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BY: **Derrick Nielsen**

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'Bringing Together That Which Belongs Together': The Establishment of KwaNdebele and the Incorporation of Moutse*

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> Down the years your people have remained loyal to their language and their culture, thus ensuring that they were not swallowed up by other black peoples, so that today they can maintain themselves as a nation in its own right within its own territory. ... Through the large-scale migration of your people to their own country, the Ndebele nation is bringing together that which belongs together.
>
> — Marais Viljoen, State President of South Africa, speaking at the first session of the KwaNdebele Legislative Assembly

> ... it was not the population composition of the inhabitants of Moutse which resulted in the incorporation of Moutse into KwaNdebele. There is absolutely no indication that the State President was motivated by a desire to add the South Ndebele of Moutse to their brothers in KwaNdebele. ... The motives were administrative – a larger continuous area can be more easily administered than separate areas under different administrations.
>
> — From the judgment in the case of *Mathebe v the Governments of the Republic of South Africa, of KwaNdebele and of Lebowa*, Appellate Division of the Supreme Court (1988).

Introduction

Through a series of public statements and official proclamations issued in the early 1980s, the South African government confirmed that KwaNdebele, a small peri-urban settlement northeast of Pretoria, was to become the fifth 'independent homeland' in the country.[1] One of the smallest and poorest of Pretoria's territorial constructs, the Department of Co-operation and Development planned to boost the area's viability by incorporating the historically non-Ndebele area of Moutse, originally a part of Lebowa, into KwaNdebele before granting independence. From 1985 until the end of the decade, both Moutse and KwaNdebele witnessed periods of popular revolt and mass mobilization against aspects of the government's bantustan policy, in

* I would like to acknowledge the financial support provided by the Allbritton Foundation, the Beit Fund and Brasenose College towards the research on which this paper is based. For her help in penetrating the dense world of Afrikaans government documents, special thanks to Daniélle Crouse. For ease of reading, all quotations from Afrikaans documents have been translated into English.

[1] A paper of this nature necessarily requires the use of many debatable – at times, detestable – terms. Many authors consistently employ quotation marks to set off those terms used by the former government which are not widely accepted as legitimate. In this paper, however, I have tried to ensure readability. Therefore, throughout the paper, I will use quotation marks to set off contentious terms only the first time that they appear. Thereafter, the problematic nature of such terms should be taken as read. I will also use 'bantustan' and 'homeland' as interchangeable terms for the ten government-imposed political units through which all Africans were expected, through residency or association, to realize their citizenship and exercise any political rights. Finally, for the reader's convenience, please note the map at the end of the paper which highlights the areas discussed in this paper.

particular against plans calling for the consolidation, development and eventual independence of KwaNdebele.[2]

As conflict engulfed the KwaNdebele region in 1985-6, the parliamentary opposition, political NGOs and a wide-range of journalists and commentators questioned both the objectives and the tactics of the Botha government.[3] For many, Moutse's incorporation and KwaNdebele's independence represented, in a vivid and tragic manner, the illogical nature of government policy. When Allister Sparks headed one of his columns with the question "What on earth is the Government playing at in KwaNdebele?" he was voicing a wide-spread sense of frustration and disbelief.[4] However, despite the urgency which the revolts' bloodshed had added, the substance of Sparks' rhetorical question was not new. KwaNdebele has frequently been cited as an example of the ridiculous lengths to which the previous government was willing to go in the pursuit of ethnic purity. In such accounts, KwaNdebele's belated establishment represents the last step in a long, and illogical, process of ethnic partition. Sparks summarized KwaNdebele's creation thus:

> It was formed by buying up 19 white farms, building an instant capital called Siyabuswa, finding a compliant member of the Ndebele tribe named Simon Skosana who was willing to play ball, making him Chief Minister of a nominated legislative assembly, then, on his say-so, declaring that the 'people' of KwaNdebele had opted for independence.

In addition, Sparks questioned the logic of Moutse's incorporation:

> I would like someone to give me one sensible reason for what has been done. The annexation does not even make sense in terms of the Government's own ideology. The people of Moutse are Sotho-speaking members of the Pedi tribe. According to the logic of apartheid's insistence on ethnic compartmentalization, they should form part of the North Sotho 'homeland' of Lebowa. But the Government has removed them from Lebowa and forced them to join the 'homeland' for the Ndebele. Why?

What follows is an attempt to answer Sparks' query. The primary objective of this paper is to construct a narrative of events which tracks government policy towards the Ndebele from their initial scattered existence across the Transvaal, to the belated creation and consolidation of KwaNdebele and, finally, to the incorporation of the primarily non-Ndebele area of Moutse. Throughout, I will adopt a top-down approach in order to view events and the region from the perspective of the South African government, and more specifically, from the perspective of officials involved in formulating homeland policy.[5]

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[2] This paper is background to a D.Phil. thesis which I am writing for submission to Oxford University. The thesis itself focuses on mass resistance in KwaNdebele, Moutse and Ekangala (another non-Ndebele area scheduled for incorporation into the homeland) during this period.

[3] Interestingly, even the Afrikaans press openly questioned the government's actions in the area. See, for example, the 'Press Watch' section of *City Press* (23 Feb 86) for English translations from *Beeld and Vaderland* editorials which were critical of government policy towards Moutse.

[4] This quote and the two which follow are drawn from *The Star* (20 Jan 86).

[5] Most of the primary evidence used in this paper come from two sources: (1) files from the Department of Co-operation and Development and the Department of Constitutional Development and Planning submitted to the Rumpff Commission of Inquiry into the Constitutional and Political Future of Moutse (1988-9); and (2) files from the state ethnologist's office, Pretoria. I would like to acknowledge

The account which emerges challenges many of the assumptions which have been made regarding the government's policy towards the Ndebele. Most importantly, the narrative suggests that the South African government was never, despite its rhetoric, primarily concerned to consolidate an ethnic 'unit'. KwaNdebele's establishment and its consolidation was not driven by an ethnographer's vision or, even by a divide-and-rule plan. Although elements of each were involved, the creation of an Ndebele homeland primarily reflected an attempt by government planners to manage the effects of emerging economic and political dynamics in the region. Following its creation, ethnic criteria were similarly downplayed in planning for the fledgling bantustan's growth and development. Through a series of government commissions and internal departmental proposals the 'separate development' ideal of a 'national unit' was increasingly ignored in favor of geographical, administrative and developmental concerns. This unstated, but clearly discernible, shift in government policy culminated in the government's forced incorporation of Moutse into KwaNdebele.

To understand the context in which these policies were formulated, it is necessary to begin with a brief review of the history of the Ndebele. As we shall see, government policy was informed by the material and political impact of past events.

The Transvaal Ndebele in Historical Perspective

In light of the upheavals which the creation and consolidation of KwaNdebele eventually caused, it is ironic to note that the South African government was historically slow to warm to the notion of a separate Ndebele homeland. Despite the Ndebele's reputed cultural conservatism (which some have claimed is evident in their distinctive wall-paintings and beadwork[6]), the ideologues of apartheid consistently left the Ndebele out of emerging plans for an ethnically partitioned South Africa. In 1959, the government did not recognize the group as a 'national unit' deserving of a territorial authority in terms of the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act, the legislative basis for the government's new "ethnic" approach to bantustan development. At the time, the Transvaal Ndebele, descendants of one of the first Nguni groups to cross the Vaal river, were spread across the length and breadth of the province.[7] Pockets of Ndebele could be found living together on land under the jurisdiction of the Bophuthatswana and Lebowa homelands, although most were still dispersed in small family clusters on the white farms of the region. Still others had been drawn into regional labor markets, either as migrant workers in the PWV or, like those living in Doornkop near Middelburg, as residents of 'black spots' near smaller towns. The dispersion of the Ndebele across the region was the result of a combination of internal and external pressures.[8]

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the help of Mrs. Uys, at the State Archives, and Mr. Wiid, at the state ethnologist's office, for helping to arrange access to these 'closed' documents.

[6] See, for example, Elizabeth Schneider, "Paint, Pride and Politics: Aesthetic and Meaning in Transvaal Ndebele Wall Art," unpub. PhD. thesis, (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1986).

[7] The most common misperception in the history of Transvaal Ndebele is that they are somehow related to Mzilikazi's Ndebele presently located in Zimbabwe. This is not the case, however. The best historical scholarship suggests that the Transvaal Ndebele settled in the interior of the trans-Vaal region by at least the seventeenth century. See further Peter Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele: Indenture and the Making of Ethnic Identity," in P. Bonner, et al., eds., *Holding Their Ground* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press and Ravan Press, 1989).

