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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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FROM CO-OPERATION TO "CO-OPERATIVE": CHANGING PATTERNS OF AGRICULTURAL WORK IN A RURAL VILLAGE.

by Deborah James

Introduction

In early autumn, after harvest, the plotholders of Morotse[1] village thresh the maize from their fields. Gathering early every morning to await the arrival of the tractor and threshing machine from the co-op, they then work till sunset, the women pouring the ripe cobs into the machine, and the few men weighing the sacks of threshed grain and loading them onto the truck. The co-op officials, after taking a roll-call at the end of the day, drive the tractor back to the co-op. Here the sacks of maize are stored, awaiting their eventual delivery to the plotholders, whose debts to the co-op must first be calculated, and then subtracted from the total yield of each one.

On the morning of June 20th, 1983, after threshing had already been in progress for about two weeks, the tractor arrived as usual. But on this day, the driver found the group of plotholders waiting for him at the gate: they blocked his way, and told him to take the machine back to the co-op, for they intended to do no more work until those whose fields were already completed had had their sacks of mealies delivered to them. After driving to the village to consult a respected member of the community who advised him, regretfully, to comply with the farmers' wishes if he wished to avoid serious trouble, he returned to the co-op.

The day before, in response to mounting complaints from plotholders about not having yet received their mealies, the co-op officials had invited these people to the office to collect their accounts, after which, they promised, the sacks would be delivered. But this attempt at negotiation increased the farmers' anger rather than defusing it. Incensed by the hopeless extent of the debt of which each one's account showed proof, and by the apparent impossibility of ever repaying this debt, they moved towards the office, shouting threats and demanding their sacks of maize.

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[1] The names of all places and people in this paper have been changed.

Members of the Lebowa police force were standing by to disperse the crowd. The farmers' unwillingness to compromise, however, was clear from the incident of the following day in which the tractor was turned back from the fields.

Only on Monday the 22nd, two days after the tractor incident, were the plotholders finally persuaded to accept a kind of compromise. The chief arrived, with several co-op officials. He chastised the farmers, invoking their loyalty to him, and to the village headman against whom much of their anger had been directed during the incident. He also, however, apologised for not having been present to ensure that people received their mealies immediately after threshing, and promised them that he would arrange this in future. They, in turn, agreed to return to the fields. The following day, threshing proceeded as normal. The burning question of debt remained unanswered. It, and many other questions and complaints about the co-op, once again became topics to be discussed and grumbled about only between friends and relatives, and possibly to re-emerge in future near-violent incidents.

To understand these people's strong feelings about the way in which their agricultural activities are presently organised, and their powerlessness to act on these feelings in any other way than through sporadic outbursts like the one described above, it is necessary to know something about their history and something, specifically, of the background to their experience of farming.

Their village, Morotse, is situated on the peripheries of Lebowa, on one of a group of "Trust farms" which were bought from white owners after 1936 to add to the existing Bantustan area. Like other such settlements, Morotse is populated mainly by ex-labour tenants. These people - both Pedi- and Ndebele-speaking - have since the late 1930s been moving to Lebowa from the nearby white farms where they once lived and worked. Those who moved at the beginning of this period arrived on the "Trust"

early enough to establish their rights to land for ploughing, while those who came since the late 1960s were able only to acquire residential stands. It is to the former group, comprising about 30% of the population, that the farmers of the tractor-stopping incident belong. The present paper is concerned primarily with this landholding minority, but it will also examine, as a subsidiary theme, some of the relationships that exist between these farmers and the majority - continually growing - of landless people.

For those who do have farming land, there have been many changes in the practice of agriculture since they first came to the area. The most recent and most substantial of these was the formation in 1979 of the co-op, its introduction having, in part, been prompted by the recent implementation of "betterment planning", with its recurrent partitioning and reallocation of land.

Of Morotse's present inhabitants, the very earliest were, themselves, labour tenants for the whites who owned the group of farms until these were bought by the Trust. They were soon joined by people who had been working on white farms further south and who, seeking a living situation with fewer constraints, found that the owners of this new place would allow them to live here in return, not for arduous labour contracts, but for rent paid in cash. Both these groups of people were allotted sizeable portions of land on which to do their own ploughing: one family claims to have used 16 morgen on different parts of the farm, while another informant, making a sweeping gesture, said "Before, the place was open. We could plough wherever we liked". The amount of land to which each household had access was certainly big enough to sustain the production of a subsistence - maize, sorghum, beans and other vegetables - plus a surplus of wheat which was sold at white markets in nearby towns like Stofberg and Middleburg. This living, during the period when whites still occupied these farms, was combined for some with periods of unpaid labour for the farm-owner, and for others with migrant labour. More young men

started leaving to work for cash after the whites sold up and left the area in the early 1940s, but this was "target" migrancy, aimed at earning money for taxes or for the ceremonial gifts associated with weddings, and to be abandoned after marriage. During this time, then, there was sufficient land to allow for a peasant production which produced a surplus, and which needed supplementing in cash only for sporadic, specific purposes, and then only by one or two members of a large household.

There were changes in this style of agriculture with the arrival in the mid-1950s of the Government planners known locally as the "Trust". First they surveyed the land and decided which was suitable for ploughing, grazing and residence respectively. The next stage, which gave Morotse its present appearance but which will here be mentioned only in passing, was the removal of people from their original clusters of residences and their relocation in a concentrated settlement, where houses had to be built in "lines". Then, most importantly for this paper, the ploughing land was divided into plots of four morgen each, to be reallocated to the people already living in the area, and to be newly allocated to the ex-labour tenants who were continuing to arrive at a rate that increased steadily over the next ten years. At the end of this period, in the mid- to late 1960s, there was a replanning of the area to provide land for the latest arrivals, leaving each villager with a ploughing plot of three morgen in size. For those who arrived after the beginning of the 1970s, there was no more ploughing land to be had.

