

https://dspace.org/

"For future reference": The Mamathola Removal of 1958 and the making of apartheid

Starfield, Jane

1990-05
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8451

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

Jane Starfield, History Department

"For Future Reference": The Mamathola Removal of 1958 and the Making of Apartheid

"One may make one's own history", said Marx, "but not in the circumstances of one's own choosing". The argument in this paper is that, the production of particular versions of history may be inversely related to their makers' choice over the circumstances in which they are made. For example, in a situation of increasing powerlessness, one may be drawn to a sense of a time when one's power was greater. That sense may turn the past into metaphor. That sense is a kind of knowledge. It is not the knowledge that lives in facts and figures, but it certainly lives with them. It is their casing, their skin. To use another metaphor, a sense of the past is a basic perceptual operating system. This is not the carefully considered, philosophically integrated ideological position of the serious historian; nevertheless, most people have such operating systems. History in this sense is a system of narration, a way of apprehending the world.

In the modern world, governments and states are closely involved in the making and unmaking of history. They can, should they feel that their version of the past is elemental to their staying in power, disseminate history via education and the Media. Within administration itself, such a version can become the basis of decision-making. Policy-making as an empirical process in any "present time" is predicated upon collective thought, which in turn grows out of putatively collective interests. Realising the imperatives of these interests in administration involves the creation of a coherent explanation that comprehends policy as the narrative and logical outgrowth of the past.

The historical annals of chiefly or ruling groups, are always powerful, especially when they are reinforced by a highly developed bureaucracy. All levels of the South African bureaucracy, national and local, are involved in the shaping of history. History making is a powerful aid to the legitimising of new orders and power blocs. As such, history becomes an actionable metaphor of power and dominance. But historical annals and their metaphors are not the sole preserve of ruling groups; socialists and nationalists alike may seek, in memory and history, the language of protest, oppression and collusion.

Many of the South African state's historical annals arise from conflicts between dominant and subordinate peoples and communities. At the same time, once elaborated and put into practice, the sense of the past which these annals portray becomes a way of explaining and even experiencing hegemonic dominance and the ways in which it organises and distributes power relations. Official history has an implicit articulation with other, less powerful, but no less competitive, versions. Apartheid's evolving political, social and economic philosophy and practice, is sustained by a dominant history of the land and the people on it.

This dominant history has taken others into its belly; one has to fight within that belly to exhume the other competing histories.

In the national bureaucracy set up after 1910, the Native Affairs Department (NAD) was an important generator of official history. This paper examines the way the NAD came to hold and act upon its understanding of history, in one Northern Transvaal community.

In mid-January 1958, in the days before Fax had made the country smaller and more governed (if not more governable), bureaucratic cable-wires between Cape Town and Pretoria were abuzz with history. The Secretary for Native Affairs, W.M. Eiselen, cabled his Under Secretary, C.B. Young, to despatch every piece of information the department had on the history of the Mamathola Removal:

> "DRINGEND NOODSAAKLIK DAT AL DIE LEERS OOR DIE VERSKUIWING VAN STAM VANAF MAMATLOLALOKASIE [sic] ASOOK LEERS OOR AANKOOP VAN METZ EN ENABLE EN LEER OOR MAKOBA VERSKUIWING ONMIDDELIK PER LUGPOS AANGESTUUR WORD."(1)

The tribe replied in the same medium, via their legal counsel, H.M. Basner:

> I HAVE BEEN INSTRUCTED BY THE MEMBERS OF THE BAN. TRIBE OF MUCKLE GLEN AKA MAM TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOU REGARDING THE ORDER...SERVED UPON THEM UNDER YOUR HAND AND SEAL ... 12TH DAY OF DECEMBER 1957 AND ORDERING THE TRIBE TO REMOVE TO THE FARMS METZ AND ENABLE IN TERMS OF SEC.5(1)(b) of N(ative) A(dministration) A(ct) No.38 of 1957.(2)

---

1. SABE NTS 7783: 159/335, "Mamathola Verskuiwing: File of Secretary, Kaapstad", CABLE 17.1.1958, W.M. Eiselen to C.B. Young, Under Secretary for Native Affairs. Translation: "URGENTLY NECESSARY THAT ALL THE FILES ON THE REMOVAL OF THE TRIBE FROM MAMATOLALOCATION AS WELL AS FILES ON PURCHASE OF METZ AND ENABLE AND FILE ON MAKOBA REMOVAL BE SENT IMMEDIATELY BY AIRMAIL." See similar cable of 16.1.1958, requesting the Reports of the 1937 and 1944 Native Affairs Commissions, the Interdepartmental Committee of NAD and Forestry, 1944, and the Tomlinson Commission, 1954 to be sent to the Select Committee sitting on the Removal. See Cable 11.8.1.1958, Eiselen requested that the relevant parts of the 5 Makoba and 8 Mamathola files be typed at once.
The Makoba Removal (near Kokstad) was considered the precedent NAD would follow for the Mamathola Removal. (see Memo of Under Secretary to SNA, 11.1.1958).

2. NTS 7783: 159/335, The SNA's telex 16.1.1958 to the Under Secretary contained Basner's cable.

These telegrams pointed the way to confrontation. Both sides mustered documentary sources and witnesses for a very public court case which concentrated the official and the public mind upon the history of the Mamathola and the NAD's attempts to remake it.

On 21 January, Native Affairs Minister, H.F. Verwoerd tabled the carefully selected documents in the House of Assembly and the Senate.(3) The Opposition jumped at the Mamathola issue as evidence of "...the increasing maladministration of the Government and the consequent threat it contains... to the survival of white civilization and leadership in South Africa."(4) This was just the kind of evidence the Opposition United Party, the representatives of an older style of less rigid "Native Administration", needed for the No Confidence Debate. They attacked the man and his party.

UP Native Senator J.M. Conradie declared that Verwoerd and the National Party had botched the removal. The UP, he stated, had always approved of the removal in principal, but abhorred "...the way it§ is being carried out." In his own defence, Verwoerd pointed out that he was trying to bring off a removal that the UP and even the South African Party before it had mooted but not carried out. The Government was trying to defuse the tension; this was a "very ordinary removal" that Opposition press and parliamentarians had "whipped up... into a world affair".(5)

For Verwoerd and the NAD, struggling to revamp their administration in the late 1950s, the Mamathola removal became even more than an embarrassment. It threatened to play out controversial issues of NAD policy in a very public - and, by reason of the judiciary's independence, legitimate - theatre. The court case also threatened to unmask the historical assumptions and beliefs underlying NAD policy.

Moreover, the Removal seemed, at the time, to be another case of resistance to the extension of Bantu Authorities. The Act, passed in 1951, "without any consultation with the African people", sought to incorporate some traditional elements of African tribal and rural local government into "Native Administration". Basner himself had defended several other communities threatened with

---

3. NTS 7783: 159/335, 20-21.1.1958, Senate Minute III, p.13

4. NTS 7783: 159/335, 21.1.1958, Sen. J.M. Conradie, Minutes of Senate Sessional Committee.

5. W.G. Ballinger Collection, BC 347 Clippings, 1948-60: 13.6.1957, Cape Times, "Tribe will be Forced to Move". WGB Clippings, 1948-60: 15.6.1957, Rand Daily Mail.

himself had defended several other communities threatened with removal or unncessary cattle culling.(6) As a left-wing lawyer and former Native Senator, he was the long-time foe of Verwoerd and the Government's policies of rural restructuring. He emphatically linked the Mamathola story to the NP's increasingly systematic dispossession of the African people.(7)

As the counterposing affidavits passed between the Union Government and the Mamathola's counsel, some senior NAD officials in Cape Town and Pretoria became uneasy. By late 1958, even the NAD's second-in command, C.B. Young, was recommending a climb-down. That, retorted Verwoerd, would look as if they were admitting defeat. Neither he nor the NP could afford defeat or embarrassment at this stage; in the coming year, he would have to steer his Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Bill through Parliament. Verwoerd also wanted every NAD office to create a receptive climate among black communities countrywide towards the Bill and the system it proposed. He therefore sought to rid the NAD of the long-running Mamathola 'problem' before proceeding with his new plans for rural South Africa.

The National Party's approach was something of a new broom. Under the UP, NAD officials had identified Mamathola's problems, but never determined what to do about with them. Most of the UP Commission Reports recommended reclamation and conservation as milder remedies, but acknowledged removal to be the final solution. The NP chose to act upon both options in turn.

Verwoerd's NAD had re-examined the accumulated official "memories" of the Mamathola dating back almost a century. After Union, the NAD gradually assembled its own memory of the country's history. If read together with the "scientific" research of ethnologists and an administrative ethos at once paternalistic and segregationist, the NAD's files and commission reports came to constitute an official "past" that informed its

---

6. See J. Fairbairn, "The Sekhukhuneland Terror" in Africa South, 3,1, Oct-dec. 1958, p.16; J. Fairbairn, "Zeerust: A Profile of Resistance", Africa South, 2,3, April -June 1958.

7. His defence harked back to the 1942 Senate election campaign, when he won over many African chiefs and communities with his stress on the land issue.

