meeting-places for the community activists of that time. In this context, the *itshanda* is a clear alternative to the *inkundla* (the open space used for meetings at the chiefs' place), and highlights the intention of the community to represent themselves independently of the chiefs. A clear picture of the *amatshanda* phase emerges from two texts. The first is a drawn from oral research by a UNITRA student in 1992:[13]

> Gatherings called *itshanda* were organised in each location. They were conducted with much secrecy. The headmen were not told about these meetings. Women were totally excluded ... In these meetings suspects would be interrogated until the truth was established. It was not easy to escape or avoid these meetings on the part of the suspects, because messengers would be

sent to each homestead in the area, and the agenda of the meeting would be disclosed, but it would be mentioned that so and so had been identified as a thief. Failure to attend the gathering implied that one was a thief. The interrogation at the *tshanda* gatherings were accompanied by brutality. People were either strangled, beaten up or were suspended from trees. A man would be forced to tell the meeting who he stole with, and where the stock was

Fadana goes on to quote a number of cases mentioned by her informants. From these it is apparent that a common feature of the *amatshanda* was that the suspect was compelled to confess, to name his accomplices, and to promise the return of the stolen cattle or else compensation. Those thieves that kept their promises were usually welcomed back into the community. But there were also cases were thieves banded together to resist the decisions of the *amatshanda*, which often resulted in armed clashes and actual killing.

The oral accounts collected by Fadana are consistent with a written report made at the time by the white station commander of the Tsolo police.[1]

> The pattern appears to be for selected victims, known as suspected stock thieves, to be arraigned before a secret tribunal, consisting of ordinary location residents, and there accused of various charges of stock theft .. Third degree, in the form of hanging or beatings, is applied to induce the victims to admit liability whereafter they are fined a nominal amount, apparently for distribution among the members of the tribunal, and ordered to compensate the former owners of the stock involved under pain of being killed and their kraals and property destroyed. Known victims whom I have hitherto been able to contact either deny point-blank that they have been victimised or refuse to co-operate.

1960-1961 the Makhuluspan

Although this name is often used with reference to the entire 1957-61 period, examination of the contemporary records clearly shows that it was never used before 1960. From 1960 onwards, however, the Makhuluspan becomes the main concern of the colonial authorities. It shows two main differences from the *amatshanda* phase. First, it is an organisation which people are compelled to join, an organisation demanding subscriptions on pain of being condemned as a stock thief. "They burn out kraals of those supposed to be stock thieves although they are not thieves. They are demanding large sums of money from persons so as not to be burned. The moneys so collected are supposed to be for

engaging of attorneys to defend them." As the police station commander of Tsolo put it, "Makhuluspan grew out of anti-stocktheft reprisals in 1957 but has since degenerated into a gangster organisation devoted to extorting money."[15] The second major difference was the active participation of certain chiefs, prominent among them Chief Diliza Mditshwa, the senior chief of Tsolo. Diliza manipulated the disturbances to wreak revenge on his enemies, either by making the Makhuluspan burn them out, or denouncing them to the police as Makhuluspan members. His close associate, Chief Charles Ranuga of Jenca was reputed to have made a "fat profit" of £1000 out of Makhuluspan fines.[16] This manipulation by the chiefs is not only indicative of the distance which Makhuluspan had travelled from the democratic meetings of the *itshanda*, but it also shows how the secret nature of the organisation permitted hidden and personal agendas to flourish.

It is not clear how Makhuluspan would have developed if it had been allowed to mature. The Bantustan authorities, although well aware that the Tsolo/Qumbu disturbances were independent of politically-inspired movements like the Mpondoland revolt, decided to take advantage of the greater police presence in Transkei to clean up "trouble spots" by means of "workouts". That is police units of 150 men at a time surrounded individual villages, checked all reference and tax certificates, and arrested as many men as possible.[17] By the end of 1961, the Makhuluspan was defunct.

1993-1995: the Joint Monitoring Committee

The anti-stocktheft movement of the 1990s was, from the very beginning, more brutal than its predecessor. Thieves were shot without warning and without opportunity of confession and restitution. The operations were covered by a cloak of silence, and ordinary community members shrunk from the scene of the action. The picture has been vividly described by a senior police officer who draws an important distinction between the normal involvement of the community in cases of violent death and the exaggerated reticence displayed on these occasions.[18]

> [In normal times] when there is a murder case in Tsolo when we got there, we used to find a chief or a headman and the members of the community as well. They would have surrounded

thebody of the dead person. Everything which would be in connection with the death of such a person, we would get from them. Then we had a difficulty insofar as Tsolo is concerned. This was January 1993. There we would find people already dead, birds making a feast out fo them and the dogs as well, eating dead people and there would be no people in their immediate vicinity. And we discovered now on removing such a dead person, which was being eaten by dogs and birds, that was not acceptable to the Tsolo community.