As has been noted by Yawitch (1981), "betterment planning" as a Government policy arose out of the Tomlinson Commission's proposal to create a class of viable farmers in the African reserves. It never achieved this aim, however, for in the areas where it was not abandoned due to fierce popular resistance, it became a compromise between attempting to facilitate a rational, planned agriculture and - more urgently - having to house the Bantustan population whose continual increase was being ensured by various types of population resettlement. The case of the Trust farms in

question demonstrates this process very neatly. The official planning report for the area specifies that the economic unit for one household using a mixed farming economy should be eight morgen of dryland for ploughing, and eleven large stock units requiring 49,5 morgen of grazing land.[2] It is the same report which details the division of the ploughing land into plots of only half this recommended size, and the further curtailment of these plots by one morgen each followed a few years later.[3] These planning decisions were clearly made in view of the population increase rather than to promote better farming.

The effects on farming of this subdivision of land were, predictably, that yields dropped and fewer kinds of crops could be grown. One informant claimed that it was straight after the "Trust" arrived to cut her fields that her husband first went to work in town, and although it would be facile to claim that planning heralded the collapse of subsistence farming for all households in the area, it certainly seems, for most, to have changed the role of farming from a primary to a supplementary one.

It was in response to this crisis in food production that a headman in the area - also its MP in the Lebowa parliament - and the local extension officer started in 1974 a ploughing project, the predecessor to the co-op mentioned in this paper's introduction. With very limited resources at first, but aided by funds from the Lebowa Government, the project's 56 initial members clubbed together to buy fertiliser and to buy or hire other equipment. The worth of this enterprise, according to its agricultural officer co-founder Mr. Sithole, was proved by the yield of the first harvest: an average of nine and a half bags of maize per morgen,

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[2] A household subsisting from dryland farming alone, claims a local agricultural officer, would need 25-30 morgen of land.

[3] Grazing resources at this stage were still adequate, being well within the planning report's specifications, but by 1982 a new report indicated that there were only about three morgen of grazing land per large stock unit.

as against the planning report's estimated average yield for the area of three and a half bags. The project, claims Mr. Sithole, was so successful at rehabilitating people's exhausted and overworked plots that by 1978 there was a flood of applications from other plotholders wishing to become members. Since Government funds were low, the project's MP co-founder applied to the Lebowa Development Corporation for finance to enable the scheme's expansion. The money was lent, and the Ndebele Co-operative, formed in 1979 to replace the project, took over its running in 1980.

There is no doubt that this co-op has caused a dramatic improvement in the productivity of Morotse farmers' fields. In 1981, for instance, there was an average yield per morgen of 35 bags, and despite drought in the two following years, the harvests remained well in excess of those produced in neighbouring areas. The attitude of most plotholders towards the organisation, however, is one of suspicion and antagonism, sometimes erupting into outright aggression, as happened in the incident described earlier. Co-op officials regard this as proof of a primitive backwardness. They see it as a stubborn refusal on the part of these people to appreciate the efforts being made in their own interests, and attribute it to "their culture" and "their beliefs": an assessment of the situation which shares much with the view of writers in the tradition of Redfield and Foster who see peasants as having a conservativeness and obstructiveness to change that is inherent in their culture (Hutton and Cohen 1975). A detailed look at the many changes wrought by the co-op's introduction - changes more far-reaching and fundamental than the obvious one of an increase in the yield of maize from the land - reveals that the reasons for the apparent conservatism of Morotse's landholders are complex, and cannot be sought on the level of economic rationality alone, even though economic considerations do, themselves, play an important part in shaping this antagonism towards the co-op.

Among these changes, the most apparent are those concerned with agriculture itself, and the social relationships it involves.

Ploughing

Previously, some plotholders had ploughed using their own oxen or tractors. Others, having no implements or draught animals of their own, had relied on fellow-villagers to do the work for them. Immediately prior to the introduction of the co-op, this was a service done in return for cash, but in an earlier period of Morotse's history it had been a form of assistance performed without reward, at least in material terms. A similar practice had been current in the Pedi heartland (Monnig 1967:160) and, as in Morotse, this type of co-operation was transformed into a cash service. It became common for families with absent migrants to hire the services of a ploughman with his team of oxen and plough: equipment which was usually purchased with the proceeds of migrancy, and which enabled its owner to retire to the countryside and earn an adequate living there (Sansom 1974:169).

Setting aside for the moment the phenomenon of these rural entrepreneurs, and looking at why it is that some households could do their own ploughing while others could not, one must appreciate two factors. One is the presence, or absence due to migrancy, of able-bodied men, and the other is whether or not the household owned agricultural equipment. The latter of these factors, in Morotse, is linked to the conditions under which its villagers used to live as labour tenants, and to their different reasons for leaving the white farms. It is a case which differs significantly, therefore, from that of the heartland communities described by Monnig and Sansom.

Some of the village's present inhabitants arrived early, having decided independently of external constraints to leave their labour tenancies

in order to seek for a more autonomous living situation. They left their farms at a time before the restrictions on labour tenants were particularly arduous, and this meant, among other things, that few if any limitations had been placed on the number of stock they were allowed to keep. When they moved to Morotse, then, many brought considerable numbers of cattle with them, and this was facilitated by the fact that most had already been living fairly close by. The chiefly Ralebetse family had 50 cattle when they came to the area in 1939 from Buffelsvallei about 15 kilometers away; and the five sons of the household used these to plough their father's, and later their own, fields. The Masilos, who had arrived from the same area some years beforehand, had ten cattle to start with, and these bred until the family owned 30. Although Swartbooi Masilo at first migrated seasonally to work on the roads, his family later earned enough money through the sale of their produce to buy their own plough, and he became a permanent country-dweller.