> THE AFRICAN PEOPLE GOT NO LAND. The Chiefs have no control whatsoever over Trust Land... Who got this land? How is it administered? NO CHIEF, NO TRIBE, NO INDIVIDUAL AFRICAN GOT THIS LAND

WGB, BC 347 C2.III.3.2.1, HMB, "To the African Electorate of the Transvaal and OFS", Johannesburg 1942. See also NTS, 89/362 (240) (1), 10.9.1942, "Open letter from HMB to J.D. Rheinhallt Jones". RJ preceded HMB as Native Senator for the two northern provinces.

time the Mamathola issue had begun to demand a drastic solution, the NAD had a large memory bank on which to draw. Its own needs prompted it to dig deep into that bank.

The Mamathola land question had its origins in the nineteenth century. Some locations had been granted by the late Republican Government.([8]) Others, including Mamathola, were recognised by the 1907 Native Locations Commission. During their attempt to bring order to land policy, the SAP'S Land Commissions passed briefly over the Letaba District in which the location lay. Under the UP, NAD officials had never determined what to do with the Mamathola. Commission Reports on the Mamathola Location prescribe reclamation and conservation as the milder remedies, whereas removal is seen as the final solution.

The Beaumont Commission of 1916 did not visit the location itself, but the Eastern Transvaal Local Land Committee - set up to fill in the Beaumont's inadequate reporting - did.([9]) To this Committee, the then Chief Mamathola declared:

> I am a chief of the tribe of the Naren [sic] and live in my location in the Beaumont Area. We want our location increased by the addition of the following farms [names 12 in the Tzaneen and Duiwelskloof Districts, including Mcnavein and Litswalo] ([10])

He was not alone. Other Chiefs remembered the days when their

---

8. N.J. van Warmelo, Government Ethnologist, traced the Banareng of mamthola back 7 generations. They had migrated from the area known as Balaodi, near sabie, to the Wolkberg above New Agatha Forest, under their fourth Chief, Podile. Mamathola acceded to the Chiefdom in the 1880s. She was imprisoned in Pretoria for her involvement in Chief MakXoba (Magoeba's) war against the Boers (1894) and released during the British occupation of Pretoria, 1902. *Chief Vuma Mamathola who died in 1944 was her son and* Malisela Letsoalo, the chief during the removal crisis, was one of her grandsons. (Van Warmelo, "Department of Native Affairs, Ethnological Publicaitons No.10, 1944, "The Ba Letswalo or Banarene", p.7.
U.G. 32-'18, Minutes of Evidence of the Eastern Transvaal Natives Land Committee 1918, R.V. Selope Thema's Evidence, p.95.

9. U.G. 32-'18, Mr.H.D.M. Stanford, Sub-Native Commissioner, Haenertsburg's Evidence, p.88.

10. U.G. 32-'18, p.85. The farms named were:
Ehlahe 2636, Pigeon Hole 2334, Rooibandfontein 2335, Nanowdale 2333, Fairview Hill 2339, Manavlim 2478, Lipwalo 2347, Vulihwa 2360, Longridge 2342, Mamathola 2341, Tubbs Hill 2344, Murlebrook 2343.

ancestors, whose graves were the sole remaining sign of their past possession, had occupied the land and felt that, in a general sense, it belonged to them. Chief after Eastern Transvaal chief came forward with similar requests for increased land. Mamathola's immediate neighbours, to whom that location was often to be linked in the future, sent oral and written deputations to claim large tracts of the Letaba District.(11) All echoed Mohlaba's plea: "We are crying out for land because our locations are small." Most added that they wished to return to the graves of their ancestors, or to expand their official "land" to the farms some of their people had already moved to.(12)

In making these requests and answering the Commissioners' questions, the Chiefs and their councillors were feeding vital information about the history of landholding and land resources into the 'Official Memory'. The Commissioners were not interested in African history for its own sake. Their questions and findings were intended to produce support for the segregation system proposed in the provocative Native Affairs Administration Bill (1917). Unremarkably, their report favoured the organised racial segregation of the countryside into discrete native and non-native territory:

> The reasons are obvious. Small black 'islands' in a white area are a negation of the principle of the Bill, which aims eventually no less at physical than it does immediately at territorial separation.

To eliminate the administrative and economic confusion "black spots" would cause, the Committee sought to "...lessen the point of contact between black and white... wherever possible." But the 1913 Natives Land Act and the Beaumont Commission had only added to the confusion of older landholding patterns. The Committee could not solve the problem Beaumont Area 4, which included the small and isolated Letaba District. Slotting this piece into a broader patch of native territory was tricky, as it was "...completely surrounded by old-established European inhabitants."(13) In practice, a new map of rural segregation

---

11. U.G. 32-'18, pp. 84-6: Letter from Chiefs S. Mamabolo, Lekhale and Molepo; deputations from Mamietjie of Mabin's Location, Mohlaba, Mametwa, Maake, Namakololo, Makuba and Mafefe (each of their own locations.)

12. U.G. 32-'18, Evidence of Maake and Mafefe on this last point. There is no direct evidence of how the Chiefs rated their chances of influencing the Committee. Selope Thema, born in the neighbouring Leshoana area, but now resident in Johannesburg, was openly sceptical: "The evidence of natives will carry no weight in Parliament. Parliament is a parliament of white people." (p.95)

could not easily be drawn in Parliament. During the next twenty years, the NAD was frequently compelled to set aside its recipe book, and improvise its land policy. In the process, the NAD intervened in a limited way in rural conflicts between blacks and whites. Only in the 1950s, under the National Party Government's radical re-organisation of the NAD, could segregation be systematicly applied.

NAD officials literally and figuratively shared common ground with whites in the countryside. For the most part, they belonged to the same community, and shred many political and cultural assumptions. To some extent, their systems of historical narration overlapped. However, institutions are great forcing houses of opinion, and the NAD often acted upon a view of history that white farmers found at odds with their own.

Their own views were tied up with the region's agricultural potential. Its "European" inhabitants feared that they too would suffer if segregation involved the wholesale expropriation of all the surrounding black locations. Many white farmers told the Committee that they opposed the removal of the Native Locations dotted about their lands. These farmers relied heavily on residents of nearby locations for their labour supply. This very pragmatic opposition to segregation did not mean that either farmers or administrators held their labourers in high esteem. Comparing the Transvaal's labour tenancy system unfavourably with the Free State's wage-labour system, Stanford, the Sub-Native Commissioner (Sub-N.C.), at Haenertsburg, denounced "Our native" as a "baboon", useless on a farm and altogether worthless, but "all we have."

White Lowveld Farmers had few other uses for locations in their midst. They did have real and imagined fears about location dwellers that, especially in difficult economic times, became an antipathy to blacks in general. As long as the balance of white farmers were undercapitalised and heavily reliant on black tenant labour, they would grudgingly allow the locations to stay. These farmers were dimly aware of social changes within the locations. They feared an imminent explosion of African population and stock, and held to a deeply ingrained prejudice that African farming methods destroyed the region's soil and water supply. They expressed broad concern about the collapse of the old "tribal system" and chiefly rule. The NAD shared this view, but had the task of administering the problem. Stanford worried that, without locations as anchors of social control in the rural areas, African farm labourers might become unruly and leave their jobs. As a Native Commissioner constantly involved with conditions in reserve areas, he thought he knew the area far better

---

13. U.G. 31-'18, Majority Report of the Eastern Transvaal Natives Land Committe, p.10 + 11.

than any Parliamentarian. Thus, he dismissed the Bill's vision of segregation as facile: "Parliament knows nothing about our wild natives."(14)

Johan Dicke put local farmers' views quite plainly. Whereas Stanford saw the Bill as providing segregation for its own sake, Dicke regarded it as a way of dividing serious from idle farmers. In his view, the Union's land legislation emanated from "...the fact that people complained of natives hiring ground and being allowed to buy ground among white people. That decided the Government to set aside native areas where natives should be able to buy ground." He advocated the institutionalisation of black landholding: a Native Land Settlement Board to control land tenure in Native Areas. The Board would dispense land to responsible African farmers, and ensure that they did their "duty by the ground." Dicke voiced the opinion common among white farmers at the time, that the state allowed Africans to get away with little real farming effort, whereas whites were expected to engage in so-called "progressive farming". He concluded that less land for the "Native" meant that "he" would become more useful to the "white man": "I am in favour of territorial separation as the only means of securing a white South Africa, but only if the Government expropriates the white owners."(15)

Dicke, Allison and Stanford were less sure of what should be done to aid African farming. The farmers were suggesting that the state had a duty to farming interests. They saw any aid to black farmers as a betrayal of the prior duty. A certain amount of envy underlay the white farmers demands and prejudices. While admitting that most of the land on which Africans lived was inferior, there were tracts of superb ranching and grazing country which warranted inclusion in a white area - a land "flowing with milk and honey", said Dicke. In the region of the Klein and Groot Letaba Rivers, the most fertile, mountainous ground was occupied by native locations, which were rapidly growing too large for their land area. Mamathola was one such location.

---

14. U.G. 32-'18, p.88-91, Mr. Stanford's Evidence. With a fatalism born of much adverse experience in the Lowveld, this official pronounced pithily that medicine was powerless against black water fever and malaria. Toughness and protective segregation were his fail-safe: "You must not live in the neighbourhood of the natives and you must not get malaria."

