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A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

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Title: Comrades, Witches and the State: The Case of the Brooklyn Youth Organisation.

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Introduction

On the 21 April 1986, in the Mapulaneng district of Lebowa, the Brooklyn Youth Organisation (BYO) was formed at a public meeting held on the local soccer field. Two leaders and a disciplinary committee (DC) were elected. Each member paid twenty cents to buy sjamboks for the leaders and the DC.

The BYO dedicated itself to eradicating what it perceived to be social evil from society. It formed itself into squads to patrol the area day and night. There were problems with criminal gangs robbing and assaulting people at night. There were also problems with Taxi drivers overcharging people late at night. The squads escorted people from taxis to their homes. They prohibited the use of knives in shebeen brawls.

The BYO prevented workers from going to work on an open-backed lorry provided by a nearby wood mill. Such transport had proved itself to be extremely dangerous. Proper busses were soon supplied by the mill.

The BYO also organised park building programmes so that "everybody should be proud of their location".

On May 1 the BYO organised the first total stayaway in Brooklyn's history. They went on to organise a consumer boycott of a nearby Checkers as "the money paid to Checkers was being used to fund the South African Defence Force."

These activities were not perceived altruistically by all people living in Brooklyn. Hundreds of old people fled into the mountains at night and there were complaints of people singing threatening songs late at night.

On the 12 May 1986, in Brooklyn Trust Land, Mapulaneng, a mass meeting was held on the local soccer field. The meeting was called by the BYO. It was attended by about eight hundred men, most of whom were below the age of twenty five. Women were forbidden to attend. The purpose of the meeting was to identify witches living in Brooklyn and to punish them. The judicial procedure was, according to my informant, "perfectly democratic". Any person attending the meeting was allowed to stand up and put foreward an accusation. The accusation included the name of a person and who they were supposed to have witched. If the accusation was received with popular approval, then the name was noted down on a list. The most enthusiastic accusers were the older, unemployed men. They would refer to previous occasions when witches were identified, but the witch would then bribe the Chief or Induna, and remain within the community. Some forty three names were placed on this list. After the meeting, the youth, lead by the disciplinary committee of the BYO, punished eight women and one man whose names were on the list, by sjambokking them and burning any herbs belonging to the accused. Three of the women, members of a notorious gang of old women called the "Big Five", after confessing their evil deeds, handed

over knives they allegedly used to cut out the tongues of their victims who they turned into zombies.

The following day a rumour was generated that members of the "Big Five" had boasted that they would now really `witch' the `comrades' (members of the BYO) as they had been allowed to live. Three days later, three members of the "Big Five" were sjambokked to death by terrified and furious youths.

As a result of police intervention, and the invasion of Mapulaneng by a large contingent from the SADF, the activities of the BYO came to an end.

In between the months of April and May 1986 at least one hundred and fifty people were accused of being witches and attacked by youths in the Mapulaneng district of Lebowa. Mapulaneng is situated in the North Eastern Transvaal, about a hundred kilometres north of Nelspruit. It has a population of about two hundred thousand people.

This paper will attempt to understand the specificity of popular mobilisation and organisation in the Brooklyn location of Mapulaneng. While this will necessarily entail a study of the witch accusations, to reduce mobilisation and organisation in Brooklyn to witch accusations would obscure more than it would reveal. The first section of this paper will offer a brief discussion of previous literature on anti-witchcraft movements and will derive an approach to be followed in this paper. The second section will attempt to contextualise the status of witch accusations as a belief and as a political strategy, by outlining the process of mobilisation that constituted the BYO. This section will offer a broad history of the political culture that has been generated in Mapulaneng. An attempt will be made to show how this historical process has shaped organisation throughout Mapulaneng. It is through understanding the relationship of the BYO against a broader political environment that we can begin to unpack the ambiguous nature of the BYO. The final section will then offer an analysis of the actual witchcraft accusation and event.

Witches and Traitors: The Politics of Witch Accusations

There is broad consensus amongst anthropological literature as to the definition of a witch. A witch is a traitor, representing all that is unnatural and anti-social to a particular society. Hence, to be labelled a witch is to be placed in an antagonistic relationship to the rest of society.[1] And, as there is no outward sign through which an ordinary person can identify a witch, anyone can potentially be accused of witchcraft. Similarly, a whole number of different antagonistic relationships can be expressed through the symbolic object "witch".