In contrast, the people who arrived later had, in most cases, remained as labour tenants until their eviction by the farm owner. Often, this eviction was due to their children's refusal to fulfil the labour requirements of the tenancy. By the time they left the farms, limitations on stock had become stringent. Many informants from this category had been allowed to own no cattle at all, and even for those who did possess a few animals, the farms from which they trekked were often so far-flung (in districts such as Lydenburg, Belfast, and Carolina) that instead of bringing these cattle with them, they sold them before leaving. For these people, mostly Ndebele-speakers, there were still dryland plots to be had if they arrived before 1970, but they had no draught animals with which to plough.

Voli Mtshweni belongs to one such family. With her husband, children, and stepchildren, she came to the area in 1960, having been evicted from the farm Renosterhoek because the children refused to work there. Having brought no stock, they worked their new fields for the first year with

a plough and span of oxen hired from Mazimgele Kabini, who had been living in the area for many years. In subsequent years they paid Kleinbooi Skhosana to do their ploughing with his tractor. By the time the co-op was introduced, many of the plotholders who had no oxen or implements of their own were hiring Skhosana.

Skhosana is a unique figure in the area. Unlike the other latecomers described above, who were evicted from their farms and arrived with next to nothing, he brought several tractors and an array of ploughing and weeding machinery with him when he came in 1967. For years he had been running the farm Mooifontein for its white owner on a crop-sharing basis, and from the proceeds of this enterprise he had gradually built up a stock of his own farming equipment. He had a reputation for being the best ploughman in the village, but a number of other people (at least one through his encouragement) were also working other plotholders' fields in return for payments in cash, having bought themselves tractors and ploughs with the proceeds of migrancy.

It seems that these tractor-owners soon took over as professional ploughmen from their humbler counterparts who worked with teams of oxen. This left the latter to use their equipment only for the ploughing of their own fields. Local links between a stock owner and a few neighbours needing someone to plough for them were transformed into cross-village links between the mass of plotholders, and the very few owners of tractors. The latter approximate most closely the rural entrepreneurs described by Sansom (*op cit*).

When the co-op took over ploughing, the effects varied for these different sets of people. For the tractor-owners, it meant the effective end of their country-based cash earnings: this was true for all except Skhosana, whom the co-op contracted to plough certain blocks of fields for them. For those owning oxen and their own ploughs, and still trying to maintain a close approximation to the subsistence farming of earlier years, it

meant a drastic reduction in the usefulness of their herds of stock, carefully tended and built up over the years. For the poorer plotholders, on the other hand, it signified a kind of levelling of opportunity, even if only in the sense that it reduced to the same level as themselves the farmers who had previously enjoyed the advantage of owning their own equipment.

Recruitment of Labour

> Now, this year, they say we owe money; but why did they not tell us before? Why do they only tell us now? We also have to pay the children that we hire, because you can't work alone, you won't finish in time.

This statement by a Morotse woman neatly summarises some present realities about the relationships involved in agriculture in the area. Relationships of reciprocity between village people which were actualised, at times of intensive work, in *matsema* or work parties have largely been replaced by contractual relationships. It may not be only the co-op that has effected this change, but the mention of time constraints in the quotation above indicates that the new organisation has had an important role in this regard. Before examining this aspect in detail, it is necessary first to look at how work parties once functioned in this village, and to draw on some comparative material in examining their role.

As Kukertz (1984) notes, much of the ethnographic literature on traditional South African societies gives a picture of work parties as occasions of "mutual helpfulness", serving to unite separate households or kin-clusters into a broader community of common purpose. Inherent in this general view is that the work party system ensured an equality of access to labour amongst a community's members, with the exception, perhaps, of the chief. Sansom (1974:154-7) elaborates on the inherent

egalitarianism of grain production using work parties.[4] He postulates that a man wanting to grow more grain than his fellows would be prevented from doing so by being unable to recruit them as labourers for extra periods of ploughing or planting. Even if, as an incentive, he provided more beer and meat than others were able to, this would be inadequate to tempt people from their own fields at the peak work period. When this period ended, freeing landholders for possible extra work, a chiefly prohibition on the tilling of any more, fresh land operated to further prevent the emergence of differentiation based on grain-growing.

This view is disputed by David Webster (personal communication) who argues on the basis of his observations of subsistence producers among the Thembe Tonga of Northern Natal. Here, a social differentiation between grain cultivators does occur, and becomes progressively greater season after season. Those whose food stocks are exhausted before the onset of ploughing will - purely in search of nourishment - attend work parties called by those who have a large remaining store of grain and meat. As a result, the former have to delay their ploughing until other work parties are over, by which time they may have missed the early rains. In addition, lacking grain to make beer, and therefore in no position to call work parties, they must plough their fields with household labour alone. In this way, poorer cultivators may become locked into a cycle of decreasing yields, while richer ones can consolidate their wealth year after year. That there was a similar situation in Morotse prior to, or during, the introduction of hired labour, was suggested by the agricultural extension officer:

> In the past they used to think, 'Have we got enough meat, have we got enough beer, to pay those who will come to work?' Usually people used to find out whether this man has reserved a lot of liquor, and if not they'll say, 'Oh, there is nothing there'. Only those few who were interested would come and help.

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[4] He contrasts this egalitarianism with the possibilities provided by cattle-keeping for storing wealth and lending capital with interest.

This evidence suggests that the work party system - even in heartland communities - contained possibilities for reinforcing social differentiation. In a Trust farm community such as that of Morotse, there were other factors, as well, which made for an unevenness in the practice of labour recruitment.