But despite the fact that from its inception the 1993-99 movement has been bloodier than the Tuntselana of 1957-1961, it nevertheless contained within it at first the tendency towards community action. This is most evident from the activities of the Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) already mentioned. The Joint Monitoring Committee, consisting of representatives of the different political parties, government departments and the community at large, was formed in October 1994 with the blessing of Dr Mpehle. The attitude of the JMC was that it could handle the problems of Tsolo better than the official state institutions and processes. Supported by Dr Mpehle, it pressurised the police task team to withdraw from Tsolo between November 1994 and February 1995. For this reason, it was roundly condemned by the police and the Kroon Commission, and forced to disband after Mpehle's suspension.

For the purposes of this paper, however, it is important to note the more positive aspects of the JMC's activities. This can be exemplified by its attempts to bring peace to the Lower Malepelepe Administrative Area. The thieves had been notably well-organised in Lower Malepelepe. They had murdered four anti-thieves in cold blood, and on 27 October there had been an open gun battle in a mieliefield from which the thieves had fled when their ammunition ran out. The JMC organised a truce between the two factions, and on 8 November 1994 they held a homecoming ceremony for the thieves. They even provided the thieves with tents for their accomodation. Dr Mpehle planted a tree to symbolise peace and Members of the Provincial Legislature spoke on the theme of "ubuntu" ("humanity"). Some of the thieves confessed and promised to return their stolen cattle, and indeed some stolen cattle were recovered and put on public display in the village. Unfortunately, the majority of the thieves felt themselves safer at Tsolo police station, and the peace initiative was overtaken by other events. Nevertheless the incident is important as a benchmark of what the JMC and Dr Mpehle were trying to achieve.[19]

1995-1999: Mafelandawonye

As the Kroon Commission wrapped up its hearings and attempted to set Tsolo on a course where state authority would be effective and even-handed, it became aware of an organisation called Mafelandawonye. Although the actual thieves were now defeated and dispersed, and although effective prosecution and policing was now in place, violence in Tsolo nevertheless assumed new and even more frightening dimensions. And whereas it would not be fair or correct to blame all the violence on Mafelandawonye, they must bear at least part of the responsibility for what happened.

This hopefully final phase of the Tsolo violence differed markedly from the previous phases in the following important respects, all of which testify to the link between secrecy and violence which is the theme of this paper.

- **The scale of the Violence**. Accurate statistics are hard to come by, but it is probably not an exaggeration to say that 1993-1999 killed more people than 1957-61 burned huts. At the peak of the Makhuluspan in 1960, 194 huts were burned in the whole of Tsolo. Between 1994 and 1996, more than 249 residents of Tsolo died although not all of these were victims of Mafelandawonye. In Jenca Administrative Area, a centre of violence during both periods, not one person died during 1957-61, whereas more than 30 people have died during the latter period and they are still dying.[20] This increase in violence is partly due to the superior nature of the weaponry (including R4s and AK47s) available to the killers, but it is also due to the much wider scope of the violence.

- **The profile of the victims.** Although the Makhuluspan in its final, more secretive stages declared that "thieves, witches and informers must be exterminated to the last man or woman,"[21] they never carried out such threats. Perhaps they were eradicated by the state before they got an opportunity. In any case, those who died in 1957-61 were overwhelmingly male, and they mostly died during pitched battles between thieves and anti-thieves. But as early in the latter phase as

1993, there were signs that old women and small children were being killed. As time went on, it became increasingly apparent that older people were being targeted, so that by 1999 police intelligence reported that the majority of victims were aged 50 years or older. War was initially declared on stock thieves, but it was soon expanded to include thieves and adulterers. The more secret the killings became the more private motives became introduced, so that victims have also included troublesome landlords, inconvenient husbands and unpopular teachers.