There is some debate as to whether a useful distinction can be drawn between a "witch" and a "sorcerer". In the case of Mapulaneng, this distinction is not useful. Firstly, although

the Pedi distinguish between night witches (witches proper) and day witches (a witch that uses herbs or words) this distinction is only theoretical. "No one is named `night witch' as against `day witch'. Pedi act in terms of witchcraft as something undifferentiated" [Sansom,1972,p204]. To use herbs to achieve something at somebody else's expense, is to witch them. Secondly, and more importantly, it is not the use of herbs that determines if someone is a witch. It is the belief that a person will use those herbs at the expense of someone else. Just as the western physician has the knowledge to poison, so the traditional healer has the knowledge to witch. It is not the knowledge of a particular technique, or the use of herbs, that will determine if someone is accused of witchcraft, it is the belief, by the accusers, in the evilness of a particular person . It is also pertinent to point out that in the case of both witchcraft and sorcery, it is almost impossible to prove or disprove a particular accusation.[3]

What the above discussion does reveal is that what will determine the effectivity of a particular accusation is the conditions under which it is received. The accuser has to be in a position to link the accused to a particular anti-social event and have that link popularly accepted.[3] When the link is popularly accepted, ordinary household herbs become noxious anti-social poison and a person becomes a witch. While tracing those structural relationships that would support an antagonistic experience is a starting point to any study of witch incidents, it is also now necessary to trace the process through which a person's identity is redefined into an antagonistic relationship and how, through time, that definition becomes popularly accepted.

A brief discussion on previous attempts to analyse and characterise anti-witchcraft movements will also prove useful. We will restrict the discussion to those attempts to characterise anti-withcraft movements when the youth took a leading role. This paper will not attempt a comparison of witchcraft movements in different parts of Africa. Rather, it is hoped that the discussion will act as a guiding methodology.

Previous attempts at theorising anti-witchcraft movements have all tended to draw on a structuralist framework and, as a result, they rely heavily on a synchronic analysis.[4] A list of relationships between accuser and accused is drawn up by the analyst. The analyst then goes to show that these relationships are structurally contradictory or strained. While a structural contextualisation is a useful starting point in an analysis of witchcraft accusations it remains static and the emphasis still remains on the event rather than on the historical processes that made the event possible. While a periodisation of a social identity is implicit in a structualist analysis, no attempt is made at explaining who witches are through historical process. A useful place to start such a project would be to draw the following conceptual distinction in our conception of social identity. We have a level of denotation such as "What is a

witch?" and various levels of connotation which would provide the answer to "Who, at a specific place and time, are the witches?". While the level of denotation will have its own history in the reproduction of beliefs in witches, the levels of connotation are our object of analysis. These levels will be determined by relatively recent historical experiences and struggles. It is these struggles that we need to unpack.(5)

A second broad weakness of previous literature on witch-craft movements has been the characterisation of the political meaning and potential of the movements. While these authors can observe an important political intervention when the youth seize the power to identify and punish witches publically, they tend to measure the political implications of the movements, by the movement's articulated aims, namely to destroy witches and, in doing so, introduce a world of perfect harmony. Meanwhile, to these theorists, the real effectivity of the anti-witchcraft movements is that of a series of cathartic events. Hence, Willis offers the following characterisation of an anti-witchcraft movement active in south-west Tanzania in the early sixties: "The overt purpose of the Kamcape movement, its manifest function, is to eradicate sorcery. Its latent function is to effect a resolution at the psychic level of a generalised sense of internal conflict and to recreate the moral climate of village communities in accordance with the traditional ethos of unity and harmony" [Willis,1982,p228]. Willis's characterisation of the movement as a political intervention can be summed up in the following quote: "What are the prospects of such movements becoming genuinely revolutionary in aim and practice, of actually changing the pattern of social relations instead of playing at it?" [ibid]. It is important to note that this theoretical tendency of setting up reproduction and revolution in opposition to one another, is reinforced by a structuralist framework.

However, when the witchcraft movements are analysed as a moment of an ongoing historical process, a very different picture emerges. One begins to get a sense of how `the youth' as a social force with specific material interests, is historically constituted as a coherent body. Anti-witchcraft movements can then be conceptualised as a specific political intervention(6) (chosen from a number of other possible political strategies), within the context of specific relationships, whose effects can be measured in relation to the interests of the `youth' in a ongoing process of struggle. Similarly, we cannot understand the political implications of the movement without understanding, not only the broader political environment, but the specific process of mobilisation and local possibilities that constituted the movement as an organisation.

When discussed in this context, the hypothesis that the public punishment of witches acts as warning to a group of people of punishment if they refuse to cooperate with the accusers, becomes useful. Witchcraft accusations allow the accusers to punish anybody without the need for material evidence, thus anybody can be accused of witchcraft and disciplined by `society'.(7) Hence, it

becomes a powerful means of imposing a discipline on a society, especially when the accusers are going to depend on the future cooperation of those associated with the accused. The movement stands as an implicit and constant threat to more or less anybody. Hence its effect is not to generate catharsis but fear and anxiety. In this context, the effectivity of the movement does not depend on the event itself, but on the collective memory of the event. It is a phenomenon that needs to be understood through time.

However, the witch attacks were only one of the activities of the BYO. If we are to unravel the ambiguous nature of the BYO, it becomes necessary to reveal the process of mobilisation in Mapulaneng, and the historical transformations that made that process possible.