15. U.G. 32-'18, p.81-4, "If he 'the native' is not fit to occupy the ground beneficially he should not be allowed to have any. A white settler must produce testimonials that he is fit, that he has capital, and that he has the necessary qualifications. So why should a native be allowed to have land without these conditions?"

Over the years, the Location's worsening condition became a by-word for erosion in the white farmers' vocabulary. The fact that the NAD did little to stop the destruction in all locations, added to the farmers' sense of injury. Some white farmers, unable to make ends meet, tried to sell off their land to black location dwellers. Throughout the 1920s, the NAD did little to alter the location's geographical position or its inhabitants' way of life. The Mamathola duly took matters into their own hands. In 1929, they entered into the first of many negotiations to acquire the land of white farmers in the district. The lack of clarity as to whether whites could trade land with blacks seemed to allow both sides more freedom to change their lot than they would have in years to come. Yet, though the state was slow to intervene, it soon caught up: in all cases save one, the NAD intervened to halt the proceedings.

"'n Klompie boere deur die kaffers en die Letaba afgesny"

In 1929, D. Dunn of the farm Letswalo (190 morgen), on the border of Muckle Glen or Mamathola in the New Agatha Forest, told the Assistant NC, Tzaneen, that he wished, for health reasons, to sell his farm and that Chief Mamathola was willing to buy it. The Chief had stated that the sale would require the NAD's approval. The asking price was L2,500. Though unsure of how to act, Tzaneen's Assistant NC was disposed to reject this and the offer of Strydfontein (a portion of Mamathola). His reasons show that the situation had not improved since the Eastern Transvaal Land Committee's day. The chief, he said, was one of many chiefs hoping to extend their lands via purchase. However, the native and non-native lands were still so interspersed that it was very hard to find land both adjoining the locations and in proposed Native Areas. He doubted that any of the neighbouring farms, (which the chief had claimed in 1918), would be available to natives at a reasonable price. In any event, Strydfontein was too far from Mamathola, fell outside the Native Area, was too small to enhance the tribe's prospects, and too expensive (L4.10.0 per morgen or L1089). The Secretary for Native Affairs (SNA) shared these doubts and the proposed sale was dropped.

Still the Mamathola were set on buying land. The NAD was sympathetic but did nothing to help. The Native Commissioner at Tzaneen, Kilpin, reported that the "tribe" was considering imposing a levy to raise money to buy further land. He clearly deemed the purchase necessary, as "...the location itself consists of very broken country it is only natural that the tribe should desire to purchase land."(16)

---

16. Kommisaris Tzaneen (KTZ) (Native Commissioner) Box 14, N2/10/3/10: 7.1.1929, "D. Dunn to NC, Tzaneen"; 29.11.30, T. Kilpin, Ass.NC, Tzaneen to SNA, Pretoria; 18.12.30, SNA to Adam Botha, Strydfontein, Letaba; 10.10.1931, T. Kilpin to SNA, Pta.

Nothing daunted by earlier setbacks, the Chief approached Mr. F Winn of Monavein. Mamathola offered to buy that part of the farm containing his ancestors' graves, which, he feared, Winn might plant over and desecrate. Winn wanted L3 for each of his 600 morgen. The Chief apprised the NAD office at Tzaneen of his intentions, citing as additional reasons the lack of grazing in his location.(17) By this stage, the Official Mind was ticking over: the Additional NC, Tzaneen, informed the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) of the situation. Considering the merits of the case required a dip into Official Memory. At this stage, the "memory" stored two basic facts about the Mamathola: they had often tried to buy land, and their location was badly eroded. But NAD policy held that a tribe could only buy land if it could meet 50% of the purchase price. Israel, the Additional NC had little hope of the small community's 348 taxpayers (who had a fixed deposit of L400 in the bank) meeting this price.(18)

The fortuitous intervention of Justice B.A. Tindall, of Pretoria, on behalf of his old servant, Chief Mamathola's follower, sheds light on some aspects of the case. Firstly, the Mamathola's finances, like those of most location communities, were managed, often haphazardly, by the NAD. (In later years, the Native Trust took over these accounts.) Secondly, the NAD and members of the community had differing ideas of the account's health. Tindall's servant (no name given) insisted that the Mamathola had L700 at the NC's office and L63 from migrants in Pretoria. Together, these sums would meet half the purchase price: L1,800. The Assistant NC, Tzaneen, grudgingly found a further L150 in the account, but did not change his assessment of the position. Tindall pointed out a third aspect of the case to the SNA "As you are aware, Natives find it very difficult to know how to act personally in matters of this kind and if they acted through a paid agent it would only be incurring unnecessary expense...". In addition to their economic difficulties, rural blacks were the objects of increasingly bureaucratised "Native Administration" procedures. The language of administration and its powerful chain of speakers, from NC to CNC to SNA to Minister, could only disempower communities who belonged, for the most part, to an oral chain of communications. Yet, the dealings between local and national NAD officials and the Mamathola from 1929 to 1935 suggest that all parties were unsure of their respective legal positions.

---

17. KTZ Box 14: N2/10/3/10: 21.6.1935, F. Winn, Monavein to NC, Tzaneen; 21.6.1935, Chief Vuma Mamathola to Sub-NC, Tzaneen.

18. KTZ Box 2, N1/15/6: 12.8.1935, M. Israel, Addl NC, Tzaneen to CNC, Pta, "Revenue Survey by A.F. Corbett, Commissioner for Inland Revenue", notes that Mamathola's Location had 348 taxpayers, being the fifth highest number of taxpayers in 9 locations surveyed in Letaba.

Into this quandary rolled the Natives Trust and Land Act (1936), which redrew the "Native Areas" of the Union and created the Native Trust to acquire and develop them. Mamathola was now in No.29 of the Areas released for black occupation. In the short term, the Act helped the SNA solve the Monavein purchase. That farm did not fall within one of the Released Areas, outside of which Natives could not acquire property. The SNA shelved the issue by forwarding the case to the Native Affairs Commission for future reference.

The Act established new sets of relations on the land. It was supposed to create rural space for black people in areas they had traditionally occupied. As such, the Trust and Land Act was about remembering a very edited "black history"; it was also about forgetting black communities' versions of that history.

The Mamathola did not forget their claims in 1936. By 1940, with further tribal funds (L1020, made up of investment and levy) and their representative, Senator J.D. Rheinallt Jones in harness, they requested all the more urgently, to buy more land. The Addl. NC, Tzaneen and future CNC in the Northern Areas, M. Israel agreed that the location was badly eroded and had little grazing for the now 480 taxpayers.([19]) In early 1939, the SNA asked the CNC,to tell the Chief, who was still urging matters on, that his request had failed as Monavein was no longer part of Released Area No.29. The SNA's message seems not to have reached Mamathola.([20]) In 1942, Solomon Letsoalo inquired desperately after the proposal, clearly feeling that the NAD had used the Native Trust and Land Act to avoid giving them any more land.([21])

If black farmers felt that the Trust had betrayed them, so too did white farmers. This belief was born of an admixture of memory and desire... They had a long collective memory of a right to the land and one almost as long of what that right entitled them to expect from the state. Their complaints recur like a litany in every decade. In the thirties, the helplessness they felt was reinforced by the massive agrarian depression and the enduring lack of labour, technology and marketing facilities. Under the

---

19. KTZ Box 14, N2/10/3/10: 12.8.1935, Asst. NC, Tzaneen to SNA, Pta;
31.8.1935, John Allison for SNA to Mr. Justice Tindall; 24.7.1936, Tindall to SNA, Pta; 31.7.1936, SNA, Pta to Tindall; 7.8.1940, M. Israel, Addl. NC, Tzaneen, to SNA, Pta.

20. KTZ Box 6, N2/7/3: 1.2.1939, Chief W.V. Mamahola to Minister of Native Affairs; 27.1.1939, SNA, CT to CNC, Northern Areas, Pta.

21. Ibid, 10.2.1942, Solomon Letsoalo, for Vuma Letsoalo to Asst. NC, Tzaneen, "We are still to-day waiting, Sir".

circumstances, they deeply resented the state's aid to black farmers.

In the white farmers' view, the Trust was needlessly putting money and know-how into black farming. The Trust was buying up land for African use and was helping Africans to farm it. For white farmers, this was tantamount to pulling the ground, and all its symbolic attachments, from beneath their feet. From 1936 on, the stakes in the conflict between white and black farmers were higher. Moreover, the state was pulling some tricky stunts.

The statistics of the Trust's intervention countrywide made the most impression on farmers. White farmers felt that blacks were being given too much land; blacks felt they were getting too little. The 1936 Native Trust and Land Act, empowered the Trust to augment the land available for black farmers by 6%, to 13% of the country's land area. The Trust's entry into the market upset land values and farming arrangements considerably. This sudden injection of state subsidised capital, coinciding with the end of the depression and new developments in disease control, transformed the land market and altered the prospects of individual farmers.