[8] For inclusion in my thesis, I have compiled a more detailed and complete history of the Transvaal Ndebele. This summary is drawn from that text. See my "Dispossession and Reclamation:

The Transvaal Ndebele have historically split at least twice due to fissions internal to the group. The first division occurred at a very early stage, probably not long after the group's arrival in the Transvaal. While the reasons for the split are unknown, we do know that part of the Ndebele migrated north, eventually settling amongst the Sotho-speaking population near present-day Pietersburg, while the remainder continued to live in the original Ndebele heartland of KwaMnyamana ('place of the black hills', later known as Bon Accord, located north of present-day Pretoria). This division is the basis for what has become a linguistic and socio-cultural division between the so-called Northern Ndebele, who have largely assimilated the language and customs of their Northern Sotho neighbors, and the Southern Ndebele whose speech and culture still display Nguni characteristics.

The Southern Ndebele subsequently endured a split of their own. According to oral tradition, before the *difaqane*, a succession dispute between two royal heirs sparked division within the Ndebele living in the KwaMnyamana heartland. In a story strikingly reminiscent of the Biblical tale of Jacob and Esau, it is said that Ndzundza, the younger son of the dying chief Musi, deceitfully deprived his elder brother Manala of the royal regalia. According to tradition, Ndzundza and his followers were chased from the area, eventually settling east of the Steelpoort River. Henceforward, the two branches of the Southern Ndebele, named after the brothers who occasioned the split, lived in peace, separated by over a hundred kilometers, and developed separately.

Both branches of the Southern Ndebele suffered heavily at the hands of Mzilikazi's regiments during the 1820s. The Manala were, in fact, nearly annihilated and, following another succession dispute, were divided into three separate small 'tribes'. First attacked and then divided, the majority of the Manala were forced, over the next fifty years, to seek refuge on the Wallmansthal mission station or live on the farms of local Boers in exchange for their labor. The Ndzundza, however, regrouped after the *difaqane*, and under the protection of the Maroteng (Pedi) paramountcy, established themselves as a regional power in the fortified strongholds of KoNomtjharhelo, near present-day Roossenekal. However, like the other African chiefdoms in the area, the Ndzundza were eventually defeated and subjugated to white rule in 1883, after a long period of struggle against both Boer and British forces.

It is important to note that the defeat of the Ndzundza and the 'peace' which followed were perhaps unique in southern Africa for the hardship which they imposed. With a view towards lessening the reconstituted Z.A.R.'s dual problems of landlessness and shortage of labor, the Ndzundza who survived the eight-month siege were distributed among the Boer commandos as indentured servants. All of their land was subsequently divided into seven hectare plots and rushed by commando veterans on a first-come, first-served basis. As a result, the population of the once formidable Ndzundza chiefdom was scattered as virtual slave-labor across the districts

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The Transvaal Ndebele in Historical Context," unpublished. See also, Peter Delius, "The Ndzundza Ndebele: Indenture and the Making of Ethnic Identity," in P. Bonner, et al., eds., *Holding Their Ground* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press and Ravan Press, 1989) and Deborah James, "Kinship and Land In An Inter-Ethnic Rural Community," unpub. MA thesis, (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand, 1987), especially pp. 44-61.

of central and eastern Transvaal and their land, ironically still referred to as Mapochsgronden,[9] was alienated.

Originally indentured for five years, the defeat of the Ndzundza in 1883 in fact began a period of dispossession that lasted into the modern era. The official period of indenture preceded decades of informal indenture, coerced labor tenancy and harsh share-cropping arrangements. Furthermore, the chief and twenty-two other traditional leaders of the Ndzundza were imprisoned after the war of 1883. Thus deprived of both land and leadership, the Ndzundza entered the twentieth-century perhaps uniquely disadvantaged among the Transvaal's African population.

Although various government commissions of the mid- to late-1910s failed to meet Ndebele requests for their own land, small groups of Ndzundza were nevertheless beginning to gather, on their own impetus, around two traditional leaders in two separate areas of the Transvaal. By 1923, Mayisha Cornelius Mahlangu, the grandson of the last independent paramount, was living with a group of Ndzundza on the farm Weltevreden, north and east of Pretoria. The purchase of the farm was secured with assistance from the other main cluster of Ndzundza living under Matsitsi, the brother of the former paramount, near Kafferskraal. Before settling at Weltevreden, the Ndzundza, in an act with future significance, offered cattle to the area's established Bantoane chief before taking possession of the land.[10]

In 1939, the Ndzundza at Kafferskraal, moved north across the Blood River to Trust farms located east of Groblersdal in the Nebo district. The move, led by Matsitsi's son, Jonas, foreshadowed the eventual political break between the two Ndzundza communities. Although tension between the two groups, and especially between the traditional leaders of the two branches, had been apparent for some time, a definite split only occurred in the apartheid era. Predictably, given the history above, the final confrontation centered around the emotive issue of land.

Until the 1950s, it appears that both branches of the Ndzundza considered the return to Mapochsgronden a *sine qua non* for further negotiations with the government. However, in 1959, the Nebo Ndzundza, under the regent chief Jack Mahlangu, decided to accept recognition as a tribal authority within the larger, primarily Northern Sotho-speaking Nebo regional authority. Implicitly, Mahlangu's decision relinquished Ndzundza claims – or at least those of the Nebo branch – on the historical Ndebele heartland east of the Steelpoort River. David Mabhogo, the chief of the Ndzundza living on Weltevreden, was furious. Having rejected a similar offer for recognition,[11] Chief Mabhogo personally traveled to Nebo in an attempt to fine and, thereby, discipline Jack Mahlangu, whom Mabhogo, as the historically senior Ndzundza

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[9] Historically, Chief Mapoch (or Mabhogo) was credited with regrouping and re-establishing the Ndzundza chieftaincy after the upheavals of the 1820s. Since then, 'Mapoch' has been regularly retained by Ndzundza chiefs as part of their title.

[10] The Bantoane subsequently formed the largest chieftaincy in the Moutse district. Thus, when Moutse's incorporation into KwaNdebele was announced, the question of the proffered cattle became a highly charged issue in the debate. Whether or not the cattle constituted 'tribute' to the Bantoane or merely a 'gift' was of great importance in 'traditionalist' arguments about the proposed incorporation. See, for example, arguments for the former interpretation made by Maredi Chueu, member of the Lebowa Legislative Assembly for Moutse, in an interview with the *Rand Daily Mail* (29 Nov 82).

[11] Department of Co-operation and Development memorandum, "Pakket vir KwaNdebele en Lebowa," ministerial inquiry M3/4/16/4/1/3 (23 Mar 84). Rumpff Commission Evidence, File 25/7/2/5 – G, "Staatkundige Dienste/KwaNdebele/Wetgewende Vergadering/ Regsgebied".

chief, considered an upstart "headman". The ensuing confrontation confirmed the political split between the Ndzundza branches. Although social interaction between members of the two groups continued, the communities' political and traditional elites remained wary of each other.

Nearly a decade later, in 1968, Chief Mabhogo finally accepted the installation of the Ndzundza Tribal Authority (NTA) in the Weltevreden area. Despite holding out nearly a decade longer than the Nebo Ndzundza, the Weltevreden Ndzundza were not allowed to return to Mapochsgronden. Like their counterparts in Nebo, they were instead simply incorporated into the neighboring Northern Sotho homeland of Lebowa. By this time, three other Ndebele authorities had been established in the Hammanskraal region of Bophuthatswana, consisting primarily of Manala Ndebele. In addition, several Northern Ndebele authorities had been established in both Lebowa and Bophuthatswana. Outside of these structures, a considerable number of Ndebele remained in precarious positions on white farms throughout the region. Thus, by the late 1960s, over eighty years after their dispersal from Mapochsgronden, the Ndebele remained politically divided, economically weak and geographically dispersed. At this stage, the government seems to have hoped that the scattered Ndebele would integrate into neighboring "black nations" and thereby "disappear".[12]

The Establishment of KwaNdebele

However, in what appears an abrupt about-face, officials of BAD met with the leaders of various Ndebele tribal authorities in March 1972 in order to discuss, for the first time, the possibility of creating an Ndebele homeland. Six months later, draft plans for such an area were released. Several interpretations of this shift in government policy have been offered. As we shall see, prominent Ndebele leaders and government officials have offered complimentary accounts of KwaNdebele's creation. They differ, however, in the emphasis accorded to the demands of various sectors of the population. After summarizing both of these accounts, I will conclude the section by developing a third interpretation which stresses larger political and material processes behind the government's decision to create an Ndebele homeland.