- **Guilt by Association** was carried to its logical conclusion. As there was no process of confronting the alleged thief with his alleged crime, no process of confession and forgiveness, it became impossible to know for certain who was a thief and who was not. Anybody with the least connection to a known member of either faction was in danger of being identified as a member of that faction. For example, a certain inhabitant of Jenca was targeted because he refused to join Mafelandawonye. He packed up his worldly possessions and fled Jenca in fear of his life. The next thing was that his neighbours, who had come to say goodbye and helped him pack, were also targeted. Guilt by association has done much to create a climate of fear and silence in Tsolo, since the ordinary individual sees no salvation for himself except to keep a low profile, and pretend that he does not know what is going on.

- **Locus of the organisation** The Tuntselana disturbances of 1957-61 were clearly driven by people residing in Tsolo itself. There are some letters from Cape Town-based political organisations in the Cape Archives, but these are tangential to the main current of events, and display considerable ignorance of what is actually going on. On the other hand, the Mafelandawonye organisation is clearly based in Gauteng and the other labour centres. Its branches are Vereeniging, Rustenberg, Bekkersdal and Welkom, not Jenca, Magutywa, Ncembu or Malepelepe. Its executive receives reports from spies and malcontents at home, and it judges these according to the standards and values of the urban areas. And dispenses justice accordingly.

- **Confession versus retribution:** But the most important difference is that whereas the older traditions, including that of the JMC, concentrated on public and community-based justice – confession and compensation, followed by the reincorporation of the thieves into normal society –

the secret justice of Mafelandawonye consists of nothing but vengeance and death. People are killed without any charge or accusation, much less are they given an opportunity to put their case or make restitution. The sentences of Mafelandawonye are executed not by the community at large but by heavily armed hitmen, many of them teenagers and some of them multiple murderers. Whereas 1957-61 captured the cattle of thieves for redistribution to community members, 1993-99 simply shot the cattle dead.

Perhaps this change also reflects a shift in cosmology itself. The older generation of anti-thieves were rural people. They regarded society as naturally harmonious and designed their anti-theft campaigns to rectify injustice and restore harmony by means of confession and compensation. The attitudes of Mafelandawonye are shaped by the harsher and more divided universe of the towns and the mine compounds. They see the world as a battleground between good and evil, between Mafelandawonye and the thieves. No neutrality is possibility, no middle way. To such a conflict there can be no end.

III

The distinction between secrecy and violence, on the one hand, and openness and peace, on the other, is well illustrated by recent events at Jenca Administrative Area. Jenca, which is situated in the mountains about 30 km from Tsolo town, had been one of the centres of violence during the Tuntselana/Makhuluspan period of 1957-61. Chief Ranuga of Jenca, a close associate of senior chief Diliza Mditshwa, was reportedly one of the Makhuluspan leaders and, according to the police, he "made a fat profit of over #1000 as fines of Makhuluspan." Jenca and its neighbouring locality of Ncembu were the first to be selected for "workouts" when Makhuluspan was suppressed in 1961. As late as April 1962, it was reported that Makhuluspan meetings were still being held at Jenca.[22]

Jenca and its neighbours were again to the fore early in 1993 when the spontaneous anti-theft outbreaks first began. But as state authority in Tsolo reasserted itself in the wake of the Kroon Commission and the power of the actual thieves waned, certain people within Jenca became became disenchanted with the violence of Mafelandawonye. They found a leader in Headman Zola Tshetsha of Jenca Administrative Area. Chief Ranuga of the Jenca Tribal Authority (of which Jenca A/A is only one component) was too timid to commit himeself either way since some of his other headmen continued to support the organisation.

The Majaba Massacre, 1 January 1999

One of the tragic ironies of the Tsolo violence is the way in which the great religious festivals of Christmas and Easter have been transformed from seasons of joy to seasons of fear and death. For it is then that the migrant labourers come home. During the Christmas of 1998, Mafelandawonye members rallied in Jenca, dancing denouncing Headman Tshetsha and singing warsongs about Skombolwana, a thief they had killed in Johannesburg. Still there were no actual killings until, by an extraordinary and fatal coincidence, one of the Mafelandawonye migrants was struck by lightening on his way home and died on the spot. His associates on the West Rand seemed to remember a prophecy he had made before going on leave. "If anything happens to me," he is reputed to have said, "it will be the fault of my mother." On New Years Day 1999 members of Mafelandawonye, apparently acting without the mandate of their leadership, descended on the funeral vigil at Majaba, a neighbouring village to Jenca. They opened fire on the dead man's mother and his female relatives and killed eight of them. On 7 January, Headman Tshetsha met with his closest advisers and consituted a neighbourhood watch.