This Act sharpened the conflict between white and black farmers in Letaba. From the late thirties, white farmers organisations challenged the Trust's policies. For instance, in 1940, when the Trust acquired the Mamathola's neighbour, Craighead Farm (A and B), and proposed to buy Litswalo, the Tzaneen Farmers' Union was furious. The Union demanded Mamathola's removal because of the advancing devastation of the hillsides and, the farmers opined, serious interference with the Letsitele River's source and sponges. The Mamathola themselves stated (and maps confirm) that the Letsitele rises some distance away from the location. The farmers' sense of the region's geography was at best vague. The dearth of accurate maps of the area fed their suspicion that the Letsitele and the Letaba rose in the location. Officials were not much better off: Surveys by the NAD's Division of Native Agriculture from the thirties through the fifties show that departmental knowledge of the water resources was sketchy. Their "knowledge" was off-set by the strong undertows of fear. They worried that if Letswalo were given over to the Mamathola, "several highly developed [white] farms" would be cut off, presumably from other white farmers.

Yet the white farmers were in a powerful position. The NAD insisted that the farmers' approval be sought before any sale to the Trust. As a rule, farmers opposed the sale of farms in the district. In 1939, the Secretary of the Groot Letaba Boerevereeniging declared his organisation's categorical opposition to the Trust's proposed purchase of the Farm Janetsi. His reasons epitomise this genre of objection. Janetsi was next to the Letaba River. The Letaba's headwaters, like the rivers in other loca-

tions, were badly eroded, which depleted the water supply these rivers might offer to white-owned farms. The erosion was the fault of unscrupulous "native" farming. The complaint would have been incomplete without its ideological component. The Union feared being encircled by African-occupied farms: "...ons is 'n klompie boere wat deur die kaffers en die Letaba Revier 'sic afgesny is en ons kan onder geen omstandighede toelaat dat ons verder afgsny word nie."(22)

During the Second World War, the NAD made little progress with rural segregation. On the other hand, the white farmers' calls for removal went almost unheeded. In 1949, the Letsitele Valley Farmers' Association agreed to the Trust's proposed purchase of Tamara (a portion of Masimu) and Sivorali, in place of Litswalo subject to several conditions. At the same time, the farmers were obdurate that Mamathola be removed and the land confiscated. With it should go the Trust's portions of Craighead (A + B) and the mountainous parts of nearby Mogoboya's Location. They insisted these areas be given to the Forestry Department and fenced with six-stranded barbed wire, that the Trust should erect and maintain. They also asked the Government to declare these spots a Conservation Area (in terms of the 1945 Soil Conservation Act) and encouraged the protection of all streams and the area's total re-afforestation. Finally, they sought to establish themselves as a voice to be reckoned with in local politics. The Trust, they reiterated, must make no further purchases in the Letsitele valley without obtaining their approval.(23)

Farmers memories of the state's promises to them were longer than the Government's. Farmers remembered that Native Affairs Commissioner, Heaton Nicholls, had promised them that no white communities would be disturbed for the sake of "native settlement". But they saw the Trust's continued purchase of land as evidence of the state's bad faith. The Annual Congress of the Transvaal Agricultural Union received many petitions from its constituent unions, demanding that the 1936 Act be amended to forbid the sale of any farms to the Trust except in Released Areas. The farmers resented their reliance on the state's protection to allay their fears of being overwhelmed: "Die Naturelle stroom nog altyd in en

---

22. Hoofnaturellekomisaris (HKN) (Chief Native Commissioner) Box 66: 16.1.1939, E.J. Genis, Sec. of Groot Letaba Boervereeniging to Add. NC, Tzaneen (my trans.). The extensive correspondence concerns the farms Oochhoek No.241, Radoo No.240, Womgololo No.244 and Mirangoma (no number given). The interaction between farmers and state gives important insights into principles informing the NAD's decisions on Letswalo and Monavein, as well as the farmers' antipathy towards African farmers and the Trust.

23. HKN Box 66: 7.1.1949, F.C. Ferguson, Chairman of Letsitele Valley Farmers' Association to SNA, Pta.

die moeilikheid neem toe".(24)

"Die Vretende Kanker"

In 1950 white farmers of two Northern districts publicly accused NAD authorities of betrayal. In that "gesonde dorp", Pietersburg, a delegation of farmers, the Chamber of Commerce, the Town Council and the local HNP, condemned the amount of land alienated to the Trust.(25) In a meeting with the Minister of Native Affairs, Dr. Janssens, Pietersburg's MP, Tom Naude (then Speaker of the House) and NAD's Secretary, W.M. Eiselen, the delegation warned that indiscriminate alienation of land to the African population might wreck Pietersburg and the North's promised prosperity. Increasing the number of black farmers, who had little value for land and farming anyway, would destroy that land, and, with it, investor confidence in the district.

More significant than the accuracy of these claims and promises, was the moment at which they were spoken. The sound and fury of this "moral" panic suggest that, far from struggling, the region's farmers anticipated an agricultural boom after the War and resented the state's apparent disinterest in their progress.(26) For, though the state's Agricultural technicians

---

24. HKN Box 3: (25)N2/10/4: 27.6.1947, Zoutpansberg Review, "Munnik Farmers up in arms against Trust buying".
HKN Box 3: (25)N2/10/4, 19.9.1950, Noord-Transvaler, "Boere-Unie, Stadsrad en Kamer van Koophandel Opponeer verkope aan Trust: Pietersburg se Toekoms op spel"; 28.3.1950, Noord-Transvaler, "Afvaardiging ontmoet Ministers Teen Verder aankope van grond vir Trust"

25. HKN Box 1, 1/0/2, Deel II: See Table "Lands Purchased: Position as at 30 April 1940 Transvaal Province". The Trust had bought approximately 214,970 morgen for L511,360.13.10 around Pietersburg, at a lowish average price per morgen of L1.13.0. The Trust was committed to buying 4,980 morgen more for L14,015.0.0. Pietersburg purchases made up almost a quarter of all Transvaal purchases, for which L2,264,647 had been paid for 966,181 morgen by the same date. Pietersburg Farmers accused the Trust of having bought 79,000 morgen in excess of their 1936 estimates in the district. Farmers claimed they had initially sanctioned this extra purchase because of the previous NAC's promises "...that as long as the sun rose in the east and set in the west, their Pietersburg would not be asked for more ground."

26. HKN Box 3 (25)N2/10/4: 28.3.1950 Noord Transvaler, "Afvaardiging Se Vertoe Aan Ministers Teen verder Aankope Van Grond Vir Trust".
See also KTZ Box 6: File N2/7/3, "Farms: Haffenden Heights, and Others, Pietersburg District", 21.10.1944, J.A. Hood, Hon. Sec. of Ofcolaco Farmers Association to Ass.NC, Leydsdorp. This

had much to offer in the way of malaria and black water fever controls, scientific farming and state-aided finance, they also were extending these to black farmers in locations and on tribal and Trust farms. White farmers had, historically, considered these people a "natural" source of labour, whose cheapness would offset the high costs of farming.

In addition, Pietersburg's local economy had new infrastructural strengths: South African Railways' investment of L250,000 in the region made Pietersburg the easily accessible pivot of agricultural renewal. This economic potential nourished local commerce and industry, whose representatives joined the farmers' protest. (27)

In 1950, a second group of white Northern Transvaal farmers lodged their formal protest about the Trust's land policy with the Native Affairs Commission. They feared - with reason, if one reads Dr. Verwoerd's expropriation plans - that the whole area would be made into a black reserve. They poured scorn on state aid to black farmers, in particular the Letaba Bantu Farmers' Co-operative (LBFC), who were, they alleged, openly competing on the "white" markets.

The State and the Letaba Bantu Farmers' Co-operative

The Letaba Bantu Farmers' Co-operative (LBFC) was an historic; it was the most successful organisation of its kind in the Northern Areas. That is, if success be measured in terms of output. There were other kinds of success: the organisation certainly raised black farmers self-esteem. From the NAD's point of view, the LBFC was based on more progressive farming methods, and as such, could shift the authority structure of location society. Some black farmers found, through the LBFC a means of accumulating individual savings, and by-passing the authority of the chief.

To understand the politics surrounding the LBFC's formation, one needs to tell its story "backwards". The "Co-operative" was the NAD's most promising and dangerous brainchild in Letaba. It was dangerous because white farmers saw it as the final straw.

The Letsitele and Letaba farmers unions, like the Pietersburg farmers, resented the combined adversity of high production costs, crippling mortgages, and the complexity of fruit farming. Moreover, the expense of its distribution was hardly offset by

---

protest did not stop the Trust buying the Haffenden group of farms or attempting to re-settle the Mamathola there. Metz, the eventual re-settlement site, is also near Leydsdorp and Ofcolaco.

27. HKN Box 3 (25)N2/10/4: 28.3.1950 Noord Transvaler, "Afvaardiging Se Vertoe Aan Ministers Teen verder Aankope Van Grond Vir Trust".

its low prices. Its need for irrigation schemes, containing canals and spraying systems, required major capital outlay. In the farmers' view, the state was doing little to stop the real and threatened destruction of natural water sources (rivers, streams and water sponges) that was at its worst in "native areas". Worst of all, the state, was pursuing the contradictory policy of luring away their labourers and setting them up in competition. Even after 1948's change of government, the state remained aloof from these grievances. When black farmers tried to market similar crops - maize, fruit, vegetables - white farmers became openly hostile. They won the support of those NAD officials who had always doubted the wisdom of co-operative farming for blacks.(28). These objections were not at first heeded. The LBFC's growing strength in the early 1950s signalled to white farmers that apartheid, which had promised deliverance from such problems, was serving the state rather than its electorate. Letaba farmers rejected the Trust as little more than "large-scale farming by the State itself... we small farmers have no hope of withstanding such a strong power."