Firstly, a number of the Pedi-speakers who arrived in this area early on were strong adherents of Christianity. This was a commitment that manifested itself not only in belief and ritual, but in every aspect of a person's social relationships as well. It meant, in the sphere of agricultural work, a disdain for the use of the work party, which was the means currently being employed to procure labour by other, traditionalist, families who had arrived in the area. In the case of Jacobs Ralebetse, this disapproval was especially strong since he was the only man in his family to have espoused the Christian faith. At ploughing time, when his father, uncles, brothers and cousins and their families got together with neighbours to drink beer and then work on each others' fields, Jacobs would inspan his own team of oxen and set off for the fields accompanied only by his wife and children, who still recall with a half-amused incredulity how hard and strictly he used to work them there. He resembles the community's other converts to Christianity in that it is through a disapproval of intoxicating drink that he expresses his repugnance for work parties and other traditionalist institutions like the headman's court. It is possible that men like Jacobs were striving for the kind of economic individualism and independence from the claims of extended family mentioned by writers on religious change in Zambia (Long 1968). Given, however, the lack of documentary evidence, and the vagueness of people's memories about exact yields, it cannot here be clearly established whether the differences between the traditionalist and Christian styles in agricultural labour laid the basis for some kind of economic differentiation.

Secondly, it has already been mentioned that the establishment of relationships - co-operative or contractual - between people for the purposes of ploughing was influenced by their different times of arrival in the area. This factor must be considered, too, when looking at work parties in Morotse. A statement from Sara Kabeni, who came in 1960, indicates that although her family had relied on the labour of work parties when cultivating their fields on the white farm where they lived before, they could no longer do so after coming to Morotse and getting a plot in the area. According to a woman in a similar position, "If you made a party, you would get many to drink, but only two to work. People only helped you if they liked you". The people who "liked" each other were the early arrivals from the nearby farms, already bound together by a common history on these farms. They were linked by kinship and marriage ties, allegiance to the same holders of traditional authority, and a tradition of reciprocal co-operation in agricultural work. Later arrivals from far away, not integrated into this community, had to fall back on immediate family, or hired labourers, to work on their new fields.

This pattern of paying helpers, or of being forced to rely on the labour of close family alone, has since become the predominant one for "old" and "new" families alike. Table 1 gives a breakdown of the percentage of households sampled using these two different types of labour, and those using a combination of both.

Table 1: Use of paid and unpaid labour

Type of labour	Households
Family only	30%
Paid only	20%
Combination of family & paid	50%
Total	100%

The co-op officials, who take a roll-call to check up on the number of helpers accompanying each plotholder to the fields at peak periods, claim that these helpers are all family members as "tradition" dictates, but such a claim is misleading. Traditional labour requirements, as shown above, were not satisfied by immediate family members alone, but necessitated the concentrated input of the bigger group which could be called together in a work party. To recruit a reasonable number of workers under the present system, a plotholder needs either a cash income or a surplus of maize with which to hire at least a few helpers. Ideally, the amount of cash or produce expended in this way can be reduced by making use of whatever family members are present - as in the "combination" category - but it is unlikely that there will be enough of these members to cope with all the work. This is because a relative, nowadays, will work without remuneration on one's fields only if he or she "eats out of the same pot".

A typical working group in the "family only" category, then, would consist of only two to three people: most typically, a woman and two children; or a woman, her co-resident daughter-in-law, and one child. All the people interviewed in this "family only" category consider themselves to be short of labourers, but are unable to pay for more as they have neither a regular cash income nor the assurance of a grain yield large enough to facilitate payment in kind.[5] The lack of access to cash through migrant remittances thus creates an intensification of intra-family dependence in such households. This extreme dependence can be most clearly seen in situations where, for some reason, the system so heavily relied upon ceases to function. Such a case is that of Anna Kabini, one of whose two daughters-in-law, despite the payment of bridewealth, lived with Anna

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[5] Although there are many other variables accounting for differential yields among plotholders, such as soil acidity, proximity to the watercourse, etc., there does appear to be a correlation between the size of a household's yield and the number of labourers working on its fields. Households in the "family only" category thus tend to reap smaller yields.

for only a few months before returning to her own home. For the purposes of harvesting and threshing, this means that Anna has only one helper, her pension being too meagre to allow for the hiring of extra, non-familial help.

The observation that cultivators in Morotse need cash inputs to achieve even the humblest success in farming has a parallel in other studies of Southern African peasant/proletarian populations. Cooper (1981) notes a rural differentiation in Botswana based on the varied extent of investment made by people into farming using town-based cash earnings. Writing of migrants in Lesotho, Murray (1981:87-99) attacks the widely held belief that migrancy and subsistence farming provide alternative means of making a living in that country, showing instead that "...farm income is partly derived from the investments of migrants' earnings, and households with an income from wage labour are better able to invest than households without such an income"(p 87).

Before suggesting in what way the co-op could be seen as responsible for this change in the system of labour recruitment, one or two details must be noted about the kinds of people who become linked by these new contractual arrangements, and about an interesting morality concerning the type of currency in which it is considered appropriate to pay employees.

Of the plotholders surveyed who pay for all, or some of, the labour on their fields, 22% employ non-co-resident members of their extended families. This practice is seen as a kind of favour to kinsmen, the reasons given being something along the lines of "I asked my daughter to come and help me. She has no fields of her own, so she can grow nothing. She needed the payment". The remaining 68% employ non-relatives; either neighbours and close friends, in which case the contract is seen, again, as a favour to the employee; or otherwise unknown people - sometimes children - from other parts of the village, who in most cases approach the plotholders and ask to be employed. Whether between kinsmen, friends,

or total strangers, these contractual relationships, in almost all cases,[6] have in common the fact that they link together members of the landholding minority.[7]

There is an interesting distinction drawn, however, between friends or relatives on the one hand and strangers on the other. This is done not only, as mentioned above, by the perception of the former relationship as a personal one of magnanimity or paternalism, involving favours to people close to one but less fortunate than oneself. The difference is made clear, as well, in terms of the currency in which payment is made. Kinsmen or neighbours who work on one's fields are most often paid in kind, whereas strangers receive their wages in cash. Reckoned in purely economic terms, there appears to be no difference between the two, as the cash wage of R22 for eleven days' work is equivalent to the payment in kind of one bag of mealies given for the same period. Using mealies to pay a friend or family member thus functions to reassert the personal component of a relationship that is otherwise becoming rapidly depersonalised. It is an extension of the ideal of commensality, and an attempt to counteract a tendency, observed in several cases, for co-operating, family groups to become smaller and to exclude more and more people.