Mobilisation to Organisation: The Mapulaneng Crisis Committee

Mobilisation in Shatale, at first glance, appears anomalous when compared to the rest of Mapulaneng. Both the process of mobilisation and the structure of organisation in Shatale were strikingly different from the surrounding areas. No witches were ever attacked in Shatale. The Shatale Youth Congress (SYC), rather than discipline with the sjambok, depended on the "power of reason" for the control of its members (although the sjambok was always a very last resort). Meetings were held in a structured fashion and problems were always thoroughly discussed before being acted upon. The SYC had active cultural and educational committees. A study of mobilisation in Shatale is not only useful in its own right, but there is a direct link between mobilisation in Shatale and in the rest of Mapulaneng.

On the 28 Febuary 1986, school students in the rural township of Shatale burnt down the houses of three men believed to belong to a gang of people who had been murdering people and then selling parts of their bodies. On the 1 March, a man was killed, his business burnt and the houses of three other people were burnt. The response of the police to these incidents was characteristically brutal. Students were arbitrarily arrested and brutally assaulted with sjamboks. They were then handed over to the family of the deceased businessperson (who soon had vigilante status) to be further assaulted. As a result many students fled into the nearby mountains. The local Members of the Lebowan Parliament (MPs), the Mashile brothers, organised a public meeting to discuss the problem with residents of Shatale. At the meeting, the Mapulaneng Crisis Committee (MCC) was elected. At a later meeting the Shatale Youth Congress (SYC) was formed.

With the exception of the Women's Portfolio, every member of the MCC had been, or was still, a teacher and was aged between twenty five and thirty five. All the members were born in the area and knew each other prior to the formation of the committee. The President of the Committee had been to Turfloop where he had been involved in student organisational activities which included some trade union organisation. Most of the members were practicing

Christians. Most of the members lived in Shatale, had cars and telephones and could communicate with one another with relative ease.

The SYC had four committees: the executive, educational, cultural and disciplinary committees. In contrast to the MCC, most of the leadership of the SYC came from urban areas especially the East Rand and Soweto. Most of the leaders were still students. With the education crisis in the urban townships, families with relatives in Shatale had sent their children to Shatale for an education. Some students had come to Shatale as they were in hiding from the police in the urban areas. As a result, members of the SYC were not lacking in organisational experience.

Let us briefly try to analyse the peculiar form of mobilisation at Shatale. Shatale was formed in the early sixties. It was to be a rural township for `Sotho' professionals. It was forbidden to keep livestock in Shatale thus ensuring anyone who wanted to maintain a more `traditional' way of life would not settle in Shatale. (The Trust Lands was specifically created for such people.) A high school was built nearby to encourage professionals to stay at the township. Taps were also provided in every street. Hence, when influx controls were severely tightened in the sixties and early seventies, people who were forcibly removed from townships in the Eastern Transvaal (eg Graskop, Sabie, Pilgrims Rest) came to settle in Shatale. Clearly, these people had already broken from `traditional' life and were often practicing Christians with a relatively high standard of education. Four of the nine high schools in Mapulaneng are located in Shatale, a township of about thirty thousand people. There is a constant flow of students between Shatale and schools in more urban townships. This flow was speeded up in the eighties with the education crisis. Shatale has become a township of bureaucrats, teachers, businesspeople, retired pensioners and migrants. Thus, although Shatale is situated far from any major centre and many breadwinners are migrants, it has the culture and consciousness typical of an urban township.

Rents in Shatale are R14 a month. Houses are supplied with water and electricity. The main road is tarred. The Eastern Transvaal Development Board has been sponsoring townships inside the homelands at the expense of townships in South Africa proper.[9] As a result there has never been any long term friction between residents and the town-council. However, since 1984 there has been strong dis-satisfaction with the performance of the police. Fourteen people had been murdered and no arrests had been made. Complaints were made to the MPs at public meetings, who got the station-commander transferred. However, there was no change in police performance.

In December 1985, three students were killed and their bodies mutilated. Three people were seen leaving the scene of the crime. When confronted by the students they confessed to the murder but said they had been sent to do it by a particular businessperson who headed a gang of six people (of which the three were

members). Leaders of the Women's League confronted the wife of the man named, but she denied any knowledge of any incident. Eventually, the gang was arrested by police from Seshego after human body parts were found in the refrigerator belonging to the leader of the gang. But they were released without a docket being sent to the Attorney-General.

Students were mobilised thouroughly and quickly. A mobilising pamphlet[10] calling for action and unity was produced and distributed. The pamphlet called for both consumer boycotts and direct violent action. A core group organised secret meetings in the classrooms at all four high schools. It is important to note that all the members of the core group had experience in organisation from townships. In fact, some had been studying in Shatale as they were in hiding from township police. At the meetings a common understanding of the problem and a common strategy was systematically generated. Three meetings were held within a week at each school. On the 28 Febuary the students met at a prearranged place and went on to burn down three houses.