Very soon known supporters of Mafelandawonye at Jenca began to die. One of them was a notorious hitman named Zandisile Yaphi, charged with several counts of murder but never convicted due to the sudden deaths of key witnesses. That Easter, at least two Mafelandawonye migrants home for the holidays were gunned down. Just in case they had missed the point,

relatives of known Mafelandawonye supporters were warned that any further Mafelandawonye activity in Jenca would have dire consequences for themselves. Extraordinarily, it was Mafelandawonye who blinked first. They approached the Tsolo/Qumbu Special Investigative Unit in Umtata and asked it to set up a peace meeting with the Jenca community.

The Peace Meeting of 15 May

The first peace meeting took place at Jenca on 15 May 1999. Like many other significant events in rural South Africa, it was never officially recorded and I hope I may be excused for recounting it in some detail.[23] The community of Jenca, about 200 strong with Headman Tshetsha in their midst, occupied the open space next to the school. The police and the government officials sat at little tables on the side. And, in front, the entire National Executive of Mafelandawonye seen by themselves as the saviours of Tsolo, but seen by others as killers and destroyers.

Headman Tshetsha opened the proceedings by formally welcoming everybody to the meeting. Everybody is a guest and must relax, he said, adding significantly, "Everybody must tell the truth, he must say things as they are, so that we may have peace." After some more preliminaries, Secretary Mntonga spoke on behalf of Mafelandawonye. He regretted the deaths of the eight women in the Majaba massacre. He did not deny the involvement of some Mafelandawonye members but they had not been mandated by the organisation. "Mafelandawonye is an organisation with a constitution," he said. "It is not part of our work to kill women. Our only concern is with the safety of the cattle." The mission of Mafelandawonye was to confront the thieves and the white butchers who were getting rich from the cattle of Tsolo. Mafelandawonye had no quarrel with the Jenca community, only with certain individuals. It was a pity that a problem had arisen between Mafelandawonye and the Jenca community, and "with the greatest respect, honourable Chief Tshetsha, your approach is not helping to solve the problem. You are condemning us without giving us a chance to explain ourselves. We should not be killing each other."

A low growling noise burst from the community when the Secretary said that the Chief had taken a wrong approach. Then Tshetsha himself got up and spoke as follows:

> I was not going to speak because I wanted the people of Jenca to speak for themselves. But I must say something ... Mafelandawonye talk about peace but at the same time youth are doing war dances, firing shots, singing songs against Tshetsha, and attacking people.
>
> Who elected Mafelandawonye down here? You Mafelandawonye are nauonal, we are local. All organisations come to me here. ANC, PAC, UDM, we call meetings for them, they explain themselves to the people. Nobody can rectify the things of Jenca except the people of Jenca. Come and launch in front of us. Show us your leaders, say to us, these are our leaders. People are dying here, and you are going back to Johannesburg. And now you come and say that it is I, Tshetsha, that am doing wrong.
>
> We don't have any desire to kill anybody. We want peace. These are our parents, our women, our children, who are dying. [At this point Tshetsha produced a list of 26 people who had been killed in Jenca, according to him, by Mafelandawonye. He quoted cases of people who had been killed, people who had been shot at from passing cars, attempts to kill him personally.] These people were killed innocently, without any case being brought against them.
>
> I am the headman of Jenca. I was born here. My father was born here, my grandfather also. I cannot be a thief. But people are being shot here. By whom, we don't know. For what reason, we don't know. Look at our cattle grazing on those hills. They are quite all right, they are not being stolen. We don't see any thieves here. What we see is – this! [waves the list of murdered community members]. And who are killed? Women and old people! What kind of manhood is this?
>
> I never rejected Mafelandawonye. I could have called a meeting for Mafelandawonye, just like any other organisation. Until January 1999. But now I say to you. We are tired. There are two things which I reject. Thieves. And killers. We know how to deal with thieves. And we cannot tolerate killers either.