The LBFC's apparent boom in the fifties was the result of a change in NAD policy in the mid-forties. The balance of NAD's amibiguous stance towards "raw unschooled natives", swung, for a while, in the latters' favour. Mamathola, one of the areas the white Letaba farmers most despised, became part of this changing initiative.

Having a memory of the location's eroded state, did not prompt the NAD to conserve land and water in Mamathola. Department Circulars for the early 1930s show that NAD undertook no irrigation works or fencing during the period. The NAD Agricultural Section's reclamation survey of 1938 confirmed Mamathola's dire position and was the "scientific" basis of the "official memory". Surveyor J.M. Holm identified existing patterns of land use and calculated, for the future, how to apportion the land for special purposes. They measured the crucial ratios of human and animal populations to land area, present and potential water supplies, dipping tanks, fences and forestry lots. The report found all the "Native reserves" in Letaba, but especially Mamathola's Location, "overcrowded" and overstocked.

The location's size and hillside position had made it vulnerable from the start. It was much the smallest of the district's significant "North Sotho" (NAD term, 1950) locations.(29) Neighbour-

---

28. KTZ 2: File N1/15/6, "Office and District Administration", "Annual Reports of Ad.NC Tzaneen, 1947-8 and 1949".

29. KTZ Box 1: File N1/12/6, "Ethnology and Custom: History", 19.12.1950 "W.J. Pretorius, Ad.NC, Tzaneen to CNC, Pietersburg". The department required Pretorius to fill in the National Register (Ethnicity Table) for his region as follows: Tsonga:

ing Moguboya and Maake Locations had, respectively, more than three and four times its land area. Moguboya had 3853 residents, Maake 3313 and Mamathola 1464. While Moguboya had 2.69 morgen per head and Maake 3.55, Mamathola had only 1.85. Total population outnumbered large stock by more than two to one, while Moguboya had an average of 1.07 stock per taxpayer and Mamathola 1.6. Mamathola had more goats, but fewer draught animals than the other two locations.(30) The ratio of land to population in the location was way below the NAD's purported average of 7.9 morgen per person in the Transvaal.(31)

In addition, surveyor Holm took a kind of scientific offence (not unmixed with moral outrage) at black farmers attitudes to their land. His survey was the first to offer a "scientific" basis for ethnic differentiation. He pronounced all black farmers "very backward" and, "the Basutos especially very suspicious and superstitious". Their reasons for farming, to satisfy subsistence needs and acquire cattle were anathema to disciples of "progressive" farming.

> The Native takes no pains to fertilise the soil by... manuring or rotation of crops. When their land becomes depleted... the usual practice is to abandon such lands and break up new ones elsewhere, burning down the trees thereon....

The survey offered few remedies for the districts' needs. While it found most of Letaba's 43 dipping tanks decayed and disused, it recommended only 2 more tanks for the whole district! The survey found that poor water supplies were depleting the quality and quantity of cattle and smaller stock. It advised the building of

---

Bankuna, Baloyi (Mamitwa and Makuba); Bahlabe (Dumeri); Bahlabe (Shihoko); Rikhotso (Mamgololo).
North Sotho: Bakone ba Bakgaha (Maake); Bapedi ba Thabina (Mogoboya); Nareng ba Letsoalo (Mamathola). Van Warmelo's analysis, heavily reliant on German and Swedish missionary sources, described the Banareng ba Letsoalo of Mamathola as a discrete ethnic group, largely because they spoke a unique brand of "Lovedu-ised Sepedi". (NAD, Ethnological Publications, No. 10, 1944, N.J. van Warmelo, "The Ba Letswalo or Banarene", p.7)

30. KTZ Box 2: File N1/15/6, "Annual Reports, 8.8.35-16.2.40", 10.11.1936 "Report on Native Affairs, 1935".
KTZ Box 6: File N2/7/5, "SA Native Trust Farm Lorraine 185, 7.7.39-14.11.41"

31. The average is taken from the 1951 Census; the pressure on land in Mamathola had not been relieved by then, as no further land had been allocated to it, and the population had increased considerably. NAD Report, 1953/4, p.11.

more stock dams to stop animals trekking vast distances every day. The survey suggested dams for nine locations, but omitted Mamathola, the one it had found driest and most eroded.(32).

This survey is the companion piece to Van Warmelo's Ethnological Survey of 1944. Both stored, for future reference, expert knowledge about the Mamathola. Both were used, when the time came, to "plot" a new position for the Mamathola on apartheid's ethnically segregated map of South Africa. These kinds of studies told Native Affairs officials what they wanted to hear. The Government Ethnologist logged the few "historical facts" that the government based its administrative dealings with the "tribes" on: the Mamathola's chiefly ancestry, totems and ethnolinguistic proximity to other "tribes". The Department did not even consider the kind of insights anthropology might have given tribal cattle usage. NAD Agricultural Officers found the "native" reverential attitude to cattle absurd, magical and backward. Black farmers' tendency to overstock, under-dip and under-sell confirmed the NAD's opinions and caused further erosion and depletion of the stock's quality. "Only in years of scarcity, and when the Native has to pay his taxes, is the selling of cattle resorted to", declared Mr. Holm. If one sees the survey as an act of scientific memory, then the NAD's limited and scornful attitude to location cattle-keeping is an act of semi-conscious historical forgetting.

The NAD did not forget about the Survey, they were merely slow to act upon it. Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s, the Agricultural Division let black farming rely on the kindness or malevolence of Nature. Reports of good crops usually gave way to reports of their destruction, by plagues of army worm in one case. The Native Trust concentrated on a few projects. Chief Mohlaba, approved of the soil conservation work in his location. On the other hand, Chief Moguboya had to be warned not to interfere with East Coast Fever fences. Parts of Maake's Location were also fenced. NAD constantly encouraged fertilisation to renew the land's resources, but complained repeatedly that "native" farmers were too conservative or had too little transport to deploy adequate fertilisation.(33)

After the Second World War, NAD began to realise that upgrading the locations might stem erosion, convert some of the inhabitants

---

32. KTZ Box 9: File N2/11/3, "Native Settlement + Reclamation", 11.5.1938 "Preliminary Report: Location Reclamation Survey, Letaba District". Holm found that half of the 5000 cattle (of 26,168) that died in 1935, had perished through lack of water.

33. KTZ Box 2: File N1/15/6, "Annual Reports, 8.8.35-16.2.40", 18.11.1936 "Report on Native Affairs, 1936". File N1/15/6: "Office and District Administration": "Annual Report 1944: Tzaneen Area, Letaba District".

to progressive farming methods and, thereby, improve their prospects. This haphazard attempt to institutionalise black farming implicitly accepted that farming and agricultural accumulation were inseparable from social and political structures. The NAD's agricultural and civic administration expanded to incorporate these structures. It is hard to pin particular policies and attitudes to particular people, but black farmers found some support from the Additional Native Commissioners (Ad.NC) and Agricultural Staff at Tzaneen and the NC at Duiwelskloof.

In late April 1947, the Add.NC, Tzaneen, R.I. Gwilt became Honorary Chairman of the newly formed LBFC. His surprise suggests that its formation somewhat exceeded NAD's expectations, even though the NAD's Co-operative Division had been lecturing on this subject two months earlier. Mr. Melle of the Division had told the assembled chiefs that "the advantage of the European over you is that they co-operate". On the other hand, L. Pienaar, Tzaneen's Agricultural Officer, thought that his region was not ready for such a project. The actual proposal came from two Mamathola residents, Thomas Rakoma and John Hosana. They united the Farmers' Associations of Mohlaba, Sekororo and Maake's Locations, and of the Thabina, Tours and Lorraine Trust Farms and Julesburg Tribal Farm into the LBFC.(34)

The term "co-operative" was misleading. Technically, the LBFC was a large Farmers' Association, as blacks were not entitled to form co-operatives under the Co-operative Societies Act of 1939. This Act, and the similarly exclusive Control Boards established under the Marketing Act, gave white farmers significant advantages in distributing their produce. The threat that the LBFC posed to white farmers was bound up with the massive growth of Afrikaner nationalism in the fifteen years before 1950. Though possessed of many able orators, theirs was not a nationalism that "ended up in speeches"(35) The Economic Movement bound Afrikaners throughout the country together in organisations that fostered the accumulation of savings: agricultural co-operatives and, behind them, the Reddingsdaadbond. These firm institutional structures gave members access to markets, banks, new machinery and technology: They

---

34. KTZ Box 11, N8/1/5(1) "Organisations, Co-operatives and Non-Political Societies", 23.4.1947: "Minutes of Meeting... at Tzaneen... for formation of Native Farmers' Co-operative Company"; 7.2.1947: "L. Pienaar to Add.NC, Tzaneen, re: Co-operative Vegetable Scheme: Letaba District and See Table collating member locations' profits and contributions, 1949-52. 18.3.1947, "Native Farmers' Co-operative Meeting: Letaba". Ibid: 18.3.1947, "Native farmers' Co-operative Meeting: Letaba", Mssrs. Melle + Wehimeyer of NAD Co-operative Division's Speeches.