As one might expect, the elite of KwaNdebele have stressed the effect that they and other Ndebele leaders had in demonstrating to the South African government the need for such a homeland. The activities of various Ndebele organizations formed in the late 1960s have been frequently cited by the leaders as proof of the depth and breadth of popular support for the cause. The earliest of these organizations, the Ndebele Ethnic Group, was established in Atteridgeville and Mamelodi in 1965 in response to Radio Bantu's lack of *siNdebele* programs. This initial group was limited in scope, but it was soon absorbed into a larger, more ambitious structure, the Transvaal National Ndebele Organization (TNNO). Founded in Mamelodi in November 1967, the TNNO originally targeted the Ndebele residents of Pretoria's and Germiston's townships for mobilization. However, in April 1968, at a Daveyton meeting held to draft a constitution for the organization, the organization's mission was broadened to include the unification of the various branches of the Transvaal Ndebele. By the time of the TNNO's first conference, held in Mamelodi from August 31 to September 1, 1968, the organization was explicitly calling for discussions with the relevant government ministers regarding the

[12] *Die Volksblad* (16 Mar 79), cited in Colleen McCaul, *Satellite in Revolt – KwaNdebele: An Economic and Political Profile* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1987), p. 4.

establishment of their own homeland. Speakers at a second conference, held near Hammanskraal in March 1969, repeated the organization's demands for government action.[13]

After the installation of the NTA in 1968, the Weltevreden elite became particularly active in rallying support for a homeland. Simon Skosana (at the time chairman of the NTA and a member of the TNNO, and later Chief Minister of KwaNdebele) recalls that he "started to move among the Ndebele people with a bicycle in 1967 and 1968 to try and organize them."[14] David Mabhogo, the respected paramount of the Ndzundza, played an important role in securing the participation of other Ndebele chiefs. Visits by Mabhogo to the Manala chief William Mabena and to the Northern Ndebele chief Johannes Kekana in April 1968 consolidated elite support for a common homeland.[15]

In short, members of the Ndzundza elite, like Skosana and Mabhogo, have stressed the role which Ndebele organizations and their leaders played in forcing the government to listen to their demands. As Skosana has summarized, "There was a very big argument about it [an Ndebele homeland]. It took us from 1968 to 1972. Then they started to answer us."[16] For the Ndzundza elite, the eventual creation of an Ndebele homeland around the 'black spot' of Weltevreden, a farm which their forebears had purchased with great effort, must have seemed, at least in part, a personal triumph. Later, the KwaNdebele Legislative Assembly (KLA) recalled the achievement when selecting the bantustan's motto: "*Kuvuswa ezivusako*" which translates as "You help those who help themselves".[17]

This interpretation of events has, at times, been reinforced by members of the South African government. Official documents and government press releases sometimes cite the persistent requests of Ndebele leaders as an important catalyst for the creation of KwaNdebele. For instance, an article commissioned by the KwaNdebele National Development Corporation states that KwaNdebele "is a paradox of sorts" among the country's bantustans. The article suggests that although the homelands "were conceived by Pretoria's strategic planners ... the self-governing territory of KwaNdebele was born of the Ndebele people's self-motivated desire to stake out their piece of South Africa."[18]

However, more often than not, government officials have relied on the rhetoric of ethnic nationalism, rather than the requests of Ndebele elites, to justify the homeland's belated creation. Marais Viljoen's statement to the opening session of the KLA, quoted at the beginning of this paper, is a particularly dramatic example of this technique. In his speech, the State President[19] praised the "surging nationalism of the Ndebele nation," comparing its "flame of nationalism" with the spirit found elsewhere in independent Africa. "How could it be wrong," he asked, "for the government of South Africa to acknowledge the human desire for unfettered freedom." He continued, claiming that "through the large-scale migration of your people to their own country, the Ndebele nation is bringing together that which belongs together."[20]

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[13] C.J. van Vuuren, "Ndzundza-Ndebele en die Mapochsgrotte," *South African Journal of Ethnology*, 8, 2 (1985), pp. 44-5.

[14] Interview with Simon Skosana, cited in McCaul, *Satellite*, p. 4.

[15] van Vuuren, "Ndzundza-Ndebele," p. 45.

[16] McCaul, *Satellite*, p. 4.

[17] *African Business* (Feb 86) and van Vuuren, "Ndzundza-Ndebele," p. 45.

[18] Ciaran Ryan for the KNDC, "A Place in the Sun," *Leadership SA*, 10, 6 (1991), p. 89.

[19] Before the 1983 constitution, the State Presidency was largely a ceremonial position.

[20] Quoted in McCaul, *Satellite*, p. 6.

In fact, Marais' last observation regarding the influx of people into KwaNdebele demonstrates the tactic most frequently employed by the government to justify the bantustan's creation. Citing the area's incredible statistics on migration and settlement,[21] government officials claimed that a separate Ndebele homeland was not only possible, but represented a positive development for the masses in accordance with their own demands. In short, the government portrayed influx into the area as a physical manifestation of self-determination. According to this interpretation, thousands of people had voted with their feet in the process of "bringing together that which belong[ed] together" – an ethnic Ndebele nation.[22]

However, what both of these interpretations obscure, and what is central to the explanation which I now want to suggest, is the fact that the provision of land for Ndebele settlement was in fact becoming increasingly necessary from the perspective of the South African government itself. By the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, changes in the political economy of the central Transvaal region had important ramifications for rural Africans. In particular, the mechanization of farm production and the switch to capital-intensive crops forced many African laborers, and their families, off the land in search of other places to live and work. Legislation restricting squatting and providing for the abolition of tenant-farming confirmed and intensified the displacement of Africans living on white-owned farms throughout the area. Constrained by the tightening of influx control measures in the cities, many displaced families had no option other than to seek refuge in the bantustan to which they were said to belong according to the apartheid schema.[23]

For displaced Ndebele, the situation was particularly severe. Without an officially designated "home" to which to return, Ndebele leaving the farms had two basic options in the search for land. First, they could acquire their own plots or, more frequently, become tenants on residential stands in existing Ndebele areas. The two most promising areas for occupation, particularly for the Southern Ndebele, were the twenty-three trust farms of Jack Mahlangu in Nebo and Mabhogo's farms around Weltevreden. Alternatively, others sought refuge in the nearby homelands of Bophuthatswana or Lebowa. Winterveld, a series of freehold farms in the Odi-Moretele region of Bophuthatswana was a particularly frequent destination in the early 1970s.

Yet the economic displacement of a large number of Ndebele from white-owned farms does not, by itself, explain why the government chose to reverse previous policy regarding an Ndebele homeland. Without changing its policy, the government could have simply added more land to existing Ndebele areas in order to ease land pressure, while maintaining these areas within the boundaries of the existing bantustans. In fact, several farms around Weltevreden were

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[21] There are a wealth of statistics which suggest the magnitude of KwaNdebele's growth. To offer but two: It was estimated at the beginning of 1986 that the bantustan's population had trebled since 1975. As a result, while in 1980 there were a reported 1.5 people per hectare, by 1984 there were almost 3 people/hectare. Cited in *The Weekly Mail* (10-16 Jan 86).

[22] See further Koornhof's statement in parliament which employs not only the same argument but much of the same language. In part, he stated: "By means of the large-scale migration of the South Ndebele to a country of their own, the Ndebele people is bringing together those who belong together, and those aspirations must not be denied." *Hansard*, 21, col. 10735 (1983).

[23] For an important piece on the displacement of Africans in the Botha period, including a section on KwaNdebele, see Colin Murray, "Displaced Urbanization: South Africa's Rural Slums," in W. Beinart and S. Dubow, eds., *Segregation and Apartheid in Twentieth-Century South Africa* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).

incorporated in this manner into the NTA's jurisdiction in 1972. We must look elsewhere, then, for additional factors which contributed to the government's need to create a separate Ndebele bantustan.

I will argue that aspects of the South African government's emerging homeland policy – especially the pursuit of bantustan 'independence' – played a significant role in creating the need for an Ndebele homeland. When the Nationalist party assumed power in 1948, independence for the small and scattered African reserves had not even been contemplated. Although Verwoerd's government sought to devolve, on a case-by-case basis, limited legislative and executive functions to the bantustans, the granting of political independence to African areas was still only considered a distant goal. However, following the swift passage of the Transkei through the assigned stages of self-government, bantustan independence became an important objective of homeland policy by the late 1960s. Legislation introduced in 1970 and 1971 confirmed the goal of homeland independence and eased its implementation. As a result, by the end of the 1970s, two homelands had already achieved what Verwoerd had once thought would take decades. This step in the evolution of bantustan policy introduced several new dynamics which were critical to the development of an Ndebele homeland.