It is important to note that the students were not blind to the political implications of their act. The mobilising document concluded: "Because the government has failed, it is our turn to solve our problems." While the objects of the action were contingent, the action itself became necessary in the absence of a legitimate protector of life and property. It is also worth mentioning that the pamphlet included a protest against the system of detention without trial.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the MCC and the SYC became the popular maintainers of law and order in Shatale and in the surrounding area. The SYC was organised into squads which patrolled the township day and night and protected the schools from vigilante attacks. When there were disputes in Shatale or in neighbouring villages the SYC would form a court and mediate in the dispute. In this way, a consistent and popular discipline was imposed on the township.

The MCC and SYC made almost immediate contact with national organisation in Johannesburg. Contact was made with the South African Council of Churches who provided legal resources, Trade Unions, the United Democratic Front and the National Education Crisis Committee. Delegates were sent to the NECC national conference in Durban and an official report back was given to the community. As a result of resolutions taken at the conference, Student Representative Councils were formed at schools, a May 1 stayaway was called and a consumer boycott of the local Checkers was implemented as part of the national campaign to get troops out of the townships.

The two main clauses in the aims and objects of the constitution are as follows:
-to organise the people to play a meaningful, non-violent role in society
-to work in tandem with the MPs in taking up matters of common

concern.
Apart from forming principles and teachers' associations, the MCC resolved to form as many sub-branches of the committee as possible in different areas of Mapulaneng. Hence, when the MPs had a mass meeting on April 13 to provide a parliamentary report back to the residents of Green-Valley (just adjacent to Brooklyn, some 30 km from Shatale), the MCC were present to form the Setlhare sub-branch of the MCC.

At the meeting the MPs received complaints from the residents. Two of the main complaints were the lack of police protection for people living in the trust lands and the provision of open lorry transport for workers. After the report back, the Setlhare branch of the MCC (SCC) was elected. At the same meeting, members of the SYC informally advised youths from Brooklyn to start a youth organisation. It is worth noting that after the meeting there was no more formal contact between the SYC and the BYO. Both organisations were essentially concerned with local issues.

The three main members of the SCC were the Chair: a telephone exchange operator (who had a matric); the Vice President: a shoemaker with a Std One; and the Treasurer: a shopowner with a Std One. The Chair and the Treasurer lived in Brooklyn but the Vice President lived in a community thirty kilometres away. In fact, after the members were given their portfolios, the SCC never had a formal meeting. But why were these particular people elected? Did they have any previous organisational experience? Was there a link with the MPs? To answer these questions we need to go back to organisation and struggle in the fifties.

Matsikitsane (Mongoose) Mashile, the elder of the two MP brothers, was chief of some five communities in Mapulaneng in the fifties. The communities were involved in tenant struggles with Hall and Sons, a farming enterprise that had been given large quantities of land in the Lowveld by the government. The use of child labour, the monopoly on cattle sales and the taking of manure were the central issues in these struggles. After exhausting official channels to achieve justice for his community, Mashile went to Johannesburg to seek help. He returned with Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki of the African National Congress (ANC). After the people in his communties had joined the ANC, the ANC provided legal assistance. In this way a particular political culture was forged. However, when the ANC was banned, Mashile was arrested and jailed for two years under charges of sabotage.

When he was released in 1963, he discovered that Lebowa and Gazankulu had taken an embryonic form and under the Bantu Authorities Act, his chiefdom had been given to Shangaan chiefs. He mobilised his followers to give him back his old chiefdom or the Setlare Chiefdom in what was to be Lebowa. His brother, who was a migrant, returned to help him with his struggles. Before there was any uprising, he and his brother were deported to the Ciskei and the Transkei respectively.

In his absence, in the sixties and seventies, there were four broad processes taking place. The land was being divided into smaller plots to facilitate an influx of people. Residents of the area were moved from their old plots (where a substantial surplus was marketed) to the new smaller plots. These plots were not large enough for subsistence farming thus ensuring that migrancy would be properly institutionalised.

There was a spate of forced removals into the area from surrounding townships but most especially from nearby farms as mechanisation was implemented and influx control was tightened. As the population increased, so land hunger increased and the position of migrants became more and more precarious.

Gazankulu and Lebowa were created in the early seventies. Sotho people were `encouraged' to move into Lebowa and Shangaans were to move into Gazankulu. Although no force was used to move people, the shortage of land lead to victimisation of people living in the `wrong' ethnic area by their neighbours. This, coupled with the refusal to teach Tsonga in Lebowan schools and Sotho in schools in Gazankulu, lead to a bitter exodus of people into their respective ethnic homelands.