35. See H. Bradford, A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924-9, (Johannesburg, 1988) p.274.

gave many white farmers a greater sense of organisational strength based on a new concentration of capital in agriculture: L2.2 million in 1936 grew to L12.2 million by 1945.

This was a crucial date for white co-operatives, for after the War, the Control Boards, which had initially spurred their growth, appeared to turn against them. The Boards' new purpose was to keep prices low, and create a "cheap food" policy for South Africa. Farmers who had seen the dawn of boom time in the war now feared its eclipse. Lower prices encouraged undercutting, and the LBFC seemed, to the white farmers, to be ravaging the already poor prices of fruit and vegetables on local markets.(36)

The Mamathola had been farming "oranges, avocadoes, mangoes, lemons, grenadillas, naartjies, and paw-paws" for some years with NAD encouragement.(37) The Mamathola Farmers' Association, already active in 1943, was formalised in 1945. The District Agricultural Officer became its Honorary Advisory President, and issued its members a list of strict aims and rules. These resembled the rules of other black farmers' associations and conveyed the NAD Agricultural Section's purpose in fostering the organisations.
The aims were:

1. To facilitate arrangements for the purchase of members' agricultural requirements and the sale of members' produce.
2. To establish a Savings Bank 'Account§ of the Association and encourage thrift.
3. To encourage progressive methods in all branches of Agriculture.

The fact that membership was not restricted to Mamathola residents, and was contingent on a fee (10/- to join, 5/- per annum), created an organisation that could distance itself from "traditional" authority. Co-operation was encouraged insofar as it would further individual accumulation. The Association would offer loans on the strict understanding of their swift repayment.(38) Some NAD officials did not support the plan, but the CNC for the Northern Areas, eagerly foresaw the day when all black rural communities would conjoin their individual farmers' associations to one uniform central body that stood for "Progressive Agriculture", "Welfare Work", "Banking" and "General

---

36. D. O'Meara, Volkskapitalisme (Johannesburg, 1983), pp.185-90.

37. HMB, Solomon Letsoalo, "Naboth's Vineyard", p.2. Solomon's son, Edward Letsoalo remembered the location's fruit as very abundant: "Mamathola was a Second Canaan". Interview with Mr. E. Letsoalo at Metz, near Leydsdorp, December, 1987.

38. Ibid, 17.10.1945: "Mamathola Farmers' Association".

Upliftment".(39) To fix these principles firmly in members' minds, a large number of white NAD officials on the executive kept tight control over loans and accumulation.

The NAD hoped they were sponsoring an organisation that would set farming on an economic footing and cut it loose from "backward" tribal allegiances and beliefs. Their efforts throughout the country received "fair support". Best supported in the Northern Areas, the NAD noted, was the LBFC.(40) By the time the white farmers complained, it had 852 members farming 515 one-eighth to one morgen plots around Tours and Thabina. Plots were farmed individually, but produce was marketed co-operatively. Revenue went into a reserve fund. To distract attention from its large role in the LBFC's organising, the NAD reported that it "envisaged that the scheme will eventually be run by the plot holders themselves." This prediction was made on the basis of a good year. The LBCF had 25,000 citrus and deciduous trees in production but the bulk of their harvest was vegetables, valued at L25,000.(41) NAD officials may have deemed this success a break with prior farming practices. But their aims ran aground on another aspect of the state's agricultural policy: the creation of separate markets for black and white farmers and consumers. The poor distribution channels available to black farmers undercut their successful production. Pienaar considered poor marketing the downfall of black farming. While the white farmers attacked the LBFC's "overproduction" of tomatoes for being too profit-oriented, Pienaar painted a different picture. He argued that the 1947 harvest produced tomatoes of excellent quality and quantity. Yet, as farmers had no boxwood to package them, these glutted local markets. During the financial year, they had, at times, sold for 6d a box, and were often less trouble simply to throw away.

Pienaar, whom Mamathola farmer, Josiah Makwela once called "the lover of the blackmen's progress", pointed out that poor marketing greatly discouraged "...a farmer who has nothing to fall back on after...all the expense of raising the crop." Unless marketing

---

39. Ibid, 30.9.1947, E. Mogg, CNC to Asst. NC, Tzaneen; KTZ Box 2, File N1/15/8 "Office and District Administration", "Annual Report of the Add.NC, Tzaneen, 1947-8".

40. NAD Report, 1950-1, p.38. There were 36 farmers' associations, women's societies, advisory boards and show societies in 16 districts of Natal. In the Transkei, there were 933 such bodies with 15,925 members. Measured in terms of savings in trust funds, Letaba's second strongest organisation was Ramakgopa's Location, followed by Matoks Location. The District Co-operative in Potgietersrust failed due to lack of funds.

41. NAD Report, 1950-1, p.38.

were improved, Pienaar felt it would be irresponsible to advise these farmers to plant another season's vegetable crop.(42) Clearly, this was a countrywide problem: in Transkei and the Western Areas, many black farmers had reportedly lost interest in farming because of poor marketing.(43) NAD officials had few solutions.

Despite his sympathy with the LBFC's difficulties, Pienaar had few practical remedies. To alleviate the shortage of transport, he suggested that the Trust lend the farmers' Associations a lorry. The farmers, unable to purchase their own transport, were willing to hire the Trust's vehicle at about 8d per mile. He anticipated that the lorry, with 4 locations, 3 Trust farms and 400 farmers to serve, would seldom be left idle. Without transport, he predicted the Co-operative scheme's imminent demise.(44)

---

42. NAD Report, 1950-1, p.29 contains a report on the growth of citrus, mango, pawpaw and banana farming.

43. NAD Report, 1950-1, p.29
Native Affairs Commission, Report, 1948-1952, p.14. The Tzaneen areas Agricultural Union, the SA Producers and Distributors Ltd and the Action Committee for Co-operative marketing registered a lengthy complaint against the state's perceived advancement of black farmers.

44. Ibid: 7.2.1947, L. Pienaar, Agric. Officer to Add.NC, Tzaneen.

While they worked together to solve transport problems, black farmers and the Trust disagreed on the question of overstocking. NAD advocated sales to reduce overstocking in the locations. Agriculture Officers held forth on the subject at the Quarterly Meetings with the District's Chiefs. When Government Notice No.1032, stipulating compulsory culling, was read out at a meeting in August 1949, Chiefs spoke out against stock sales:

> Stock is the Bank and means by which our people acquire wives. The wage rate on surrounding farms and sawmills is only L1 per month and Natives are prevented from going to Johannesburg because it is congested. Stock sales are dominated by European speculators who only pay L2 per beast and if owners refuse to sell they are driven away with sjamboks.

Stock reduction was often on the agenda at the Quarterly Meetings, which were occasions on which NAD and Chiefs debated how to run the countryside, politically and agriculturally. The tone of the meetings was often highly didactic, with NCs and Agricultural Officers ordering the Chiefs to carry out the NAD's plans. Implicitly, the NAD was superimposing their beliefs about land, labour and resources upon the older chiefly beliefs. Every discussion was a challenge to chiefly power.([45])

E.V. Liefeldt, the NC at Duiwelskloof, understood to some extent that implementing up to date farming methods meant modernising chiefly rule. He tried to lessen the blow by saying that the manner of stock reduction would be left up to Chiefs and their communities. Appealing to "progressive elements", he added that spending money on stock in overgrazed and eroded areas was a very bad investment and that the "tribes" should modify their lobola customs "to an economic basis as distinct from a numerical basis to avoid irreparable loss and damage to individual stock owners and to the community". Liefeldt's crisp words exemplify the NAD view that African culture was ultimately to blame for poor rural conditions. Given the NAD's limited ability and inclination to improve resources and education, that culture would have to change. ([46])

These criticisms and piecemeal interventions were intended to promote the NAD's main rural goal: intensive farming in the reserves. Yet progress was retarded by educational and economic barriers to advancement, by the LBFC's poor image, and by the NAD's half-hearted commitment to African agriculture. Segregated markets weakened it further:

> It is ironic that with thousands of potential consumers among their own people on the Rand and in other large

---

45. KTZ Box 6, File N1/15/4, "Chiefs and Headmen Meetings, Thabina"

46. KTZ Box 6: File N1/5/4: "Chiefs and Headmen Meetings,

> centres, the LBFC should be forced into competition with European farmers. ...Urban natives, if they had the chance, could consume all the fruit and vegetables produced by rural Natives, but there are not nearly enough Native markets to make this possible.(47)

Despite these difficulties, improvements were made. By 1952, the LBFC could market three-fifths of its produce; the remaining two-fifths were used in the locations. While transport problems persisted, a local canning factory at Politsi offered to buy up unmarketable produce, unless whites objected.

Slightly improved marketing and absorption of produce did not spell immediate prosperity for every member of the LBFC. While most Farmers' Associations improved the total net income for winter and summer harvests between 1949 and 1952, Mamathola's declined sharply from L1595.15.10 in 1949/50 to L360.13.11 in 1951/2. Tomato production in 1952 was less than a third of the 1949 crop: 22,065 lbs as opposed to 70,270. General fruit and vegetable production was halved (13,510 lbs to 6,808lbs). Average income appeared to rise, but this was due to the decline in the number of producers on the location's 30 morgen of irrigated land from 38 (1949) to 16 (1952).