First, in a pattern probably not anticipated by the South African government, the pursuit of independence in the bantustans, particularly in Bophuthatswana, initiated what Deborah James has described as a "domino effect" in ethnic relations. As a homeland opted for independence, minority ethnic groups in the area often suffered discrimination and harassment in various forms, usually in the context of education, business licensing or access to social benefits.[24] By the late 1970s, tens of thousands of non-Tswanas were leaving Bophuthatswana, and especially the ethnically diverse Odi-Moretele region, in an attempt to escape the escalating wave of chauvinism and discrimination which had originated at the highest levels of the bantustan government.[25] Since many of Odi-Moretele's residents had been drawn to the area due to its proximity to the PWV, KwaNdebele was a natural choice for those seeking a home still within commuting distance to the Rand. By 1979, an estimated 10,000 individuals had moved to the bantustan from the Winterveld area alone.[26]

A second consequence of the government's policy of homeland independence was a renewed determination to clear 'white' South Africa of 'black spots'. There were both ideological and material motivations behind this commitment. First, the mere existence of African-held land outside of the bantustans belied the government's insistence that the latter areas were the true and historical 'homes' of all Africans. Secondly, both to lure homelands to accept independence and to justify the policy to apartheid's critics, the government wanted to consolidate the existing bantustans into more sensible and coherent geographical units. In order to achieve this goal without exceeding the quota of land set aside for African occupation in the terms of the 1936 Land Act, the government wanted to remove outlying African-occupied areas (also called 'poorly situated' areas) and relocate their inhabitants to areas linked to the homelands. For government planners, the displacement of thousands of Ndebele from 'black spots' across the Transvaal further intensified the need for an Ndebele bantustan. Leaders of neighboring

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[24] Deborah James, "Kinship and Land," p. 52.

[25] For a description of the waves of harassment which have been directed against non-Tswanas in Bophuthatswana see Jeremy Keenan, "Pandora's Box: The Private Accounts of a Bantustan Community Authority," *South African Review 3* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), pp. 364-6.

[26] This figure was originally provided by the Department of Co-operation and Development. It is cited in various sources including McCaul, *Satellite*, p. 8.

bantustans, already overcrowded, would not have accepted such large numbers of displaced Ndebele without the provision of substantial extra land by the government. Perhaps the most famous 'black spot' removal which involved KwaNdebele was the forced relocation of over 10,000 people from Doornkop and Kromkrans to resettlement camps in Siyabuswa in 1975.[27]

Finally, one should note that the decision to create an Ndebele homeland was ideologically consistent with the government's decision to pursue independence, along ethnic lines, for the country's African population. As the government increasingly justified its policies – and continued white minority rule – through the rhetoric of self-determination and the 'separate development' of 'nations', it would have been difficult to continue to ignore the representations of sectors of the Ndebele elite. I would argue, however, that this consideration was not determinative of government policy. As we have seen, the officials of BAD consistently resisted Ndebele requests for a homeland for over a decade after the first legislative declaration of 'national units' in 1959. If one accepts that the government's homeland policy, like apartheid more generally, was not based upon a fully worked out 'master plan' or 'blueprint',[28] then I believe the timing of KwaNdebele's creation supports the argument that larger material and socio-economic dynamics were preeminent in determining government policy towards the Ndebele. Furthermore, after the government's decision to recognize the Ndebele as an ethnic group, not all of the Transvaal Ndebele were included in government plans to consolidate KwaNdebele. A sizeable number of Ndzundza Ndebele and the vast majority of Northern Ndebele were to be left in other homelands.

In sum, the government's recognition of KwaNdebele was not the final step in a 'grand apartheid' plan, nor did it reflect a government ethnologist's belated 'discovery' of another South African 'tribe'. Rather, it reflected the government's attempt to control emerging socio-economic and political realities in the region through the application of existing policy. In short, in the mid-1970s, the creation of an Ndebele homeland was functional to the National Party's political and economic goals.

Early Plans for the Consolidation of KwaNdebele

When BAD first released draft plans for an Ndebele homeland in September 1972, the site of the bantustan was left open. At this stage the government had not decided whether to use the Ndzundza land at Weltevreden or that in Nebo as the 'heartland' around which the homeland would be consolidated.[29] However, in April 1973, BAD issued 'final' plans for a homeland located in the Weltevreden area.[30] Meetings were subsequently held in July and September 1973 with representatives of the NTA and the three Ndebele tribal authorities in the Hammanskraal region of Bophuthatswana in order to discuss the formation of an Ndebele regional authority, the next step on the apartheid ladder to 'self-government'. In July 1974, the NTA, enlarged to approximately 51,000 hectares by the addition of several adjoining farms, was excised from Lebowa and granted the powers of a regional authority. In 1977, the three Ndebele tribal authorities in Bophuthatswana were excised and incorporated into KwaNdebele

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[27] Originally reported in *The Surplus People Project*, vol. 5 (1983). Cited in McCaul, *Satellite*, p. 13.

[28] For a recent elaboration of this point in relation to influx control in the early apartheid period see Deborah Posel's *The Making of Apartheid, 1948–1961: Conflict and Compromise* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).

[29] South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), *Survey of Race Relations 1972*, p. 173.

[30] SAIRR, *SRR 1973*, p. 152.

in situ, without population removals, as the Mnyamana Regional Authority. Then, later in the year, having established the requisite number of regional authorities, the government joined them together in the South Ndebele Territorial Authority, thus officially constituting a homeland. By 1979, the territorial authority was granted legislative assembly status with Simon Skosana as chief executive councillor. In 1981, KwaNdebele became 'self-governing', the penultimate stage of political development on Pretoria's road to independence.[31]

However, the significance of these political steps towards the establishment of KwaNdebele pale in comparison to the importance of a series of decisions regarding the spatial consolidation of the homeland which were taken in the period 1972 to 1983. Ultimately, the decisions of various commissions, committees and officials, when ratified by parliament, determined the future of the homeland and, indeed, large parts of the surrounding central Transvaal.

In the early 1970s, a Parliamentary Select Committee on Bantu Affairs was appointed to consider plans for the geographical consolidation of the various bantustans. As we have seen, their report focusing on African areas in the eastern and northern Transvaal contained the first official endorsement of an Ndebele homeland. A second report named Weltevreden, and its Ndzundza inhabitants, as the nucleus for the bantustan. However, it was the 1975 consolidation proposals which ultimately suggested the path that the homeland's development would take – a course which eventually led to heated, sustained and widespread conflict in the coming years.

The government's consolidation efforts in the first half of the 1970s must also be considered in light of shifts in the region's political economy as well as the evolution of the government's homeland program discussed above. As the nature of the farming industry changed throughout the 1960s, so too did prospects for government restructuring of land holdings in rural areas. While previous governments had periodically tried to rationalize the "checkered mosaic of black communities and white farmlands" to improve the carrying capacity of the former, the owners of the latter had usually succeeded in minimizing proposed consolidation efforts.[32] However, as farming methods changed, and labor needs declined accordingly, the government was finally in a position to pursue more thorough consolidation. The opportunity for change further coincided with emerging government policy. Not only did the logic of bantustan independence suggest the need to consolidate the area of the existing homelands, but one after another, the officially-recognized leaders of the bantustans demanded 'meaningful' consolidation and the addition of more land before accepting government offers of further political devolution.

Against this background, the 1975 consolidation proposals were designed to achieve four fundamental goals at the national level. In so far as the government deemed possible, the select committee tried to decrease the number of separate bantustan pieces, eliminate 'black spots', move 'poorly situated' scheduled and released areas, and fulfill but not exceed the quota of land promised in the 1936 Land Act.[33] In regard to KwaNdebele, the select committee recommended the addition of 52,000 hectares immediately bordering Weltevreden which, when implemented, would more than double the area of the existing homeland. However, most importantly, the committee recommended that the three districts of Moutse should be excised from Lebowa and incorporated into KwaNdebele. Although the proposal was not immediately

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[31] McCaul, *Satellite*, pp. 5-6.

[32] The quote is from Martin Murray, *South Africa: Time of Agony, Time of Destiny* (London: Verso, 1987), p. 93.

[33] See further SAIRR, *SRR 1972, 1973*, and *1975* and Muriel Horrell, *The African Homelands of South Africa* (Johannesburg: SAIRR, 1973).

In anticipation of Moutse's incorporation, the committee also recommended that farms at Immerpan, an unoccupied block of land between Roedtan and Zebediela, be purchased as compensatory land for Lebowa.[37] In addition to its function as compensation, the government planned to use the area as a relocation site for Moutse residents who refused to integrate into KwaNdebele.

Following parliamentary approval of the 1975 plans, the land south of Weltevreden was duly added to KwaNdebele's jurisdiction. Although Immerpan was subsequently purchased by the SADT, the area was not immediately added to Lebowa, nor was it opened for settlement by Moutse residents or anyone else. Interestingly, nothing at all seems to have been done in regard to the excision and incorporation of Moutse. Gibson Mathebe, the Bantoane chief and chairman of the Moutse Regional Authority, later stated that he was not even aware of the possibility of excision until 1977. In September of that year he recalls that Greyling Wentzel, then Deputy Minister of Co-operation and Development, first mentioned the possibility of excising the land around the Philadelphia Hospital, the region's only hospital, located in Dennilton, Moutse.[38] While it is impossible to know if this was the first public mention of excision by a government official, what is beyond doubt is that neither the Moutse community nor its leaders were formally informed of the 1975 decision to incorporate until late in 1979. As we shall see, this was an oversight which the government would later come to rue.