Lastly, this period saw the transformation of the chief from political ruler to a bureaucratic figurehead. This transformation generated a huge political vacuum at a grass-roots level. This vacuum has manifested itself in confusion amongst the bureaucracy as to under whose jurisdiction a particular area of a person's life falls. To this must be added the fact that bureaucrats in Lebowa, as a rule, are not effectively accountable to their superiors or the Lebowan populace for their actions. This has resulted in a number of possible channels to follow in order to get things done. Hence, this vacuum could provide the space in which an Induna, agricultural officer or even a clerk could exert an arbitary, corrupt and extremely oppressive bureaucratic power. Or, on the other hand, as Miedzinski points out, "While absolute confusion dominates the rural power structures, it is this very confusion that generates the alternative, legitimate power structures. It is those who can assert the power to regulate people's lives who emerge to fill the space created by the breakdown in the traditional and imposed structures" [Miedzinski,1987,p19]. Thus, we have the creation of opposing political factions and grass-roots leaders, struggling to assert their legitimacy, and to build a following amongst the rural populace. In this competitive situation, going to someone for advice is no longer just a friendly act between neighbours, it is a reflection of the legitimacy, effectivity and power that a particular faction wields.

The two Mashile brothers returned from exile in 1973 and 1978 respectively. The younger brother, Seghopela, returned first. On the insistence of his followers, he ran for parliament in 1978 and had a landslide victory. (The elder brother ran for and got into parliament in 1983.) It was not long before the two brothers had forged links with alternative grass-roots leaders and

factions. As MPs, The Mashile brothers saw their role as political. Whenever the system failed to respect people's rights, or to render a service it had promised, they would intervene and take the matter to the highest authority in parliament. By publically embarrassing ministers they ensured that bureaucrats were accountable to their superiors. When necessary, they made the ministers directly accountable to the people by organising surprise mass meetings when they visited the area. In this way, the two brothers created a vast network of supporters and forged a political culture specific to Mapulaneng.

However, there was one crucial vacuum that remained unfilled in 1979. There was no-one to take up the issue of the increasing shortage of land. With a declining economy mixed with increasing population and poverty, the situation of migrants was becoming desperate. This was aggravated by threatening gestures from Gazankulu to take over various pieces of land. The chiefs did not have the legitimacy or power to confront the situation effectively. Under these circumstances, the Mashile brothers formed Liglo La Nagha (LLN), a migrants' association. It was under the LLN that, in 1984, the Lebowan side of the Lebowa / Gazankulu land conflict was organised and fought at a physical, diplomatic and legal level. However, more importantly for our purposes, it was under the banner of LLN, that the supporters of the Mashiles, namely the alternative grass-roots leaders in Mapulaneng, were formalised under a single organisational structure. Thus, it comes as no surprise to us that we discover that every male member of the SCC was a member of the LLN and that the active members of the SCC were all previous executive members of the LLN.

Hence, when the BYO was constituted, it went to the two members of the SCC living in Brooklyn for advice and guidance. It was through the SCC that the BYO got involved in May Day and in the Checker's Boycott. Following the example of the SYC, the SCC also advised the BYO to form anti-crime squads and to escort people home at night when they had been dropped by taxis. It was also the SCC that negotiated with the nearby mill for safe transport for workers. However, all these issues have to do with conflicts outside the community as such. Dishonest taxi drivers, criminal gangs, Workers' Day and callous employers are all relationships with outsiders. But what of conflicts and problems within the community?

The main problem within the community that the SCC was called to solve, was the problem of old people fleeing into the mountains at night. There was also fear in the community caused by `comrades' (youths) singing militant anti-witchcraft songs late at night. The two members of the SCC resident in Brooklyn told the BYO to organise a public meeting on May 8. At the meeting, the Chair of the SCC told older people to come out of the mountains as the comrades were there to protect them. He also told parents to discipline their children. Witchcraft was not the concern of children.

On May 13 the MCC and the active members of the SCC were detained. Over a year later when they were released, in an interview, the chair of the SCC gave the following assessment: "We knew that the chiefs or Indunas could not control the children but our big mistake was to think that the parents could discipline the youth. We never spoke to the youth directly about discipline. That was our big mistake: to work through the parents." Which begs the question: What was happening in the homes that the parents could no longer discipline their children? (12) This leads us to our analysis of the anti-witchcraft incident.

Comrades, Women and Witches: Struggles in the Rural Household

This section will attempt to demonstrate two processes. Firstly, an attempt will be made to show how witchcraft accusations were fundamentally shaped by the history of the rural household and the struggles within it. Secondly, the question will be posed as to how a consensus was generated as to who exactly were the witches. During the meeting of the BYO, when it was decided who was going to be punished, many people were accused of witchcraft but these accusations were not popularly accepted. It came as no surprise to either the youth or to women interviewed that the group of people who were attacked, were the chosen ones. Thus, we are posing the question as to how this consensus was generated.