Tshetsha had highlighted two important points in this notable speech. First, that organisations need to be transparent and accountable to the community. Second, that it was dishonest to talk about stocktheft when it was the people, not the cattle, of Jenca who were being endangered. After he finished, two of his associates spoke. The first, an elderly man named Duba who had lost his son, recalled the Mafelandawonye rallies of Christmas Eve 1998, the war songs and the death threats. The second was a young migrant worker who had returned home in fear of his life. He recalled a Mafelandawonye meeting at Carletonville which had received reports from Mjika A/A. "They were talking about people to be killed," he concluded. "I heard it with my own ears. The Mafelandawonye representative has

said Mafelandawonye is not about killing people, but they are killing people."

Faced with a hostile community that was calling them not only killers but liars as well, the Mafelandawonye struggled to reply. Secretary Mntonga referred to their constitution which they had sent to Minister of Justice, Dullah Omar. To a meeting which they had attended with the House of Traditional Leaders in Bisho. To an approach they had made to Minister Valli Moosa. To meetings in Umtata and at Medunsa. To meetings in Carletonville and Phola Park. To meetings everywhere in the country, so it seemed, except in Tsolo.

Eventually, the community lost patience. "The people are not being killed up there, they are being killed down here," one old man said. Others demanded to know where the Mafelandawonye executive got their information about Jenca, the information which led them to kill people. Now at last they saw the members of the National Executive, but they had not yet seen the Jenca branch executive.

> Of what does your region consist? What is its organogram? Where is its branch? Who are its leaders? When was it founded? Organisations must start at the bottom. Let us not play around. We are talking about killing. About accusations that lead to people being killed. How do you process them?

Faced not only with the fury of the community, but with their own inability to justify their actions, the Mafelandawonye executive crumbled. They admitted that they had no Jenca branch as such, and that their Jenca members were not present at the meeting. They asked for a cease-fire, and they promised to bring their Jenca members to a follow-up meeting two weeks later.

The Meeting of 29 May 1999

Headman Tshetsha and his councillors also wrote to the Jenca Mafelandawonye in Gauteng, and ordered them to attend the meeting of the 29th. Somewhat surprisingly seven of them did attend, motivated perhaps by the knowledge that this was their last chance to come home and clean themselves

with the community. The full executive of Mafelandawonye did not return, but they were represented by Deputy President Mzamane and another executive member. "*Phantsi ngobusela., phantsi!* (down with theft!)" Mzamane shouted when he was formally introduced to the meeting. No one responded. Rather they stipulated that, except for the two executive members, no Mafelandawonye member from outside of Jenca was to be allowed to attend the meeting. Against Mafelandawonye protests that they were an organisation of the whole Tsolo and not of Jenca only, the house insisted that this problem could only be solved on a community basis.

The Jenca Mafelandawonye were embarassed and inarticulate. Apart from fervently wishing that the meeting might succeed they had nothing to say. The community insisted that they should tell what they knew. Eventually, the discussion focussed on two topics: certain death letters that had been distributed at the Carletonville hostel, and the words of the songs that had been sung on Christmas Eve 1998. The Jenca Mafelandawonye shuffled and denied. They did not know. They were not there. The man who had distributed the death letters was just acting the postman. He did not know what was in the letters. He had not given them to anybody. He had just put them on the table. Another member, comrade Dodo, flatly denied the accusation of a returned migrant that he had beaten people in Welkom when they refused to join Mafelandawonye. For an outsider like myself, it was very difficult to see where all this was going. It was getting late, and even if these factual matters were settled, there was not enough time left to discuss the substantive issues of war and peace.

Still the questions and the denials continued. Headman Tshetsha asked Deputy President Mzamane what songs he had been singing on the 24th December. Mzamane ducked the question, and Tshetsha told him to sit down. He asked a more junior Mafelandawonye member who was he singing about that was going to be killed? The Mafelandawonye member said it was nobody he knew. "You too, sit down." Tshetsha shouted. Suddenly, there was a crack. Another junior Mafelandawonye member got up and admitted that they had been singing about guns. The community sighed with appreciation but they did not relax their questions. One old man said they wanted peace, but they could not make peace without the truth.