Consolidation Planning Under P.W. Botha

On February 7, 1979, P.W. Botha rose in Parliament to call for a reexamination of the consolidation of the 'national states'.[39] Stressing the need to speed up consolidation, Botha established a Commission for Co-operation and Development to investigate the matter. He further directed the commission to reconsider whether existing consolidation plans would assure the desired 'freedom' of all the various groups in South Africa. To assess progress towards this goal, the Prime Minister specified that the commission should consider consolidation not only in terms of geography but also from the perspective of 'the consolidation of nations' and the 'economic consolidation of states'.[40]

Later in the year, a commission was duly appointed with the Deputy Minister of Co-operation and Development Hennie Van der Walt as chairman. Subsequently, four regional committees were appointed, each charged with examining consolidation matters in separate areas before making recommendations to the Commission at large. On November 16, 1979, Koornhof announced the membership of the Central-Western Regional Committee which would examine consolidation issues for QwaQwa and KwaNdebele. The committee later divided itself into two sub-committees, each focusing on the consolidation of one of the homelands. The first meeting of the committee for KwaNdebele consolidation was held in Pretoria on December 14, 1979. Taking Botha's insistence on speed to heart, the group was instructed to submit a report with

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[37] *Stakeholder Analysis*, p. 11.

[38] Evidence of Chief Gibson Tlokwe Mathebe, cited in the Parsons Commission Report, first report, volume two, p. 297.

[39] The term 'national state' was the newest in the government's string of euphemisms for the bantustans.

[40] "Uittreksel: Eerste Minister se toespraak in die Volksraad, 7 Februarie 1979," in the papers of *Mathebe v the Government of the Republic of South Africa and Others* (Appellate Division, 1988), pp. 222-4. Thanks to John Dugard for generously supplying a copy of this record to the author.

their recommendations for the region to the general consolidation commission by March 31, 1980.[41]

The committee relied on several sources of information to formulate their proposals. Firstly, the committee's terms of reference specified that the consolidation decisions of 1975 were to be used as the "the departure point" for their investigation. The suitability of the original proposals were to be considered in light of specific guidelines issued to the regional committees by the Department of Co-operation and Development (DCAD).

Secondly, through the local media, the committee solicited memoranda from parties interested in KwaNdebele's consolidation. Although several documents were submitted, the only memorandum cited at length in the final report was submitted by the Executive Committee of the Ndebele Regional Authority in KwaNdebele. Citing Botha's call for the 'consolidation of nations', the executive committee's submission stressed the desire of the Ndebele 'nation' for unification. Rejecting the ethnological distinctions between Northern and Southern Ndebele, the KwaNdebele officials called for an enlarged homeland which could accommodate 'one inseparable nation'.[42] Towards this end, the executive council submitted extravagant consolidation proposals which would have required the addition of approximately three million hectares at a cost of over two million rands.[43] Needless to say, the consolidation committee's final report largely ignored the regional authority's land proposals.

Thirdly, in a final bid to gather information, on January 10 and 11, the members of the committee travelled to KwaNdebele and to three areas considered for incorporation, namely, Moutse, the Mathanyana district of Bophuthatswana and nine Trust farms on the border of Nebo (often referred to as the Zaaiplaats farms). The report, however, bears little sign that the committee's field trip influenced their final conclusions. Moreover, there is no evidence that members of the Moutse community or its recognized leadership were consulted in the course of the visit.

While the committee members may have been unaware of popular opinion, they were certainly well informed regarding the aims of the government. The guidelines issued to the regional consolidation committees enumerated a number of wide-ranging principles to be followed. In setting out the aim of the committees, the document's opening paragraph revealed the all-encompassing nature of the goal:

> To round off the consolidation of all the states within the historical boundaries of the Republic of South Africa, so that their areas will be the most acceptable geographic, political, ethnological, economic, agricultural and mineral bases for states, bearing in mind the South African state's interests.[44]

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[41] Report of the Central-Western Regional Consolidation Committee (KwaNdebele), p. 17. [Hereafter, the Regional Consolidation Committee report.] The full report is contained in *Mathebe v the Government of the RSA and Others* (Appellate Division, 1988), pp. 234-291.

[42] The quotation is from a resolution passed at the March 1969 general meeting of the TNNO cited in the Ndebele Executive Council's memorandum; The memorandum is quoted in the Regional Consolidation Committee report, pp. 8-15.

[43] Regional Consolidation report, p. 15.

[44] "Riglyne aan Streekskomitees," p. 36. Document contained in the papers of *Mathebe v the Government of the RSA and Others*, pp. 225-233.

The DCAD realized that a decision-making process based on this many criteria would inevitably result in a number of conflicts. Therefore, the committees were instructed, when faced with a situation in which irreconcilable guidelines applied, to pursue "a method of optimization" by which the "best" solution could be identified. In order to find the optimal solution, the department reminded the committees of the need to prioritize the proffered guidelines. The document suggested that "the most practical way of going about prioritizing is to honour the highest priority until a point is reached at which other guidelines are no longer satisfied." At this point, it was argued, decision-making would be constrained by those restrictions which cannot not be ignored. Of course, what this method presupposed was a clearly established hierarchy of priorities and a list of non-negotiable baseline restrictions. Neither was explicitly offered in the departmental guidelines. Nevertheless, the discussion of various guidelines in the body of the document implicitly suggested some principles for prioritizing.

The DCAD's guidelines included principles derived from traditional bantustan policy. However, although still listed as important guidelines, many of these principles were now followed by new qualifications. For example, the separate development of ethnic units, the stated goal of government policy since at least 1959, was reaffirmed as current policy. Yet the document emphasized that ethnic concentration was but "one of the determining factors for determining borders." Furthermore, the department baldly stated that the "complete consolidation of all members of a nation in their land by large-scale resettlement is regarded as impractical."[45] The principle of geographic consolidation, a main concern of the 1975 proposals, was also reaffirmed, but similarly qualified. The guidelines stated that:

> Although it may be regarded as desirable from a political point of view to consolidate a state to a geographically linked area, it is more desirable from an economic point of view for a state to contribute to the development of the area such that its economic existence will profit from the move. This basic starting point does not represent the necessary consolidation of a state to a geographically adjoining area.[46]

In sum, although the DCAD's document still cited ethnic and geographic criteria as factors to be considered, they were no longer allowed to stand on their own. In fact, as the above quotes suggest, other variables were increasingly being emphasized in the department's planning calculus – particularly economic and administrative considerations. The report of the Central-Western Committee for consolidation aptly illustrated the point.

Before revealing the committee's recommendations, the report listed the criteria, agreed upon by the committee, which were used to evaluate various consolidation options. The first foreshadowed the rest, stating that "consolidation should increase a state's viability."[47] Although the report later noted that, "it must be accepted that not one of the National States, and this includes KwaNdebele, can exist completely economically independent of the Republic of South Africa," the committee immediately reaffirmed that "they must nevertheless attempt, amongst other things, to make KwaNdebele economically viable."[48] The remainder of the listed criteria similarly highlighted economic, administrative and logistical considerations. Revealingly, ethnic and historical factors were not even mentioned among the principles to be considered.

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[45] "Riglyne aan Streekskomitees," p. 38.
[46] "Riglyne aan Streekskomitees," p. 39.
[47] Regional Consolidation Committee report, p. 17.
[48] Regional Consolidation Committee report, p. 18.

On this basis, the report concluded that, *inter alia*, both the Moutse and Mathanyana districts should be excised from Lebowa and Bophuthatswana, respectively, and then incorporated into KwaNdebele. In addition, a substantial tract of white-owned land was marked for purchase and transfer to the bantustan. In all, the committee proposed to nearly quadruple the area of the homeland to approximately 377,000 hectares in total.[49]

Planning Moutse's Excision

Despite the emphasis which the government would later accord to the consolidation decisions of the committee, the DCAD was not, in fact, passively waiting for the 'objective' pronouncements of the committee before acting. Before, during and after the committee's meetings, department officials were actively planning and negotiating Moutse's excision from Lebowa. In May 1978, the DCAD requested the state ethnologist's office to comment on the Moutse area.[50] The response, written by C.V. Bothma, was not what we might expect.[51] The report began in conventional style, providing a detailed summary of the district's tribal and community authorities, the farms they occupied and a rough estimate of the ethnic composition of each area based on the 1970 census. However, the analysis which followed seems unusual. Rather than providing a detailed recommendation for the consolidation of the area based on relevant historical and ethnographic considerations, the report explicitly started from the premise that Moutse would be excised from Lebowa and incorporated into KwaNdebele. In this and subsequent reports, Bothma's task was not to recommend how 'national units' could be effectively consolidated. Instead, his reports highlighted problems which might arise in executing existing consolidation proposals, reminded the government of previous commitments to African leaders and reported the results of present and past negotiations with these leaders.[52] In effect, Bothma and the state ethnological department served as trouble-shooters and risk analysts in the DCAD's attempt to excise Moutse.