The functioning of work parties in traditional Pedi - as in other - communities was closely tied into the system of authority, in that commoners could invite parties to begin ploughing and planting only once the chief had performed rituals for the protection of the land and seeds (Monnig 1967:159). The recruitment of labour for agriculture in

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[6] In a very few cases, two relatives, both owning land, work for pay on each other's fields. This depends on the co-op's decision about when different fields are to be harvested, threshed, etc.

[7] The position of these landless people is similar to, but more extreme than, that of the late-arriving plotholders mentioned earlier. Many of them lack not only land but also social support-groups to be relied on in times of emergencies.

present-day Morotse, though vastly changed, is even more rigidly bound up with the system of authority. Through the headman, one of whose major functions is to act as mouthpiece for the co-op, this organisation's officials issue instructions to plotholders about when harvesting or threshing is to begin. Farmers must then arrive at the fields on the designated day, accompanied by the requisite number of helpers, whose presence is recorded during a roll-call. By the end of a specified period, work on their camp of fields must be completed, so that the next camp can be begun; and for one household to finish the harvest in a week without extra help would be impossible. It is because of this urgent hurry, say informants, that the old work parties are not held any more, and people have to be paid to work instead. The co-op's efficiently and rationally made plans are too large-scale and inflexible to be changed in view of such eventualities as the absence of a crucial household member - for work reasons, perhaps, or because of a funeral in another area - at the time designated by the co-op for work to begin.

One might think that a peasant/proletarian community on the fringes of the capitalist economy would, by 1983, be tied up with cash transactions in every sphere of their lives. Why, then, should they focus animosity on an agricultural co-op for causing the introduction of such transactions into their farming? The reason for this is that, contrary to all educative efforts by the puzzled co-op and Government officials, Morotse plotholders see themselves as working, once again, under the kind of restrictive authority which many of them left the white farms to escape. Here, they complain, they are even worse off than they were as labour tenants, as they get none of the few perks - food while working, tea, packets of sugar - associated with that rather feudal relationship, and they bear the added burden of being forced to pay helpers out of their own pockets. In addition, their accounts show that most of them are deeply in debt to the co-op for its capital-intensive inputs to their lands of ploughing and fertiliser (and, in 1981, the use of a very expensive combine harvester). The co-op's offers to these people to lend

them bags of maize in order to tide them over until a better year, is of no comfort to them. As one woman put it, their reply to this offer from the co-op was

> You must give us the sacks, not lend them to us. How will we ever pay back that debt? You will have to come and sell our houses and furniture so that we can pay the debt; otherwise we will owe money till we die.

This situation of hopeless debt combines with the responsibility of paying for agricultural labour to make Morotse cultivators feel unfairly dealt with. And it is the authority to which they are subject, an authority whose basis is questioned by many of them, that provides the focus for this feeling of outrage.

Structures of Control: the Loss of Autonomy

Diagrams pinned up on the walls in the offices of the co-op illustrate the interlocking of the various bodies responsible for its running. Mr. Sithole, the extension officer, summarised these rather complex-looking diagrams as follows; "The Tribal Authority is there to give the land, to help their people, the Lebowa Department of Agriculture is there to see that everything is done properly, and the LLM (Lebowa Landbou Maatskapy)[8] is there to finance the co-op". The interaction between these three is structured via various committees. Decisions are made by the Directors' Committee: a body on which the chief of the area and his chief councillor sit, along with some local notables chosen by them, such as successful shopkeepers and businessmen in the area. There are representatives on this committee, too, from the LLM, the Lebowa Department of Agriculture and Forestry, and the South African Government's Department of Co-operation and Development. The Functioning Committee then carries out these decisions: it comprises such people as the agricultural

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[8] This is a division of the LDC (Lebowa Development Corporation), which is controlled by the South African Government.

extension officer and Mr de Jager, an employee of the LLM whose job is to administer and manage the loan given by this company to the co-op. His role is supposed to be embedded into a complex decision-making process, with checks and counter-checks, in which "the tribe's" interests are allegedly represented by the chief and his councillor. He has, however, more power than is designated him in the official version of the co-op's structure described above. It is a power that derives partly, perhaps, from his being the only white amongst several blacks in a Government-linked organisation. It stems even more, however, from the fact that he represents the company which provides the money for this enterprise.

It is the commanding presence of Mr de Jager at the co-op, and the intermittent presence of some other whites there, that partly accounts for some plotholders' perception of their present situation as one of "working for whites", or as being similar to their previous lives "on the farms". The word used by them to refer to the co-op - "Trust" - is the same as that with which they describe the Government planners who earlier subdivided their fields; an indication that the former organisation is seen as merely another phase in the intrusion into their lives of external, Government control. This time, as they see it, the "Trust" took their land away altogether: many claim that they once owned fields but that these now "belong" to the co-op.[9]

Even though the co-op's official records refer to these people as "plot owners", it seems reasonable for them to assume that the lands on which they work are no longer their own. The type of crop they grow is dictated: a frequent complaint is that they may no longer plant the other foods - pumpkins, beans, *morogo* - which they used to cultivate between

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[9] In fact, the land officially belongs to the Government's SA Bantu Trust, and each plotholder pays an annual rent for his fields. Plots falling vacant are reallocated by the chief and co-op officials, on the basis of whether or not the applicants are likely to be "good, progressive" farmers agreeable to the co-op's improvements.

their rows of mealies to supplement their diet. The time of harvest is dictated: Karel Ralebetse claims that since the introduction of the co-op he has been forbidden to go to his fields early in the summer and pick green mealies, as he used to, for his children to eat. As discussed earlier, the way of ploughing fields is dictated, and the system of recruitment of labour has undergone a change because decisions about when work is to begin and end are now made from above. These new styles in ploughing and labour recruitment, as already noted, have had varying effects on different members of the community. But more uniformly experienced is the general change - of which these details are only a small part - in people's control over their own affairs and activities. It is this change which explains why many of them see their contemporary situation as one of doing a few months compulsory labour on the co-op's fields each year in return for the bags of mealies they receive, or are lent, after harvest. It is this change, too, which is the most significant factor in explaining such outbreaks of aggression and near-violence as happened in the tractor incident described in the introduction.