A break was called, and the Mafelandawonye went out to consider their position. When they returned, they were shaking and contrite but not yet frank, more especially the postman who had delivered the death letters at Carletonville. The crowd growled at him. Then another Mafelandawonye member intervened. "He (the postman) is still young," he said to the crowd. "He does not know what to say. He is scared because everybody is looking at him." The chairperson of the meeting, a Captain in the intelligence services, then said very gently, "the only solution is to tell the truth without fear." And the little postman admitted that he himself had written the death letters with two others, whom he named. "When we got to Johannesburg," he said, "we were asked to join in the name of Tsolo. We were told that there are only two parties in Tsolo, the party of the thieves and the party of Mafelandawonye. If you did not join, you got beaten." And one after another, the Jenca members of Mafelandawonye begged the pardon of their community. One said that there was no way that the house of Jenca could be cleansed except that the whole Jenca go up to the mountain and wash themselves with traditional medicines. "I can't come home," another said, "and it is lonely in Johannesburg." He too apologised. "But my question is not yet answered," interjected one old man, "are you not the organisation that kills people?" And Comrade Jumba of the National Executive of Mafelandawonye admitted that people had been killed needlessly, and expressed hope for a new beginning.

The last word, naturally enough rested with Headman Tshetsha. He welcomed the Jenca Mafelandawonye members back into the community of Jenca, but he had no words of reconciliation for Mafelandawonye. "They went to Johannesburg and became divided from us," he said of his community members. "That is the fault of Mafelandawonye. They must leave Jenca alone. We want a true peace. The National Executive members here present must take a message back to Johannesburg. You can do what you like in Johannesburg. You can do what you like in any other place. But you must leave Jenca alone."

IV

The subject of this conference is secrecy and lies, and it is necessary in conclusion to return to this theme. This paper has dealt with anti-stocktheft movements in rural Tsolo over two periods, 1957-61 and 1993-1999. Within these movements it has discerned two tendencies.

The first, which was predominant in 1957-61, and surfaced briefly in 1993-1999 during the heyday of the JMC, is that of community action. Community action is mass action, the entire community is involved, and, within the constraints of illegality, it is as public and transparent as possible. The thief is accused, and given an opportunity to explain himself. The object of the movement is to restore social harmony by reconciling the thieves with their victims by a process of confession and compensation.

But as the movement gains momentum, it comes into conflict with the state which eventually revives its claim to sole judicial authority. The movement is forced to retreat underground. Secret organisation replaces mass mobilisation, and secrecy breeds hidden agendas and violent retribution. There is no time, and there is no forum for open accusation let alone confession or compensation. This occurred in Tsolo during the Makhuluspan phase of 1960-1, and, to a far greater extent, during the Mafelandawonye phase of 1993-1999, facilitated by the removal of the locus of organisation from Tsolo to Gauteng.

The Jenca case suggests the possibility of a third phase: the a reversion from secrecy to community action via confession and apology. And it is in this phase that the critical role of honesty and truth can be detected. It is important to remember that the peace meetings at Jenca were requested by the Mafelandawonye themselves. The unspoken reason for this was that they were losing ground to Headman Tshetsha's neighbourhood watch. What they did not perhaps anticipate was that Tshetsha and the Jenca community were not prepared to make peace without Mafelandawonye first admitting the truth. Even if the truths told were relatively insignificant – the words of certain songs, the names of certain letter-writers – they freed the affected members from the social codes of Johannesburg, and enabled them to return to the social code of Jenca. And it created a lasting foundation for peace. As one old man put it at the meeting of 29th May: "You cannot make peace without the truth. You cannot just

close your eyes, and say we want peace."

POSTSCRIPT

Just before Headman Tshetsha concluded the peace meeting of 29th May, an old man who had hitherto been quiet spoke up. He said he was satisfied with the apologies of the Mafelandawonye, but he had to express some reservations inasmuch as on former occasions, Mafelandawonye had a habit of preaching peace but smuggling firearms. Even before the first peace meeting, many Jenca community members had been of the opinion that Mafelandawonye were not sincere about peace, and that they only asked for a meeting to spy out the Jenca land and the Jenca people.

Sadly, these doubts proved well-founded. On the evening of the 6th June 1999, six days after the peace meeting and two days after the national election, six cars of Mafelandawonye hitmen from Rustenberg descended on the homestead of Mr Duba, Headman Tshetsha's councillor. The Jenca neighbourhood watch was well prepared, however, and shot dead four of the attackers for the loss of one of themselves.[21]

This event occurred while I was already working on this paper. The Jenca story is clearly not yet over, and I could not help wondering whether I should not stop writing immediately. But on closer reflection, I feel that my main argument is not invalidated. It was not the Jenca Mafelandawonye who reneged on their agreement. And, after all, it was not the truth that brought Mafelandawonye to the peace table, and it is not the truth that will protect them in the weeks to come.