In his reports, Bothma stressed that the majority of Moutse's communities would not pose a threat to DCAD plans to excise Moutse. Three of the region's primarily Northern Sotho areas were summarily dealt with. The 1978 report stated that,

> The removal of the Matlalas [in the Matlala Lehwelere and Matlala Mashung tribal authorities and in the Keerom area] shouldn't present too many problems. Notwithstanding the fact that they are small tribes, they are related to Chief Matlala, the former chief minister of Lebowa, and can be directed to join his area.[53]

Bothma stressed that the residents of the farms Keerom, Doornlaagte, Driefontein and Spitspunt were, in fact, already part of Chief Matlala's tribal authority in Nebo, which would therefore simplify and ease the removal process. In a 1983 report, Bothma reported to the DCAD that Chief Matlala had been waiting twenty years to exchange the two tribal farms and two trust

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[49] Regional Consolidation Committee report, p. 28.

[50] The comments were given in a report prepared for the "Hoofdirekteur, Tuislandsake", in response to request R226/2 of 11 May 1978.

[51] C.V. Bothma, "Uitsnyding van Moutse uit die gebied van die Lebowa-Wetgewende Vergadering" (12 May 78). From files in the State Ethnologist's office, Pretoria.

[52] See further, Bothma, Moutse ethnological report (1983). This report in particular was frequently cited in DCAD documents.

[53] Bothma, "Uitsnyding van Moutse," p. 2.

farms in Moutse occupied by his subjects for farms bordering his area in Nebo.[54] The analysis further suggested that the Northern Sotho residents in the Rathôke area, although unrelated to the Nebo Matlalas, could be removed just as easily: "The Sotho-minority [in Rathôke] also shouldn't present any problems. They consist of small groups from various tribes and can either trek back to their chiefs or incorporate with the Ndebele."[55]

In so far as the area's non-Sotho population was concerned, Bothma was confident that they could be relied upon to accept incorporation into KwaNdebele. Moutse's Northern Ndebele population, particularly concentrated in the Rathôke area, were counted among those most in favor of incorporation into KwaNdebele. Bothma further assumed that "the Shangaan/Tsonga of the district would be equally happy to be included into KwaNdebele or Lebowa," while noting that the "Nguni" would prefer incorporation into KwaNdebele.[56] In addition, both reports stressed that the owners of private plots, no matter what their ethnic background, would not be willing to sell their land and would, thus, accept incorporation into KwaNdebele without resistance.[57] In 1982, representatives of the Lekgotla la Bareki community authority, in the course of discreet discussions, assured the KwaNdebele commissioner general and officials of the DCAD that they had no objections to incorporation into the Ndebele bantustan. For Bothma, this was proof that Moutse's private land-owners, occupying 42% of the area's land, would accede to the government's consolidation plans.[58]

Both of Bothma's reports concluded that the real challenge to incorporating Moutse was posed by the Bantoane tribal authority and the area's nearly 34,000 residents.[59] As the 1983 report stated:

> The Bantoane tribe, the largest in the district, represents the eventual problem with respect to the incorporation. It must be accepted that approximately 9,000 Ndebele and other Nguni are only in the tribal area because they couldn't find any other place to live. They would have no problem in joining KwaNdebele. That reduces the problem to the 24,000 Northern Sotho. The attachment of this tribe to their area, a part of which they bought at the beginning of the century, insures that they will not be willing to move. It can therefore also be expected that the tribe will vehemently resist incorporation into KwaNdebele.[60]

Judging that at least the 24,000 'problem' Bantoane as well as the majority of their neighboring Sotho-speakers would "probably trek," Bothma's reports finally raised the importance of finding land for these groups in Lebowa. Officials of the DCAD were, in fact, already working on the issue.[61]

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[54] Bothma, Moutse ethnological report (1983).

[55] Bothma, "Uitsnyding van Moutse," p. 2.

[56] Bothma, Moutse ethnological report (1983).

[57] As one might expect, Bothma's first assumption proved correct – land owners were not prepared to sell their land. However, later events dramatically disproved his conclusion that they would therefore not oppose incorporation.

[58] Bothma, Moutse ethnological report (1983).

[59] The 1980 census, cited by Bothma, calculated that there were 33,882 inhabitants in the Bantoane's jurisdiction.

[60] Bothma, Moutse ethnological report (1983).

[61] The quote is from Bothma, "Uitsnyding van Moutse," p. 3.

In the second half of 1979, Piet Koornhof, the Minister of Co-operation and Development, initiated a series of personal meetings with Chief Minister Cedric Phatudi and the Lebowan cabinet. Although the stated aim of the meetings was "consultation" on consolidation issues, the primary objective of the government was more immediate and particular. The DCAD sought to secure Lebowa's acceptance of Moutse's excision and, in return, they promised compensatory land at Immerpan. High-level negotiations were held in September, November, June and October, 1980, without securing an agreement.[62] Government documents later recalled that over the course of the negotiations, Lebowa voiced "strong objections" to the possible excision.[63]

On October 23, 1980, Dr. Phatudi organized another meeting with Deputy Minister Wentzel to which Moutse community leaders, including the Bantoane Chief Gibson Mathebe, were invited for the first time. For Phatudi, the meeting seems to have represented something of a crossroads. The date of the meeting suggests that the Lebowan government knew of the decisive proclamation which would be made by the State President the next day. If this was the case, then the meeting served Phatudi's interests in two ways. Firstly, by drawing Moutse's leaders into the negotiations, Lebowa strengthened its negotiating position vis-à-vis the DCAD. Secondly, by calling for Moutse's participation in the proceedings, Phatudi hoped to demonstrate to the Moutse leadership Lebowa's good faith and their opposition to the excision plans.[64]

For his part, Chief Mathebe later recalled that the meeting was the first time that the Moutse leaders learned of plans to incorporate their area into KwaNdebele. Previously, they had feared that their area might be declared a 'black spot', which would have ultimately led to their removal. To the Moutse leaders, the new information sounded little better. The meeting ended with the flat rejection of the plan by the Moutse delegates.[65]

Undeterred, on the next day, October 24, 1980, State President Viljoen published two proclamations which officially excised Moutse from the jurisdiction of Lebowa and placed the area under the direct control of the DCAD and the South African government. Although the proclamations constituted a quick and easy *fait accompli* regarding the official excision of Moutse, the DCAD's battle to incorporate the area into KwaNdebele was just beginning.

The Incorporation of Moutse into KwaNdebele

Soon after the government's unilateral proclamation of Moutse's excision, negotiations between the DCAD, the Lebowa cabinet and the Moutse representatives resumed. However, as one might expect, relationships were strained following the State President's pronouncement. At their request, Chief Mathebe, his brother Godfrey Mathebe and Maredi Chueu (the latter were Moutse representatives in the Lebowa Legislative Assembly) were granted another meeting with Koornhof on November 6, 1980. Members of the Lebowa cabinet were also in attendance. At

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[62] Response to parliamentary questions, *Hansard* (26 Apr 85).

[63] DCAD document marked X144/50 (Nov 83); Rumpff Commission Evidence, File 25/7/2/5 – G.

[64] This account is based on the evidence of Chief Mathebe cited in the Parsons Commission Report, 1, 2, p. 297. Further details of the meeting are still being sought by the author. Important details which must be corroborated include the questions of who called the meeting and whether Phatudi was indeed informed of the decision to announce Moutse's excision the next day. At this stage, this interpretation remains a working hypothesis.

[65] Mathebe, Parsons Commission Report, 1, 2, p. 297.

the end of the "heated" meeting, the Moutse representatives were still in doubt as to the ultimate aim of the South African government. Mathebe recalled that "the incorporation into KwaNdebele was not squarely raised and many persons at the meeting gained the impression that it was the resettlement of the Moutse Community, and not its incorporation, which was at stake." Again, the meeting concluded with the rejection of excision by the Moutse and Lebowa delegations.[66] It was the last meeting which was to be held for exactly a year.

The Lebowa and Moutse leadership tried to break the stand-off in late 1981. On October 23, Phatudi suggested that Chief Mathebe and a delegation from Moutse should travel to Pretoria in an attempt to meet with Koornhof. Having arrived without an invitation, they were simply turned away. Again, Phatudi stepped into the breach. Following discussions between the Chief Minister and Koornhof, the latter agreed to travel to Moutse in order to discuss the excision with the Moutse leadership and the area's residents.