The Chief and the Plotholders

The role of this paper is not a prescriptive one, and it would be inappropriate here to suggest alternative routes for the co-op which might have led to a more truly "co-operative" spirit on the part of its participants. The question is of analytic interest however, as its answer is bound up with a more general consideration of authority structures in the community, most notably with an examination of the chief's power. The extension officer suggests that, had the co-op continued to operate on something like its previous scale, with a large degree of responsibility for control and decision-making by the plotholders themselves, it might have been more successful. As it is, the official version of the co-op's present structure is that the interests of "the tribe" are

represented by the chief, John Masangu, and his councillor: that "the Tribal Authority is there...to help their people".

The chief's role in various aspects of the co-op's running has been mentioned above. He and his councillor sit on the decision-making Directors' Committee; he chooses other committee-members; he reallocates plots of land which fall vacant to people who are thought likely to be "good farmers". Theoretically, his power is so extensive that he has final veto on all decisions taken at the co-op. It has already been noted, however, that there is some discrepancy between the official structure of the co-op and the way it actually operates, and that the white representative of the LLM, Mr de Jager, exercises power greater than the authority of his official position. From conversations with this man and observations of the co-op's daily running it is clear that the chief is usually dissuaded by Mr de Jager from taking decisions which the latter regards as irrational or agriculturally unsound. De Jager leaves unquestioned, however, certain chiefly decisions, especially those pertaining not to the project in general but to matters which have a bearing on the chief's own, or his family's or certain friends', private gain. This fine personal balance between the two men is worked out through their jocular and boisterously humorous relationship. It is weighted, however, by the fact that the LLM representative is a shrewd and businesslike person with considerable agricultural expertise, whose authority is reinforced, as already mentioned, by his being white in a Government-linked organisation, and by the fact that he represents and protects the interests of the organisation's financial backers. The chief, on the other hand, is thought of in some quarters as a man who drinks too much and who uses the little power allotted him under the Bantu Authority system for corrupt ends. It might not be extreme, then, to describe this as a situation in which the chief is being indulged by being allowed to pursue his own private gain inside the structures provided by the co-op. In return for this limited realm within which he can play the despot, he speaks on behalf of the co-op to the residents of Morotse

and neighbouring villages: his voice, being that of traditional authority, will be listened to by some villagers more readily than by others, for reasons to be explored below. Rather than being a representative of villagers' interests in the co-op, the chief could be more accurately described as a spokesman for co-op interests in the sphere of village life.

In substantiating the claim made above about the chief's tendency to pursue his private gain, it is impossible to avoid drawing on reports made by villagers, some of which may be exaggerated or even unsubstantiated. What is important about these reports, however, is that they demonstrate the antipathy of at least a part of the community to this chief, and their willingness to believe him capable of corruption and selfish actions.

According to de Jager, the chief, who has extensive fields of his own, has in the past appropriated the entire crop grown on them for himself, refusing to pay his debts to the co-op. In addition, he sends his wives before harvest to pick green mealies from his fields. Neither of these irregularities would be permitted an ordinary plotholder, and although de Jager claims he is trying to persuade the chief to abide by the rules, and thereby set a good example to his people, it is probable that these misdemeanours of Masangu's will continue to be condoned. Similar is the chief's behaviour in respect of grazing land for his cattle. Part of the grand plan for the area was to create a nature reserve, to which end one of the Trust farms was fenced with game fencing and several families were moved from their homes on the farm. The chief, observing the good quality of the grazing land on the farm in question, insisted on being allowed to graze his own cattle there along with the antelope that had been imported. Again, de Jager's reaction is one of amused resignation: he proposes to circumvent the problem by fencing off an area on the edge of the reserve especially for Masangu's cattle.

Allegations made by villagers about the chief in his role as co-op authority include the following: he has appropriated co-op funds for his own use; he has favoured kinsmen by reserving for them important paid positions within the co-op; he and his family members in the co-op have given plotholders' sacks of grain to shopkeeper friends to sell; he favours friends, relatives and fellow-Ndebeles by allocating fields to them when they fall vacant, or by giving them larger fields and residential stands than are given to other residents. Such allegations exist against a wider backdrop of complaints about the chief's more general abuse of his authority, such as his misappropriation of school funds, his favouring of Ndebele-speakers when planning the siting of facilities such as schools and reservoirs, and so on.

It was claimed earlier that this chief's role is more like that of co-op spokesman than that of community representative. Such a claim is borne out if one examines certain disciplinary measures employed by the co-op in whose execution the chief is, to a greater or lesser extent, involved. Firstly, he is alleged to have withheld work-seekers stamps from villagers who have failed to pay the annual co-op subscription of R10: a payment compulsory for landless people and plotholders alike since, it is claimed, the co-op provides benefits to the community as a whole. Another sphere of punitive action in which the chief might come to play a part concerns his role in allocating land. It was mentioned in the section on recruitment of labour that co-op officials keep careful records of the number of helpers accompanying each plotholder to the fields. A note is made, as well, of whether each plotholder has bought and used pesticides, and of the amount of time he or she has spent on weeding. Until now, this information has been used only in enabling co-op officials to decide whether or not to grant loans of maize to tide particular "good" farmers over years in which they are deeply in debt. It is proposed, however, to make future decisions about possible confiscation and reallocation of plots on the basis of these records of each individual plotholder's performance. Were this proposal ever to be carried out,

it would be the chief who, nominally at least, would have to sanction such decisions, since he is responsible for the allocation of land. For the moment, however, the plan remains unrealised, since officials fear plotholders' reactions.