Mamathola's decline was attributed to its struggle against removal. The tide of NAD opinion was turning against it. Agriculture Officer Pienaar, while favouring the LBFC with his patronage, reported adversely on Mamathola Location. He affirmed the NAD's thirty year old image of the location as "oorbewoon, en oorbewei", and overploughed. Once again, he alluded to the irrefutable disaster of its hillside position which exacerbated the effects of this maltreatment. The location's dryness, and reliance on small mountain streams, seemed to demand an irrigation scheme. But, although in the early fifties, NAD's technical staff increasingly saw the wisdom of irrigation for congested areas, they also judged the solution too inflammable. As a result they initiated very few such schemes in native areas.(48)

State intervention - or the lack of it - was not entirely to blame for Mamthola's decline. The location had a long history of internal dissension which was aggravated by the NAD's minimal involvement in the LBFC as a whole. It refused to station a permanent agricultural demonstrator in Mamathola. Mamathola's farmers resented this deeply. For, in supporting an organisation in which leading members of the chiefly dynasty were not prominent, the NAD was creating a power vacuum that Thomas Rakoma

---

Thabina"

47. Ibid: 7.12.1949, The Star "Native Co-operative Draws Dividends From Land No Longer Dying".

prominent, the NAD was creating a power vacuum that Thomas Rakoma all too readily detected and filled. It is hard to determine when the Rakoma clan had become a source of conflict. They were prominent citizens of Mamathola: Rev. Moses ran the Mabeleke Church and School; Thomas was a well-known farmer; and Nimrod Rakoma was a trader in the location.(48)

Thomas wrote to the NC in November 1943 to say that there were certain bodies in the location who opposed any kind of improvement in Mamathola, and that Chief Vuma supported them. The bodies were the Farmers' Association, the Post Office Committee and the School Committee. This paper does not explore the disputes in the two latter committees. It must be pointed out, though, that in 1957, when the Removal controversy escalated, the removal of the Post Office and the two schools were hotly contested.(50)

The most important phrase that Rakoma used showed a perhaps inadvertant sense of historic memory: "I wish the Commissioner to make note of this ... disputes [outlined above] for future reference". Rakoma's letter shows that he made a habit of informing the NC on matters in Mamathola. He took a conspiratorial view of events, and believed many people were ganging up on him. Verbal objections to Rakoma were first made in 1947, just after the LBFC was founded. Josiah Makwela insinuated to the Agricultural Officer that Rakoma was, perhaps too eagerly, doing the state's work. "He goes about giving hint as we are still short of a Demonstrator". By mid-1948, Makwela complained more directly, this time to the NC Tzaneen, that Rakoma would:

> ...[leave] his own work for any notice from the officials, to the farmers. He then starts from his home for Craighead to go and inform the farmers about the Notice. On his return he goes about in the Mamahlola Location doing the same.(51)

Rakoma's tendency to do the state's work became far more sinister in the subsequent decade. He was openly called an informer by many of those who refused to move from the location. Yet his role as "go-between" predated the removal and the LBCF. As early as 1943, he was telling tales to the NC, as he put it, "for future reference". The embryonic disputes he reported became, fifteen

---

48. NAD Report, 1950-1, p.29

49. KTZ Box 3: File N2/4/3/11, "Trading Sites Sedan: Saul Maepa and Nimrod Rakoma, Mamathola's Location", 5.7.43-8.12.50.

50. KTZ Box 5: File N2/3/3/8(1), "Church and School Site Mabeleke: Mamathola's Location", 1.11.43, "Thomas Rakoma, Councillor to NC, Tzaneen".

51. Ibid: 29.10.1947, J.S. Makwela for Mamathola Farmers' Association (MFA) to Agricultural Officer; 15.5.1948, J.S. Makwela

sion among the Mamathola by mis-reporting the Chief's words on several occasions. The Rakoma clan was quick to accept the offer of the farm Metz, in mid-1957. This act incensed the Chief, who swore under oath, that:

> ...the Rakomas, who are not members of the tribe, although they resided in Mamathola Location, had decided to move on 3 June 1957,... I knew that the Rakomas had been having secret meetings with the NC, Tzaneen.(52)

The fact that the State's Counsel included Rakoma's affidavit, which denounced the Chief and his Councillors in their evidence suggests that the state placed great value on his information about Mamathola. The growing enmity between the Rakomas and the supporters of Solomon Letsoalo illustrates the ways in which residual ethnic difference could be revivified and used to explain current political conflict. The restructuring of the rural areas under apartheid brought many simmering conflicts to the boil.

Some conclusions

While the actual cirucumstances of the removal are the subject of another paper, it is worth noting that the official reasons given for the removal related to the same issues that had bothered farmers and administrators for decades.

By mid-May 1956, white farmers in Letaba were growing still more restive. The Chairman of the Letaba District Farmers' Union's Native Affairs Committee could not understand why the Mamathola Removal to Fertilis was being delayed. His Union felt "...erg ontsteld oor die aanhoudende benadeling van die waterbronne van die Litsetelle-rivier *sic§ en die grond erosie wat steeds erger word."(53)

Potential advantage to white farmers was but one of the NAD's considerations. The department had other, more recondite reasons, for removing the community. In some ways, the reasons themselves remained theoretical, and ran aground on the contradictions of NAD policy. It seems that the more officials tried to remake the rural areas of SA in the image of apartheid, the more difficult the task became. Simultaneously, the new philosophy of administration translated itself into a new discourse for managing

---

for MFA to NC, Tzaneen.

52. HMB, "M. and S. Letsoalo versus the Union Government", First Applicant's Replying Affidavit, para.5a,e.

53. NTS 8/423(25), 17.5.1956, "Brig. J.P. Coetzee, Voorsitter Naturellesake Komitee. Letaba Distrikboerebunie to SNA".
Trans: "...deeply worried about the continuing destruction of the water sources of the Letsitele River and the soil erosion which

agricultural matters. This new language was a scientific one, capable of articulating (and legitimising) the department's technical plans for rural development. The scheme as a whole bore the title "Autogenous Development".(54)

The term and the scheme were vehicles of the NAD's new attitude to "native" administration. Underlying "autogenous development" was a reversal of previous NAD views of the historical and political destiny of black South Africans. In broad terms, the UP had advocated rural segregation, but lacked the inclination or the ability to enforce it systematically. Its legal mechanisms were, for the most part, held together by loopholes. In respect of farming, its administrators tended to choose partial rather than radical solutions: the NAD in the 1940s preferred the limited intervention of reclamation and conservation to the drastic invasion of removal and resettlement.(55)

The National Party changed all that. The NAD found reclamation and conservation measures inadequate within three years of 1948:

> Reclamation work has expanded considerably... °but§... the progress is too slow and one realises how inadequate the rate of reclamation is when compared with the destruction in these areas.(56)

Senior NAD officials soon came to regard their predecessors, as well as certain local officials, as "soft" on the "Bantu". The Native Trust had done everything for the "Bantu", who could now do nothing for "himself". The new NAD told blacks that they were now "on their own" in respect of agricultural aid, and must develop "on their own lines."(57) To this end, the department proposed streamlining the bureaucracy of autogenous development into four spheres. It would lay the foundations of development in the Bantu Areas while at the same time "extending the work ...°of§ ...the Trust". Urban locations would be established on a regional basis, and influx control employed to maintain popula-

---

is ever-worsening."

54. NAD Report 1953/4, pp.5-6.

55. The exception to this broad statement is the Makoba Removal of 1944, also in terms of Section 5(1)(b) of the Native Administration Act of 1927. The reasons for the removal, from the Mount Currie district closely resembled those given for the Mamathola Removal. Eiselen called for the files on Makoba in 1958 when he and Verwoerd were deciding how to deal with the Mamathola. (NTS783: 159/335 "Mamathola Verskuiwing: File of Secretary, Kaapstad".

56. NAD Report, 1951/2 p.35

tion quotas in town and countryside. The Department would divert Bantu labour to the most promising labour markets in order to promote the welfare and development of the whole country. To sustain these policies and ensure black participation in them, the NAD would integrate education into broader community development. Moreover - and this was the "break" with UP policy - black people would be given responsibility for this development in order to replace the Bantu "... feeling of frustration in the past with a sense of fulfilment."

This system was legally enacted under the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, which created a new administrative attitude towards "the Bantu". The new attitude took into account their "racial characteristics" and was not based on a "European conception of social organisation". The new NAD also took from anthropology a systematic and purposeful "explanation" of Bantu past and present.