On November 6, 1981, Koornhof, Wentzel and a delegation of South African officials attended a mass meeting of an estimated 8,000 residents at Elandsdoorn, Moutse.[67] Following Phatudi's introduction, Koornhof rose to address the crowd and to explain the South African government's policy. He began by assuring the residents that he was a friend of Moutse and wanted to do everything in his power to help them. In the body of his speech, Koornhof emphasized four points. Firstly, that the excision of Moutse had already been achieved and therefore there should be no doubt that the area was under the jurisdiction of the DCAD. Secondly, that the excision was undertaken only after a series of "discussions" with the cabinet of Lebowa and the "Dikgose and leaders from Moutse," although, for the record, Koornhof noted that "the Lebowa Cabinet at no stage expressed itself in favour of the excision." The Minister promised that consultations would continue. Thirdly, Koornhof reminded the residents of the government's provision of "compensatory land for Moutse" at Immerpan. Koornhof mentioned the land several times and stressed the area's size, highly developed farms, arable land as well as the government's commitment to make a range of services "available." Finally, Koornhof assured the residents that there was no cause for worry, as no one would have to move in the next year. In fact, he promised that anyone willing to stay in Moutse would be able to do so. He concluded by confiding to the residents that nothing would please him more than to solve the Moutse problem.

Following the speech, several Moutse representatives and chiefs stood to challenge aspects of Koornhof's statement. Chief Mathebe chided the Minister for refusing to say what was planned for the Moutse area. The only thing mentioned, he pointed out, was the land at Immerpan. Like many of the speakers who followed, Mathebe raised the issue of possible incorporation into KwaNdebele by citing a recent newspaper article in which Skosana had claimed that Moutse would fall under his homeland's jurisdiction from the beginning of 1982. In his response, Koornhof relied on a tactic increasingly employed by the DCAD. In an attempt to distance the department from decisions about Moutse's future, Koornhof emphasized that the decision to include Moutse into KwaNdebele was made by parliament in 1975. He claimed that his role was only to work with the Lebowa government to find a way of implementing the decision. Koornhof had earlier even tried to personally distance himself from the process by

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[66] Both quotes from Mathebe, Parsons Commission Report, 1, 2, p. 298.

[67] "Notule van vergadering van Sy Edele Dr. P.G.J. Koornhof met die inwoners van Moutse op vrydag, 6 November 1981 te Elandsdoorn," in *Mathebe v the Government of the RSA and Others*, pp. 340-352. All of the quotes from the meeting which follow are from this source.

claiming that "the decision to excise Moutse from Lebowa was taken by Parliament long before I became Minister of Co-operation and Development."

With the close of the Elandsdoorn mass meeting, a period of government consultation also ended. Although, Chief Mathebe approached the Lebowa Commissioner General to ask for a follow-up meeting with Koornhof, it was never arranged. In fact, the Lebowa and Moutse representatives were not invited for further discussions until March 1983. In the meantime, the DCAD pursued a new line of "consultations."

In the same month that he addressed the Moutse residents, Koornhof appointed a committee to make discreet inquiries to specific community and tribal authorities regarding their stand on incorporation. The committee, which included the KwaNdebele Commissioner General and members of the DCAD, selected its targets well. In January 1982, the minister's emissaries met with representatives of the Northern Ndebele who occupied the Makeepsvlei farm in the Rathôke area.[68] The officials later reported that the community representatives were "eager" for incorporation into KwaNdebele.[69] Given the community's history, their attitude was not surprising. Although an offshoot of the Northern Ndebele living under Chief Fickson Kekana in the Zebediela region, the community had never been placed under his, or any other, tribal authority. No doubt feeling left out of the spoils, the tribal head of Makeepsvlei had been asking the government for recognition for years.[70] Telling the government's representatives what they wanted to hear in 1982 could only help make his case. Not surprisingly, four months after Moutse's eventual incorporation, the KwaNdebele Commissioner General met with the same councillors to discuss the formation of the Amandebele-A-Moletlane Tribal Authority.[71]

Koornhof's delegates similarly met with councillors from the Lekgotla la Bareki Community Authority later in January 1982. As we have seen, they too assured the officials that they would not resist incorporation.[72] Although it produced only a small fault line, the DCAD's efforts to crack the united front of Moutse's elite had begun. Nevertheless, for a combination of personal, political and financial reasons, the majority of Moutse's chiefs, councillors and legislative representatives stood firm in their opposition to excision and incorporation.

Around this time, developments elsewhere in South Africa forced the DCAD to reconsider the state of their ongoing negotiations for Moutse's incorporation. A 1982 court ruling nullified Pretoria's excision of the Ingwavuma district of KwaZulu, largely on the grounds that the government had not properly consulted the relevant parties prior to their decision to excise. The DCAD were all too aware of the possible implications that the ruling might have for the Moutse issue.

The DCAD's professed willingness to consult homeland officials on Moutse's future was not limited to public pronouncements. Internal departmental documents painstakingly recited government efforts to negotiate Moutse's transfer. However, after the Ingwavuma decision, the DCAD suspected Moutse's excision was threatened, despite their on-going attempts to

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[68] DCAD X144/50 (Nov 83).

[69] Bothma, Moutse ethnological report (1983).

[70] Bothma, Moutse ethnological report (1983).

[71] Memorandum from G.J. van der Merwe, KwaNdebele Commissioner General to J.C. Heunis, Minister of Constitutional Development and Planning, "Toestand en Moutse," (16 Apr 86). Rumpff Commission Evidence, File 25/7/2/5 – G.

[72] DCAD, X144/50 and Bothma, ethnological report (1983).

negotiate. As Lebowa's objections to Moutse's excision multiplied in the wake of the Ingwavuma ruling, the department's doubts deepened. The worst was confirmed when they learned that the Moutse community had received a private opinion from the same advocate who had represented the Ingwavuma community in their case. In his view, the proclamation by which Moutse had been excised would also, if challenged, be ruled invalid by the courts. The State Prosecutor, when consulted by the DCAD, concurred with the advocate's interpretation. Ironically, the problem that the ruling presented was not that Lebowa and Moutse had objected to the excision when consulted, as the court had not ruled that "consultation" required acceptance. Rather, the problem was that a firm decision to excise Moutse could be traced to 1975, when parliament accepted the consolidation proposals before it, years before government "consultation" had even begun.[73]

Nevertheless, Koornhof attempted one last round of negotiations with representatives from both Moutse and Lebowa. At a March 5, 1983 meeting in Pretoria, Koornhof clearly raised the issue of Moutse's incorporation in the presence of the area's delegation for the first time. Perhaps he hoped to secure their support, thereby forestalling legal challenge. However, as both groups "strenuously rejected" the department's proposals, the meeting collapsed.[74] After Koornhof's failure to secure both parties' support, and in light of the Ingwavuma decision, the DCAD decided to "discontinue consultation with tribes and communities in the Moutse district."[75] The department was forced to regroup. New and reformulated strategies soon emerged.

When the government restarted negotiations months later, they assumed both a new form and a new justification. The changes were announced by P.W. Botha himself during his first visit to the area which had become such a source trouble for his government. Formally responding to Lebowa's invitation to come to Moutse, Botha met with the usual Moutse and Lebowa representatives on November 18, 1983. Although the cast was familiar – aside from the new and more powerful director – the script was not. At the meeting, Botha publicly rewrote the South African government's role in the ongoing negotiations over Moutse. He announced that his government considered the problem a conflict between the administrations of Lebowa and KwaNdebele. Thus, he urged the two 'national states' to settle their disputes and resolve the status of Moutse through negotiation. While emphasizing that South Africa was not a party to the debate, he said that he would agree to help appoint an 'independent' mediator to aid the necessary bilateral discussions of the bantustan governments.[76]

Although restructured, the negotiations which followed achieved little more than their predecessors. If anything, the meetings, held under the chairmanship of Dr. P.S. Rautenbach, assumed an even more formal and stilted character. Largely lacking the passion of previous encounters – no doubt in part to the conspicuous absence of representatives from Moutse – the meetings often consisted of an exchange of policy statements which did little to find common ground. Numerous meetings over 18 months, from December 1983 until May, 1985 produced no significant breakthroughs.

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[73] This summary is based on information in DCAD, X144/50 (Nov 83).

[74] Chief Mathebe, Parsons Commission Report, 1, 2, p. 299.

[75] DCAD, X144/50 (Nov 83).

[76] See the Department of Foreign Affairs, *The Moutse Issue* (Johannesburg: Perskor, ca 1985). This twenty-page, glossy booklet represents the government's best attempt at 'spin control' on the Moutse conflict.