Another thing which concerns the chief, this time as one of several members on the Directors' Committee, is the meting out of a disciplinary measure to plotholders who have used an unusual form of informal resistance. During harvest time in 1983 Bafedi Ralebetse and her daughter Paina, who were particularly upset about the rumour that the co-op would be taking all the maize from the harvest in payment for debts incurred, were careful while harvesting their crop to leave behind a substantial number of cobs on the maize-plant stalks. This meant that at the end of the week's harvesting period they not only had a pile of mealies to be threshed by and taken off to the co-op, but also some mealies left behind in their field. When they returned secretly in the evening to collect these remaining cobs, they were spotted by someone who informed on them. The two women were then summonsed to the co-op, where they were severely reprimanded and fined twelve of their total yield of 89 bags of maize.

At times, it is said, the chief uses the co-op as a forum within which to exercise his authority governing other matters. One Morotse resident complained that Masangu had administered a punishment at the co-op in a case that should clearly have been brought to trial before the chief's court, with evidence heard before the whole council in the time-honoured way. Instead the man, whose pig had trespassed onto the field of a neighbouring village's headman, and who had then become involved in a fight with the headman, was taken to the co-op where he was bound hand and foot and whipped by the chief without any intervention on the part of the council.

Accounts such as these explain a local priest's description of this chief as "despotic". His assessment is shared by at least some of the plotholders in Morotse, as is demonstrated by the abovementioned allegations secretly made against Masangu. On the other hand, it was the chief's intervention which finally persuaded the plotholders, despite their grievances, to return to work on their fields after the tractor incident. To explain this apparent contradiction one must look at the role of ethnicity in the community, and at the way in which ethnic affiliation partly governs villagers' responses to chiefly authority.

Ethnicity and Authority[10]

Earlier, it was stated that Morotse's residents are linguistically heterogeneous. Among the first arrivals to the area, there were roughly equal numbers of Pedi- and Ndebele-speakers. The chief under whose jurisdiction they fell was, however, an Ndebele, and the wave of new arrivals in the 1960s and 1970s consisted mainly of Ndebeles. This group included both the late-arriving plotholders and the landless people who came even later. It has also been suggested, earlier in this paper, that there are hints of inter-ethnic tension in the way in which allegations against the chief are phrased. He is said, by Pedis, to be favouring Ndebele residents in certain respects by granting them, for instance, larger stands.

What has not yet been mentioned is that during the tractor incident and the associated disturbances it was the Pedis of the plotholding group who were said, by most Ndebele informants, to be at the forefront of the action. One suggested, as an explanation, that it was because this land belongs to Lebowa that the Pedis were so angry about their use of it being

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[10] This section of the paper is a condensation of what will finally occupy a whole chapter of a thesis: it therefore lacks the detail which a fuller version will entail.

interfered with; another said she thought the Pedis were anti-white and this was due to their not having "grown up with the whites, as we did". The Ndebele village headman, on the other hand, stated that it was both Pedis and Ndebeles who were shouting and swearing at the extension officer on the day before the tractor incident when plotholders went to the co-op to collect their accounts: "I was so ashamed when even the big camp above the road went along with the small camp and swore at Sithole".[11] Pedi informants agreed that there was equal antagonism being shown by members of both ethnic groups. One Pedi-speaker claimed, however, that no unity could be maintained because of the Ndebeles' deferential and obedient attitude to their chief: "they just clap their hands and say 'Masangu' when he speaks".

It can be seen, then, that although there is a stereotype according to which it was the Pedis who were doing the "fighting" and who had planned and executed the protest, this is not to say that dissatisfaction about the co-op, and even about the chief, was not widespread on both sides of the ethnic divide. But the contrast - if one allows this stereotype some weight - between the outspoken resistance of the Pedis and the apparent rapidity with which the chief's authority was accepted by the Ndebeles, can tentatively be explained in the light of two factors. On the one hand, the widely diverging ways in which colonialism was experienced by these two groups resulted in strongly contrasting attitudes towards traditional authority. On the other, these diverging recent histories are overlaid onto traditional social structures that differ considerably from one another, especially as regards their marriage rules and practices. The interaction between these factors can throw some light on the contrasting attitudes of Morotse's Pedi- and Ndebele-speakers towards the chief's authority.

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[11] The fields in the big camp are mostly held by Ndebeles, and those in the small camp by Pedis: the headman is here expressing her sense of betrayal that even the Ndebeles joined in the demonstration.

The Ndzundza Ndebele had lived as indentured labour tenants on white farms of the south-eastern Transvaal since their defeat by the Boers in 1883. Their royal family was scattered, its members living on various farms, and their role as rulers severely limited by their and their people's subordination to these farmers, whose permission had to be asked, for example, to hold tribal meetings or initiation schools. It is possible that as their role became minimised in areas such as that of the allocation of land, the adjudication of cases and other secular activities, it began to focus more on the ritual domain: the holding of initiation schools for instance was something about which, according to informants, no white farmer had any objections. Many of Morotse's Pedi inhabitants, in contrast, had experienced labour tenancy for one generation only; even within that time they had had some liberty to move between different farms, mission stations, African freehold land and the Pedi heartland itself; and ongoing contact had been maintained with communities and chiefs living in the heartland.[12] Unlike their Ndebele counterparts, then, they were in touch with a tradition of chieftainship in which secular power and control was still very much at issue.[13]

In summary, it is suggested that the resulting Ndebele pattern might have been one of loyalty to a chief whose role was strictly circumscribed by white landlords/employers. In contrast, the Pedi expectations of a chief were, and are, that he should articulate and express community feeling, even if this involves coming into conflict with higher authorities. This view, which is close to that described by Comaroff (1974) for the Tshidi Tswana, is borne out by a statement from the same Pedi informant whose perplexity at the Ndebeles' ready submission to authority was cited

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[12] Cooper (1974); interviews with Namolelo Mathibela and Monica Makofane (1983).