In her paper Family and Household in a Lebowa Village, Debra James offers both a description and analysis of different households to be found in rural Lebowa. Household forms are not only determined by the development cycle of an individual household, but access to land, migrant's wages, local employment, ethnic practices, kinship and patronage networks serve as parameters around which a particular family formulates strategies for survival. Access to these resources is, in turn, determined by a household's history in the area and experience of resettlement.

As a result of these material variables, a number of different household forms have emerged. A nuclear household, making up 13% of those studied in James' sample, contains two generations, and is headed by an adult male, who is usually a migrant with a fairly steady income. Simple three-generational households, making up 9% of the sample, consist of the extention of a nuclear household to include a further generation in the form of one of the son's family. Extended households, the most common category making up 54% of the sample, are an extention of simple three-generational households with the vertical addition of grandchildren, or the horizontal addition of the spouses of other siblings. As males are often absent working in the cities, about half of the extended families are managed by women. The last category James produces, the small female-headed household is comprised of a woman and her children following the death, divorce or desertion of the husband (if the woman was ever married.)

James stresses that her typology is not to be thought of as an

end in itself. The different forms of households she labels are a result of a complex ongoing historical process. In this context economic necessity, rather than `tradition' will determine the *form each household takes. The form of a household will mutate* as the broader conditions of existence change through time and the household struggles to survive.(13)

While wecannot use James's work without qualification, it is worthwhile pointing out the striking similarity in the economic history of Morotse and Brooklyn. Like Morotse, Brooklyn was made Trust Land in 1936 and later subject to a subdivision of plots. And like Morotse, the inhabitants of Brooklyn have been arriving in an unsteady stream as Pedi labour tenants from the neighbouring area were evicted from their farms. Access to labour markets is also restricted to a labour bureau and some small towns from sixty to a hundred and fifty kilometres away. The employment policies of the few factories in these towns will also determine who in the household has access to employment. (eg Some factories will only employ women.) Thus it is not surprising that similar forms of households have been generated in Brooklyn.

The transformation of the household has not been without internal struggles for control of resources. "The main friction is between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.(14) The son is fond of his mother. When he returns he brings presents for his mother and often even sends his migrant's wage to his mother. This creates problems with his wife who complains that her mother-in-law not only wants her own pension but still takes money from her husband which she should receive. `What is the mother-in-law doing with so much money?' the wife will complain. When the wife goes down to collect water or to work at the fields she will be advised by her friends: `Your mother-in-law is giving your husband herbs so that he will love her and give her his money. Your mother-in-law is a witch.' This is how trouble starts."(15)

In the absence of a sufficient migrant's wage, pensions(16) have become a crucial element in the reproduction of rural society. What is not clear, is the duty of the old woman to contribute to the broader household budget. While this obligation is vague in the case of a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law (especially if the daughter-in-law has a form of local employment), it becomes opaque if her children have left the area, and she is staying with relatives. An important point to be drawn from the above discussion is that a static structural analysis would be missing the point. The course of history has produced a form of household and conflicts previously unknown in Mapulaneng. To go into the complexities of each `structural' relationship would be losing out on the historical process that made the relationships necessary.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising to find that the "Big Five" were all widowed pensioners, living on the margins of their respective households. (A couple of members of the "Big Five" were staying at the household of cousins.) In the absence of broader support, the "Big Five" formed a tight exclusive

group, both part of and separated from the rest of society. It is also no shock that members of the "Big Five" used implicit threats of witchcraft if anyone (including close relatives) refused to cooperate with them. In this way they maintained some power and were able to receive some respect from the community.(17)

However, `selfish' pensioners are not the only problem with which the rural resource managers have to contend. "There was a piece of land that was the family's to use. However, we did not need it and my neighbour began to use it. When my husband lost his job we began to need the land again. We gave our neighbour time to realise she did not have rights to it. Eventually, we took the matter to the chiefly court, who decided in our favour. There was great tension between us."(18) Neighbourly harmony turns to neighbourly conflict as competition over scarce rural resources increases. In a situation where migrants are losing their jobs or simply not returning to the countryside, access to rural resources becomes a life and death issue. It is important to note that with the decline of chiefly power, there is no definitive structure to mediate in neighbourly disputes. The result, in an atmosphere of even scarcer rural resources, is an increase in neighbourly and factional conflict that is never resolved. Hence, it is not surprising that the BYO planned to burn the house of a family accused by one of the comrades of killing a pig (whose ownership was in dispute) but was only stopped by the timely intervention of a member of the SCC.