> In establishing the Bantu Authorities the aim is so to extend the traditional Bantu system, that functioned effectively within the framework of primitive Bantu economy and culture, that it would also be effective under the new economic and cultural conditions under which the Bantu live today.([58])

Thus, the major project, Bantu Authorities, and the minor, the Mamathola Removal, had similar trajectories: if not renovating the Bantu past, then at least, relegating them to an impoverished version of it. The parlous condition of the reserve areas gravely threatened to contradict the almost pastoral aims of Bantu Authorities. Unless the Bantu co-operated with the NAD and conserved the soil, Eiselen warned, it would be "too late". Time was running out and, if they did not co-operate, the Bantu would realise their own sorry destiny, rather than his department's felicitous plan for them. The path to the latter led away from "malicious agitators" and "obsolete and primitive" farming methods. They could not continue to expect soil conservation to be "a purely professional service performed by European officials." In sum, Eiselen hoped that the political restructuring of the countryside would solve its economic problems. Conservation would become the concern of each Bantu Authority, and "linked up with the traditional tribal system of government ... as soon as authorities have been constituted under the BAA".([59]) The most important government scheme for achieving this "link" was Betterment.

Implicit in all this talk of "Bantu Authorities" was a power

---

57. NAD Report, 1953/4 p.5-6.

58. NAD Report, 1950/1, p.5

struggle over the control of chiefly office. Many chiefs had long been in an ambiguous relationship with the NAD. The Native Affairs Act of 1920 had begun their gradual transformation into salaried government officials. The authority of "chiefly councils" had been replaced by the government-dominated Local Councils. At the same time, chiefs were striving to retain authority and credibility within their communities. This struggle was often bound up with changing gender relations in the countryside. Increasing migrancy among men was creating rural communities of women, elderly men and children. At their Quarterly Meetings with NAD officials, the Letaba Chiefs repeatedly demanded that the department exert greater control over women. Passes for women was the cry on many chiefly lips in the early fifties. (60)

Betterment created both an intellectual and a practical framework for agricultural renewal. The farming innovations proposed were cast in the new scientific language that involved codifying the land for specific uses as well as effecting actual improvements. Agricultural officials were kept busy demarcating arable lands, terracing hillsides and proclaiming rehabilitation camps on some of the dried and gullied farm. In some cases, the state supervised the improvement of water resources. Strips along river banks were grassed; training banks for dams were built. Duiwelskloof district alone acquired eleven stock dams by the voluntary labour of "Natives themselves", using Trust equipment. In that area, 149 miles of river beds were beaconed off for conservation.

Betterment allowed the state to create new futures for black communities and discard their old histories. Throughout the Letaba District, the NAD strove to remove and then "better" people whom they decided were not really farming. In 1955, Toerien, the NAD's Expert on Bantu Agriculture, was ordered to plan a betterment scheme for the Mamathola.(61) There could be no removal without betterment, especially on the Fertilis and Haffenden Heights group of farms. Toerien submitted the plan reluctantly. He had for years been aware of the worsening problems in Mamathola, but was not convinced that the Fertilis farms offered any solution to them. Yet he had to submerge his doubts in administrative procedure: "...die saak [het] nou so ver gevorder dat met die goedkeuring van hierdie verslag, die werklike verskuiwing aangepak kan word."(62)

---

59. NAD Report 1950/1, pp.5-6.

60. See Quarterly Meetings, 21.12.1949 and 21.12.1950

61. The term "Bantu" is interleaved with the term "Native" in many NAD files at this time.

62. NTS 8/423(25): 10.8.1855, M. Toerien, Hoofvakkundigneampte,

This report underlines the inadequacy of the land and the NAD's land policy. Toerien minced no words when he said that the farms had very limited dry and irrigated lands, which could not be extended. Betterment's main aim was to relieve pressure on the land by creating ample rural space for farmers within a single settlement; Fertilis did not have enough land to accommodate such a plan. Toerien unenthusiastically anticipated much competition among farmers for access to the restricted farming lands. Most families, farmers and non-farmers would inevitably end up in the area intended for residential purposes alone. In short, farming on an "economic basis", the watchword of Betterment, was impossible. The scheme itself would not weed out the farmers from the "pseudo-agriculturalists" the department so deplored; only the passage of time would "skakel die non-boere uit".(63)

The Mamathola decided that they did not want to go to Fertilis. Solomon Letsoalo, speaking for the Mamathola, opted for a Betterment scheme in Mamthola Location itself. The circumstances were not, however, of his own choosing. The power of deciding what was to become of Mamathola and its people lay in official hands. The choice of policy was made at ministerial level on the advice of local NCs and Agricultural Staff.

Ultimately, the threat of removal engaged the entire community in a struggle for the location's reproduction. Education, the power of chiefs and the powerlessness of women were key areas of conflict. The Mamathola Removal was a test case for many aspects of NAD planning. Reclamation, conservation and culling schemes had all been partial interventions requiring partial planning. Removal implied a very different initiative. If the community had gone voluntarily, it would have vindicated the new, sterner approach to Bantu Administration in general, and "autogenous development" in particular. But the Mamathola's resistance was so strong that it prompted, instead, a reconsideration within the department. It also provoked some debate among the white public and much resentment among the black public about the prospects of betterment.

On 20 September 1956, the CNC, Pietersburg warned Dr. Eiselen that he might have to reconsider the removal:

> Mamathola x Resistance building up x Satisfied none will

Pietersburg to Hoofnaturellekomisaris, P.burg. "Kommentaar i.v.m. die Beplanning van die Fertilisgroep". Trans: "...the case *has§ now proceeded so far that with the approval of this report, the actual removal can be undertaken."

63. NTS 8/423(25): 10.8.1955, M. Toerien, Hoofvakkundigneampte, Pietersburg to Hoofnaturellekomisaris, P.burg. "Kommentaar i.v.m. die Beplanning van die Fertilisgroep"

come forward voluntary removal x Chief abandoning post x Enumeration improvements commenced x Violence not threatened but no co-operation x Suspending further action pending instructions.(64)

Eiselen forwarded the cabel to Verwoerd. The fact that the Minister of Native Affairs was so involved in planning the details of the removal suggests that he realised how much depended on it. Verwoerd outlined his plan to Eiselen, who sent it on to the CNC, Northern Areas for forwarding to E.V. Liefeldt, the NC Duiwelskloof. Liefeldt was a career administrator who had been the NAD's major mediator with chiefs in Letaba. In late September 1956, the Minister requested that he and Toerien constitute an ad hoc committee to prepare him for his 5 October meeting with the Mamathola. Verwoerd was clearly as influenced by Toerien's 1955 unfavourable memorandum on Fertilis, as the CNC had been in May of that year.(65)

---

64. NTS NA 8/423/(25), 20.9.1956 CNC, Pietersburg to SNA, Pretoria

65. NTS 8/423(25): 28.5.1956, P.S. Toerien, Agricultural Extension Officer to CNC, Pietersburg; 29.5.1956, CNC, Pietersburg to SNA, saying, on the basis of the Toerien Report that he could not support the removal, as it would mean resettlement on an unecomic basis. "..ek verseker is daarvan dat, met behoorlike beplannin, enveselnywerheid, ons die Mamathola mesnse in hulee eie lokasi kan vestig en terselftetyd nog die gron end waterbronne bewaar en beskerm." He added that he was only proceeding with the Removal because the Minister had insisted. In September that year, the reluctant CNC had to warn the Mamathola of their impending removal. The Mamathola sent a delegation to meet him and ask for 6 months grace before the removal. The delegation came from that part of the tribe that the NAD's "official version" designated "minority", for example, Solomon Letsoalo and Samuel Makwela. It also included Thomas Rakoma and Saul Maheka (elsewhere spelled Maepa, a location trader). They gave the CNC the impression that they would not go to Haffenden, but were not unwilling to leave Mamathola. At the time, the CNC had to issue certain threats to them on behalf of the NAD:

1) That they must first go to Haffenden (Fertilis group) and, if they really didn't like it, they could opt to move again.
2) That they would not be allowed to settle on white lands as tenants.
3) That the Minister might be persuaded to grant an extension of 6 months if the tribe moved on their own. The NAD would only pay compensation for houses and transport to heads of families who would go to Haffenden Heights to be bettered. Compensation would only be paid after the removal. All these promises would only come into effect if the tribe moved before 26 September 1956. Moreover, the NAD's decision to allot plots on a first come first

The Minister ordered the suspension of plans for moving the Mamathola to Fertilis. Instead, he asked Liefeldt and Toerien to investigate the viability of settling the community on the Trust farms Metz and Enable, near Leydsdorp. Verwoerd gave detailed instructions on the scale of farming he wanted to see established there. He favoured a combination of citrus and mixed fruit farmers, some on irrigated plots. Given the limited water resources, the Minister wanted to be quite sure that the minumum of "lead out" [uitlei] canals would irrigate the land. Only 300 of the 400 families would be allowed to farm; the others must live in the village to be constructed near the borders of farms Turkey and Enable. The new village must be clearly separated from Chief Sekororo's existing one and his influence. This last order directly contradicted one of the NAD's official reasons for the removal: to redraw the map on historical lines by reuniting the Banareng with their former cognates, the Bakone of Sekororo.([66])

The Mamathola Removal was carried out in mid-1958, almost exactly as Verwoerd had planned it. The legal case in which the Chief, Malisela Letsoalo and his councillor Solomon sued the Union Government to return the Mamathola to their location achieved nothing. The state had devoured the history of the Mamathola and served them up a new and tasteless future.

---

served basis ('n lokmiddel om 'n vroe verskuiwing aan te moedig") heightened the tension among Mamathola's residents as economic needs and moral choices were forced into conflict.

66. See Van Warmelo, "The Ba Letswalo or Banarene", p.7