What proved more successful for the South African government was a new round of discussions with Phatudi. Although several meetings were held in the presence of the entire Lebowan cabinet, the most rewarding were private discussions between the chief minister and high-ranking South African ministers. The most important of the government's overtures to Phatudi came on August 2, 1983. On that day, Phatudi met with both P.W. Botha and Piet Koornhof. The South African government had arranged the meeting, in large measure to try to deter Phatudi from initiating legal action against the 1980 excision. Following another unsuccessful meeting between Koornhof and the Lebowan cabinet on June 3, the DCAD knew that the chances of litigation were increasing. A memorandum from the Director General of the DCAD to Koornhof advised that the government "can't ignore the possibility that Lebowa will institute court proceedings regarding Moutse." Aware that Lebowa had already solicited legal opinion, the Director General warned that a "repetition of the Ingwavuma and Kangwane cases and those results should be prevented."[77] The government initiated a two-part strategy to ensure that the Moutse incorporation would not falter as well.

Firstly, the government planned to introduce measures which, in the words of the Director-General, would insure "that the legal standing of the Proclamation be placed beyond any doubt."[78] Thus, legislation was prepared which would secure the legal standing of Moutse's excision by turning it into an act of parliament. Due to the principle of parliamentary supremacy, the excision would then lie beyond the reach of the courts. Secondly, in order to buy time to secure the legislation's passage, the government hoped to reach an agreement with Phatudi which would delay legal action until after the August parliamentary session. By which time, of course, the DCAD's legal position would have been strengthened, perhaps even made unassailable. Botha's meeting with the chief minister on August 2 achieved the necessary respite.

Minutes from the meeting record that the State President agreed to undertake three tasks: (1) to visit the Moutse district after the end of the parliamentary session scheduled to begin on August 8. This was, in fact, the commitment which brought Botha to the meeting in Moutse discussed above; (2) to pursue "in the meantime an in-depth investigation about the consolidation, planning and regional development of Lebowa;" and (3) to continue with the "Bill at present under consideration in the RSA Parliament ... in order to confirm the status quo (that is the excision of the Moutse District from Lebowa and the administration of Moutse directly by the Department of Co-operation and Development)... ." Botha did agree, however, to make the bill's abolishment of Moutse's representation in the Lebowa Legislative Assembly "permissive and subject to further negotiations." In exchange for these promises, Phatudi gave Botha the time he needed. The minutes recorded that: "The Prime Minister gave these undertakings on the express understanding that the Lebowa Government will not proceed with its contemplated action against the Government of the Republic of South Africa about the Moutse issue."[79] Later in August, parliament passed the Laws on Co-operation and Development Amendment Act, No. 112 of 1983. With the excision of Moutse legislatively secured, the South African government now turned to insuring the area's incorporation into

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[77] Memorandum from the Director General of Co-operation and Development to Piet Koornhof, Minister of Co-operation and Development (n.d.). Rumpff evidence, file 25/7/2/5 – G. Although the memo is undated, dates and events mentioned in the text place it in the period June to August, 1983.

[78] Memorandum from the Director General of the DCAD to the Minister.

[79] These and other quotes from the minutes of the August 2, 1983 meeting are cited in DCAD, X144/50 (Nov 83).

KwaNdebele. Although the evidence is patchy, it seems that the DCAD again turned to discreet, at times secretive, negotiations in order to move the process forward.

In particular, much speculation has been focused on arrangements which Phatudi may have made with the South African government. Oral interviews conducted by the author in the Moutse area have consistently demonstrated a wide-spread belief among residents that Phatudi was willing to agree to Moutse's excision and its incorporation in exchange for land elsewhere. The citrus farms of Zebediela are frequently cited as the government's 'reward' to Phatudi for his eventual acquiescence. One resident has said:

> Well, as far as we were concerned, we thought that maybe Phatudi was once bought off because he was no longer interested. We heard they made the exchange. He got the orange field in Zebediela for us to be incorporated into KwaNdebele.[80]

An influential document written by the Transvaal Rural Action Committee repeats the allegation, stating:

> Finally in 1985, it would seem that the South African government managed to persuade Chief Minister Cedric Phatudi of Lebowa to cede Moutse to KwaNdebele in exchange for the Zebediela orange estates, a new railway line, some land at Mokerong, and the Saliesloot and Immerpan resettlement camps ... .[81]

The documentary evidence I have examined does not definitively establish a Moutse-for-Zebediela trade. Nevertheless, there are signs that the DCAD largely succeeded in their efforts to tie Lebowa's further consolidation to their acceptance of Moutse's excision. For Phatudi, like leaders of all the crowded and resource-strapped bantustans, offers of further land, no matter what strings were attached, would have been hard to ignore.

Botha initiated a new round of negotiations on land at the August 2, 1983 meeting by promising Phatudi "an in-depth investigation" into Lebowa's future consolidation and development. Of course, Immerpan had already been publicly offered to Lebowa as compensation for Moutse. Government documents show that behind the scenes DCAD officials wanted to make the area as attractive to Lebowa as possible. One DCAD report noted that Moutse's proximity to job opportunities would insure that few of the area's residents would actually take up the offer to be resettled in Immerpan. Therefore, the document predicted that "Lebowa [would] get the area virtually clean of people."[82]

As early as 1983, government documents were also indicating that the government might be prepared to provide more land for Lebowa in exchange for Moutse. The same DCAD document which reported Botha's undertakings to Phatudi in August suggestively noted that

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[80] From author's interview with Petrus Rakoena, Kuilsrivier, Moutse (12 Nov 94). The suspected Zebediela trade was mentioned in a number of other oral interviews conducted in the Moutse area by the author and Phaswane Mpe in the period 1994-5.

[81] This important – and very useful – document has had several lives. Written in the midst of popular uprisings against KwaNdebele independence and Moutse's and Ekangala's incorporations, the document was widely distributed in order to inform the public about the tragic events in the region. The article, "KwaNdebele: The Struggle Against 'Independence'" is readily accessible in print in W. Cobbett and R. Cohen, eds., *Popular Struggles in South Africa* (London: James Currey and ROAPE, 1988).

[82] DCAD memorandum from the Director-General to the Minister, "Pakket vir KwaNdebele en Lebowa," inquiry M3/4/16/4/1/3 (23 Mar 84).

throughout the region for the next several years. The period of elite politics which this paper has traced consequently drew to a close. Government commissions, public consultations and private negotiations were quickly replaced by government repression, individual defiance, and mass revolt. As resistance spread and casualties followed, Moutse and KwaNdebele flickered for an instant into the popular consciousness of a nation already in crisis. For many, KwaNdebele's creation and the strife over Moutse's incorporation were merely the latest examples of the embattled government's irrationality. The narrative developed here, however, qualifies this view. The government's policies towards KwaNdebele, as they developed over the years, expressed no basic irrationality. Despite the government's rhetoric, and contrary to Viljoen's quote which prefaces this paper, KwaNdebele was not created as a vehicle for zealously 'bringing together' an 'ethnic nation'. Rather, the bantustan was a means for the government to bring together – and control – those that its other policies had displaced, removed or made surplus to the economy. Analyzed as an instrument of control, the real questions regarding KwaNdebele's establishment and Moutse's incorporation were not the rationality of the plans, but rather their effectiveness and practicality. The narrative developed here has highlighted adjustments which government officials were making to traditional homeland policy in an attempt to make KwaNdebele functional to the state's interests. As a result, by the mid-1970s and the early 1980s, plans for KwaNdebele were increasingly concerned with consolidating the bantustan geographically, administratively and economically. By the early Botha period, the DCAD's unstated but clear aim was to create, as far as possible, an economically strengthened but still dependent homeland on the periphery of the PWV. Plans calling for the incorporation of Moutse were followed pursuant to this goal. Ethnicity, previously one of guiding principles of 'separate development', was largely ignored in the process.

Ironically, the government's abandonment of the principle of ethnicity opened up new spaces of contestation for the opponents of the apartheid state.[88] In 1988, in a decisive case in the Appellate Division, Chief Mathebe, on behalf of the Moutse residents, challenged the government's proclamation incorporating Moutse into KwaNdebele. In the end, the government was hoist on its own petard. Turning the state's traditional policy of 'separate development' against it, the Moutse community's advocate argued that Moutse's incorporation into KwaNdebele was invalid as it disregarded the ethnic identification of the majority of the area's residents. The ploy worked. In its judgment, the Court ruled that under the existing legislation it was impermissible for the State President to incorporate Moutse into KwaNdebele for administrative or geographical reasons.[89] Ultimately, the government's rational and calculated attempt to modify one of the most important instruments of its hegemony – the bantustans – was caught up in its own contradictions.

[88] For an interesting exploration of several legal challenges which exploited emerging contradictions in government policy see Richard Abel, *Politics By Other Means: Law in the Struggle Against Apartheid, 1980–1994* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 486-494.

[89] Mathebe v Regering van die Republiek van Suid-Afrika en andere 1988 (3) SA 667 (A).

Map of KwaNdebele, Moutse and related areas

Adapted from the DCAD document, "Sakelys en Inligtingsdokuments" (Nov. 1983)
From the files of the Office of the State Ethnologist, Pretoria