"My biggest problem is hunger, I don't have money to buy food, my children are suffering because we have no food. I have no money for school fees, my son had to leave school because I could not afford to pay. Look at my house,it's next to nothing. It would not be long before it falls down and there is no one to help." [taken from Mrs G, mother of five children whose husband has neither been home nor sent money since 1978](19) For the first time in Mapulaneng both young boys and young girls are suffering from pellagra. The household manager is facing an impossible task. The result is severe stress, chronic illness and even insanity. In the case of Mrs G: "for a long time she [Mrs G] fell ill, because I think of all the frustration, she went a little confused, she became all mixed up and was in hospital for a long while."(20)

Meanwhile, at the daily meeting points, in the fields, water taps, scenes of tragedies and funerals a propoganda machine is at work. Conflicts and frustrations suffered by the rural resource managers are shared and thoroughly discussed.(21) A private conflict, when shared, becomes a common threat to the survival of society. If, in time, there is no-one to contradict it, a rumour becomes a reality as it is repeated and garnished. As public tragedies occur, people look for past villains in order to allocate responsibility. A selfish pensioner or uncooperative neighbour becomes a witch. However, in the households the rumours are spread to new ears: the ears of the youth. It is now towards their social position and conflicts that we turn.

Following the economic recession of 1982, unemployment in South

Africa and especially in the homelands has shot up. This has had the effect of creating a huge population of desperate unemployed youths in the countryside.[33] Rural culture has yet to create or define a productive place for these people. To illustrate this point let us record the following biographies of three youth leaders:

Joseph K was born in 1965. His parents were not married. His mother first worked at a nearby white farm but in 1970 she was a domestic at Phalaborwa and he was brought up by his mother's mother. But as his grandmother was working at a white farm, he was cared for by his uncles (who also lived with his grandmother). Joe went to school in 1975. He tried to make some money by herding his `rich' neighbour's cattle but he only received an occasional `gift' in the form of of some old clothes or food. He was forced to drop out of school in 1984 when he reached Std 4. He worked for a white farmer for R45 a month. He left after eight months and went to Kempton Park with an uncle who had found work at a construction firm for him and two of his friends. He lived at a hostel and received R58 a week. Spare time was spent at the hostel's shebeen as he was afraid of leaving the hostel because he had been warned about city girls who would rob him. After fourteen months the firm closed down and he was forced to return to the countryside. At Mapulaneng, he would spend his time going up and down to the labour office. He would try and earn some money by washing taxis. His spare time was spent under the trees playing different board games with a group of other unemployed men or watching his friends practice or play soccer. Scholars would only join them after school. He has built a small mud hut on his own plot. He would like to get married but does not have money to pay lobola or to support a wife.

Bill G was born in 1965. His father worked at Sabie and would return on the weekends. His mother worked at a local shop. He was brought up by his grandmother. He went to school in 1973 but by the time he reached Std 5 he was having continual conflicts with his teachers about his bad school attendance. When he needed money his mother would contribute R2 and his grandmother would contribute R2 from her pension. In 1984 he had a mental breakdown and left school. In 1985 he learnt how to become a soccer referee. Following that he would act as referee in all local soccer matches and some played away. He now gets money from his half brother and has an occasional job managing a shop. He has fights with his father who wants him to work in Sabie. He would spend his spare time playing games under the tree, refereeing soccer or, when he had money, at a shebeen.

Phil H was born in 1965. His father worked in Pretoria. His mother worked at Hoedspruit (some sixty km away.) As his grandparents were deceased, he was brought up by his two elder sisters. He started school in 1973. He did not like school as teachers would thrash him (especially at high school) for no reason. He left school in 1985. He plays soccer for the Brooklyn Fast Movers which practices four days a week and plays a match twice a week. He also plays games under the trees. He got a job

helping at the local butchery. Presently, he faces problems as his two sisters got divorced and returned to the house with their children and suddenly there is no room for him. He organised a room at the butchery where he works.(23)

Hence, we can see the effect of both the new family forms and the depression on the life opportunities of young unemployed men. Grandmothers, aunts, uncles, mothers and sisters all become sites of intense conflict as the young men struggle to stay alive. Meanwhile, under the trees and on the soccer fields have become a melting pot of all these frustrations and conflicts. Private experiences are shared and made public. A new solidarity is forged amongst the youth. In a society that cannot find a place for them, nor support them, the youth have generated a culture that is both within and outside society. It is, in effect, the breeding ground for a gang structure and culture. We can observe the birth of an antagonistic youth culture. But how are these struggles perceived and explained by the people living them?

The most eloquent answer came from one youth leader: "It is a well known fact that powerful Xhosa herbalists from the Transkei, have produced a herb which, which when used by women, makes men passive and obedient to their wives. It has become a major problem. These women are very mischievous with their herbs." Thus, changes in the balance of power within the household are explained with reference to herbs and witchcraft. The loss of health suffered by a mother is explained by a neighbour who is witching or poisoning her. Uncooperative grand parents are tightfisted as they are intrinsically evil and anti-social. In fact one could generalise and say that any anomaly (a relationship or event that can be observed without the observer being able to explain it) is expalined with reference to the notion of witchcraft or herbs.(24)

Meanwhile, in the fields, at the watering taps, funerals, in the households, on the soccerfields and under the trees a metaphor is created and a consensus is reached. A metaphor that links witches, herbs, neighbourly conflicts, domineering wives, uncooperative parents, selfish grandparents and unemployed migrants. And a consensus that binds the metaphor to a relatively small group of marginal people. (Usually people with little access to the 'propoganda machine'.) It was this metaphor and consensus that the BYO inherited when it was formed. And, it is towards this metaphor that we need to turn if we wish to understand the political meaning of the witch attacks.