Clearly the truth alone is not enough. But that was never the argument of this paper. The argument of this paper is that guns alone are also not enough. And that argument, I think, still holds.

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[2] This paper is a companion piece to "Unsocial Bandits: the Stock Thieves of Qumbu and their enemies", (unpublished, History Workshop, University of the Witwatersrand, July 1994).

[3] Statistics from "Overview of the Transkei Sub-Region of the Eastern Cape Province", commissioned by the Land and Agriculture Policy Centre, Johannesburg 1995. The statistics, even within the confines of this single document, are sadly conflicting.

[4] The most convenient and also the most illuminating introduction to Mpondomise history are the wonderful oral traditions reprinted in F. Brownlee. The Transkeian Native Territories (Lovedale, 1923), pp.111-123.

[5] There is no satisfactory account of this movement. For Tsolo, see W.T. Hammond-Tooke, Command or Consensus (Cape Town, 1975), pp.105-7; N. Fadane, "Unrest in Tsolo in 1957-61", History Honours essay, University of Transkei, 1992. For Qumbu, see Peires 1994, pp.10-18.

[6] Evidence of Brig. R. Mpongoma, Kroon Commission Minutes, Vol. I, pp.69-70. The Kroon Commission minutes, over 4000 pages long, will one hopes be archived someday by the Department of Justice.

[7] This process is analysed in more detail in Peires 1994, pp. 20-21.

[8] Report of the Kroon Commission, pp. 659-660.

[9] Most of the above information comes from the Kroon Commission minutes. See especially, the amazing testimony of Sabata Xusha, a reformed thief, in Volume VIII of the minutes.

[10] Evidence of N.R. Dlanjwa (head of the task team), Kroon Minutes, I, pp.81-2.

[11] Evidence of N.R. Dlanjwa, Kroon Minutes, I, 93. Evidence of V. Nusana (chair of JMC, Kroon Minutes, Vol V.

[12] Beinart records the names Mafelandawonye and Iliso Lomzi in Herschel in the 1920s. The name Mafelandawonye seems to have been associated with the Dr Wellington movement in Herschel, and may have travelled thence to Tsolo/Qumbu, where the Wellington movement was also strong. W. Beinart and C. Bundy, Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa (Johannesburg, 1987), Ch. 7. The name Iliso Lomzi almost certainly dates back to the nineteenth century.

[13] Fadana, 1992, p.3.

[14] Cape Archives, CMT 3/1482, File 42/22/ DC Long-District Commandant, Umtata, 22 January 1959.

[15] Cape Archives, CMT 3/1482, File 42/22 Evidence of M. Rangana, n.d. (1960). D. Long – Commandant SA Police, 7 May 1960. In 1960 alone, #600 was paid out to meet the fines of those convicted of hut burning. I/TSO 52. Bantu Affairs Commissioner Tsolo-Chief Magistrate Transkei, 25 Feb. 1961.

[16] Cape Archives, CMT 3/1482 File 42/22, Bantu Affairs Commissioner Tsolo – Chief Bantu Affairs Comm. Umtata, 15 June 1961; Statement of Chief Mditshwa, 6 May 1960, Officer Commanding AS Police- Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 10 January 1961.

[17] Cape Archives, CMT 3/1472, File 42Q, Minutes of a meeting, 7 Feb 1961, to discuss Native Unrest.

[18] Evidence of N.R. Dlanjwa, Kroon Minutes, I, pp78-9.

[19] Evidence of V. Nusana (JMC chair), Kroon minutes.V; evidence of S. Xusha (reformed thief), Kroon minutes, VIII, Daily Dispatch, 8 Nov, 9 Nov 1994, 1 March 1995.

[20] Cape Archives 3/1482 File 42/22, Locations involved in hut burning, 6 May 1960. Human Rights

Committee, Tsolo Battleground (Port Elizabeth, 1995)

[21] Cape Archives 1/TSO 52 Bantu Affairs Commissioner Tsolo – Chief Magistrate Transkei, 25 Feb 1961

[22] Cape Archives, CMT 3/1482 File 42/22, Officer commanding SA Police – Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 10 Jan. 1961, CMT 3/1470 Bantu Affairs Commissioner Tsolo – Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 25 April 1962

[23] I attended both meetings described here, and the quotations are translated from the Xhosa by myself. There is an account of the first meeting by Stan Mzimba in the Daily Dispatch, 25 May 1999

[24] Daily Dispatch, 7 June 1999