[13] Although the effective defeat of the Pedi polity occurred in 1879, there has been since that date a tradition of fierce resistance in which it was frequently chiefs who supported, or even voiced, the objections of their people. Yawitch (1981); interviews with Alpheus Mthethwa (1981) and Johannes Masangu (1983).

above: he claims that a chief should be a listener and follower of his people's wishes, and that if he fails to act on their behalf they will fight with, or even kill him.[14]

The other factor explaining why it was that the Ndebele majority of Morotse's plotholders appeared so ready, despite their grievances, to accept the compromise offered by their chief, is the rule about marriage adhered to by this group. The traditional ideal, still accurately reflected in current practice, is one of clan exogamy.[15] This accounts for the impression which an outsider cannot help but form that, in the core group of plotholding Ndebeles, virtually everyone is related to everyone else. A more important effect of exogamy, for this paper, is the fact that many of these early-arriving Ndebele plotholding families have ties of kinship - consanguineal or more frequently affinal - to the chief. Of a sample of landed Ndebele households surveyed, 57% have direct family links to Chief Masangu, of which well over half are relationships established via marriage. This widespread linkage is due not only to the practice of clan exogamy, but also to its being combined with polygyny, the incidence of which among Ndebeles in the community is still high when compared with their Pedi neighbours. Polygyny is most commonly practised, of course, by the chief and his closest kinsmen, and this may further serve to proliferate the marriage links, engendered by clan exogamy, between his and other families.[16]

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[14] It was earlier mentioned that a number of Morotse residents, especially Pedis, are strong adherents of Christianity. The informant quoted here, and many others with similar views, belong to Pedi Christian families. Interestingly, though they might reject traditionalism in most respects, they still hold strong views - partly traditionally derived - on what constitutes correct behaviour for a chief.

[15] There are, however, a few instances of patrilateral parallel cousin marriage - "you may marry your father's sister's daughter, but it is better to marry a stranger".

[16] This, of course, is not true of cases in which the various wives of a polygynist are "sisters" or women from the same clan, as sometimes happens.

The practice of exogamy in precapitalist Southern African societies has been seen by anthropologists and historians as one of several alternative ways in which the integration of society can be achieved. Preston-Whyte (1974), summarising this approach, shows that where cousin marriage serves to reinforce and perpetuate existing links, exogamy initiates new marriage links in each generation, and serves thus to unite, for instance, dispersed and scattered settlements such as those of most Nguni. When discussing the political implications of these different marriage practices, however, most attention has been given to the use of cousin marriage: it incorporates political subordinates into a royal family while maintaining the status distinction between them and their royal affines, and thus retains wealth and power in the hands of the ruling elite (Leach 1963, Delius 1983, Bonner 1980). Less has been said of the effects of clan exogamy in providing links between rulers and their subjects, perhaps because the topic seems too obvious to need further elaboration. In an inter-ethnic Bantustan context such as that of Morotse, however, it can throw some light on the much-abused and much-maligned notion of ethnicity, whose quasi-mystical significance can here be seen to be reducible in some measure to the practical effects of different types of marriage links.

It is not possible here to draw the obvious contrast with the Pedi section of the village. Although marriage with both cross- and parallel-cousins is practised by its "old families", no point can clearly be made about the implications of this for Pedi attitudes to authority, since there is no Pedi chief in the village, but only a "headman" from a chiefly family who is appointed by the co-op to act as its mouthpiece. Preferential marriage and its resulting strong linkages in this community have implications, rather, for matters such as access to and the distribution of scarce resources.

Ndebele attitudes to the chief, then, derive at least in part from a combination of history and marriage preferences. The chief's closest

relatives, like Nobutshe Masangu the Ndebele headman who is the widow of his half-brother, and Nogeli Masangu whose genealogy shows two close marriage links to him, took no part in the demonstrations at all. The other Ndebele plotholders, though tied to the chief by strong loyalties reinforced in many cases by kinship links, ignored these ties until the moment when these were invoked by the chief in his bid to appease and calm the plotholders. It is the argument of this paper that the acquiescent response of the Ndebele plotholders to their chief's appeal caused a break in the ranks of demonstrators, and it was this that served to prevent any continuation of their protest against the co-op.

Conclusion

To conclude, then, the villagers of Morotse are aligned in a number of different ways, some of these alignments having been fostered or intensified by the co-op's presence, while others were minimised by it. Members of "old families" with access to land, and to the networks of support and reciprocity that make for a sense of community, are manifestly better-off than the newcomers, who possess neither of these resources. With the co-op's inception, some of the latter have become temporarily linked to landed families as employees. The community of plotholders itself does not, however, constitute a simple unity. Some of its members have lived in the district for longer than others, and have built up more resources, both economic and social, than others. The difference between these two categories has been minimised by the co-op, and has been replaced by a stratification based on access to wages earned in urban centres of employment. People with money to pay labourers, rather than country-dwellers owning ploughs and oxen or a tractor, are now the ones most likely to succeed in agriculture.

While the plotholding group may be seen to occupy a relatively privileged position in this village, it is not surprising that they are also the most vociferous critics of recent attempts at "development", since it

is their activities which are most directly interfered with by these new schemes, and their landless neighbours have, by comparison, no such effective basis for united action. The unity momentarily attained by the plotholding community during such events as the tractor incident is shown, however, to be vulnerable to a further split in village life: between ethnic groups with different histories and social structures. In the light of developments in other Bantustan situations, in which competition over scarce resources has led to increased ethnic conflict, it may be that similar divisions will plague future attempts by Morotse's farmers to express their indignation at outside interference with their use of the land.

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