An attack on a witch is a punishment for all the crimes the witch is supposed to have committed. Like all public punishment, it places a label on the accused and stands as an example for the rest of society to see and from which to learn. The witch attacks are a warning of a potential punishment for all those people involved in relationships that the youth define as anti-social. The youth had taken power and their way of showing it was by displaying, in the strongest and most public terms, that domineering wives, uncooperative neighbours, tight-fisted

pensioners and a multitude of other relationships would no longer be tolerated. It was, in effect, the most powerful political intervention the youth could make within rural society. Its effect was not cathartic. It was an implicit threat and it produced fear and anxiety. It was the imposition of a new discipline in each and every household, a demand for cooperation, in a situation where the material conditions demand conflict.

Conclusion

The rural youth are victims of an historical process that is beyond their control. The anti-witchcraft movement of 1986 was essentially a revolt against this process. It is a revolt against a society that is no longer able to support them.

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the historical processes that shaped political resistance in Mapulaneng. The decline of the South African economy has created a desperate situation in the rural areas. This situation has resulted in a society criss-crossed with antagonistic relationships. The specificity of these antagonisms can be explained through the historical process that produced a multitude of different forms of households. This historical process has also produced an antagonistic youth culture. It is this culture that supported the coherence of youth organisation. The anti-witchcraft movement was a political intervention within these antagonistic relationships.

While youth organisation was essentially an anti-witchcraft movement, its activities and its future potential cannot be reduced to that single activity. The witch attacks were a political intervention within the rural community. However, youth organisation did show a willingness to intervene in relationships between the rural communities and 'outsiders'. Which of the two relationships will come to dominate future organisation will be a site of struggle.

Footnotes 1–9 missing from original copy.

research.

10)The pamphlet and a translation of the pamphlet were produced at the trial of the MCC heard in the Nelspruit Regional Court in June 1987.

11)Setlhare is an area of Mapulaneng that falls under the jurisdiction of a particular chief (who used to be called Setlhare.) There is a dispute between the present chief and the elder Mashile brother as to who is the legitimate chief of Setlhare. The chiefdom includes parts of Brooklyn, Green-Valley, Acornhoek and Buffelshoek.

12)A school teacher explained to me how it was impossible to discipline children when there parents were migrants. In the case of extremely difficult children, the teacher would summon the children`s parents. Often an ineffectual grand-mother would present herself. In certain cases the children were bringing themselves up. Neighbours were supposed to be watching over the children.

13)For a discussion of the above process but in Lesotho, see Murray 1981.

14)Murray notes the ambiguous relationship between a migrant`s mother and wife in Lesotho. He comments that conditions of dependence within a particular household will determine the authority structure and who takes on the position of household head. (see esp chapter 7) However, he fails to tease out the possibilities of conflict from this ambiguous situation.

15)Taken from an interview between myself and Mrs M, a rural resource manager whose husband is a reliable migrant.

16)Delius pointed out to me the significance of pensions. He also pointed out how the role of a grand-mother has changed to that of mother.

17)see Steadman (1985) for a discussion of the use of witchcraft threats as a strategy used by marginalised people to achieve some respect.

18)Taken from an interview between myself and Mrs M.

19)Taken from an interview between K Heller and Mrs G.

20)Taken from an interview between K Heller and a women`s organiser.

21)For a discussion on how this consensus is created, see Lloyd Peters (1982). Lloyd Peters shows how Welsh youth gang, despite their rebellious stance, maintain a morality passed down by their parents. As a result, when the gangs act to discipline a member of the community, they do so with their parent`s implicit consent. It is worth noting that the reaction to the witch

attacks from parents was mixed. Traditionally, it was not the role of youths to concern themselves with witches. However, in other communities, when parents were asked by the youth as to how the "comrades" could be of service to the community, the answer was to eliminate the witches troubling the community.

22)According to a survey produced by the Development Bank in 1986, the amount of non-economically active males, in Lebowa as a whole, increased between 1970 and 1980 from 342 607 to 646 667. The population as a whole increased from 1 108 459 to 1 755 874. The Bank estimates that by 1985 about 826 150 males will be non-economically active if the level of unemployment remains constant between 1980 and 1985. (ie if a steady 81% of the male population remain economically inactive.) This, as we all know, has not been the case.

23)All three of these life histories were based on recent interviews between myself and the three young men. It is worth noting that Bill was elected as the leader of the BYO and Phil was his right hand man. They ruled the organisation with an iron fist.

24)Offiong (1984) makes the same point but in relation to an anti-witchcraft movement in Nigeria.

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