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Sebatakgomo: Migrant organization, the ANC and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt

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Sebatakgomo ; Migrant Organization, the A.N.C and the Sekhukhuneland Revolt

Introduction

In the 1940s and 1950s in reserve and trust areas from the Zoutpansberg to the Ciskei bitter battles were fought against first Betterment Schemes and then Bantu Authorities. Communities believed - with good reason - that these state initiatives posed a mortal threat to their residual, but cherished, economic and political autonomy. These episodes are usually treated under the rubric of rural or peasant resistance but the centrality of migrant labour to the South African political economy has always undermined simple divisions between town and countryside. A closer examination shows that in virtually every instance of resistance urban-based migrant organizations played vital roles. Yet this is difficult to explain for groups like the Zoutpansberg Cultural Association, the Bahurutshe Association or the Mpondo Association step almost entirely unheralded onto the stage.(1) We have the barest idea of the long history of migrant organization which preceded their part in these events.

It has also become commonplace in the literature on 'rural resistance' to suggest that the ANC, while not entirely insensitive to rural issues in the 1940s and 1950s, nonetheless failed to establish effective rural organization and played at best a marginal role in the various revolts.(2) This conclusion is partly based on the sparseness of Congress branches in the countryside. But it has been arrived at without any systematic attempt to examine a crucial question. Did migrants and their organizations provide a partly unseen but effective bridge between the ANC, the SACP and rural politics?

These gaps in our understanding of 'rural resistance' will not easily be filled . This article, however, attempts to provide some illumination of these issues by means of a study of the role. of migrants in the Sekhukhuneland Revolt of 1957 - 1961. To give some indication of the destination of the argument, the evidence suggests that a movement established in 1954 from within the ANC and the SACP - Sebatakgomo - won widespread migrant support and played a key role in organizing and sustaining the resistance in the eastern Transvaal. The journey to this conclusion will, however, be long and prone to detour - for in order to be able to explain the interaction between migrants, the ANC, and rural conflict in the 1950s it is necessary to trace the changing patterns of Pedi employment and association from at least the 1930s.

Patterns of Migrancy

The Pedi were amongst the earliest migrant labourers in South African finding employment from the 1850s on the farms and in the coastal towns of the eastern Cape and then dominating the labour market at Kimberley from the 1870s until the mid 1890s. The last years of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth saw a partial reorientation of Pedi migrancy towards the Rand. But the diamond industry continued to be an important focus especially after the opening of Premier Mines on the southern border of Sekhukhuneland in 1902. Premier Mines, in fact, became the single most important employer of Pedi workers until the early 1930s. But diamond mines had one major disadvantage - their vulnerabilty to recession. There were major reductions of the workforce in 1914, the early 1920s and massive lay offs after 1930. Premier Mine was effectively shut down in 1931 and thousands of Pedi workers had to seek work elsewhere - mainly on the goldmines.

In the nineteenth century some Pedi youths sought employment on local farms but this practice declined with the development of coal mining at Witbank and Middelburg before the Anglo-Boer War and the opening of asbestos, tin and platinum mines from the second decade of the twentieth century which provided local though relatively low paid employment. From the 1890s young men also found employment as domestic workers initially in neighbouring towns and increasingly also on the Rand. A common pattern in the twentieth century was that individuals would first take local jobs and thus acquire the skills and resources to make their own way to the higher paying urban centres. By the early 1930s the bulk of the Pedi mine workers were employed on the East Rand mines - mainly as surface workers. But while some youths from Sekhukhuneland also found work in the white suburbs of the East Rand the majority of Pedi domestics worked in Pretoria and Johannesburg.

Migrant Organization before 1920

From their earliest involvement in migrant labour men from Sekhukhuneland stuck together both en route to work and, where possible, at their place of employment. This initially had two dimensions. One was the exercise of chiefly power. Some of the first men who left Sekhukhuneland did so at royal behest in regimental groups and elements of this form of organization played a role well into the twentieth century. Chiefly representatives also travelled and lived with migrants. In the decades immediately after the Boer War chiefs made regular trips to mining centres to visit their subjects - not least of all to collect funds from them.

The second element was the protection, comfort and sense of dignity that concentration and solidarity afforded young men living and working in harsh and alien contexts far from home. In the nineteenth century a lone migrant was often prey to exaction

and attack whereas groups of Pedi migrants were able to defend themselves. And in the early twentieth century it was commented of Pedi migrants on the gold mines

" There is no doubt that they do not like being portioned out to the mines. In the first place they like to know before they leave the location to what mine they are going; and secondly a gang likes to go to the same place and not be divided up. " Indeed if they were divided and allocated " they look upon themselves as being sold as slaves to the mines" (SNA124/03)

The tendency of Pedi migrants to cluster at specific employers was also, of course, a response to variations in wages, conditions and proximity. Pedi experience of recruiters - kalatsane (cheats) - and long contracts persuaded men to avoid both wherever possible. The men who took this route were usually inexperienced, without money for transport, desperate for advances or instructed to do so by their parents or chiefs. An insistence on only taking contracts for specific mines and the predominantly "voluntary" nature of most Pedi migrancy to the mines enabled men to maintain important elements of choice about where and with whom they worked. The concentration of Pedi migrants at certain mines and the enforcement of ethnic divisions on the mines also allowed for some continuities in patterns of authority and organization between countryside and compound.

In the twentieth century it was not only through sporadic chiefly visits that rural hierarchies made themselves felt on the mines. Crucial additional dimensions were contributed by mine police and indunas who, at least in the Pedi case, were often men of senior rank within rural communities and acted as a link between men on the mines and their home villages. These individuals also played crucial role as recruiters both sending requests for workers to their communities and acting as a focal point for men making their own way to the Rand.

Jeeves has pointed out how some chiefs and independent recruiters insisted that each group of recruits be able to designate one of its number a "police boy". In 1914 on the giant ModderBee mine, which was particularly popular amongst Pedi workers, there was an average of one "native" policeman for every twenty workers. The compound Manager complained that they "want the highest wages; and those we give them to induce the native (sic)coming here" The exclusion of independent recruiters by the 1920s reduced this pactice but it by no means put an end to the central role of the mine police.

These individuals acted as informal recruiters and to maintain chiefly authority. They also seem to have been able to offer the men from their own home areas some protection from some of the violence endemic to mine life and interceded in conflicts between them and management. They could also arbitrate in the event of disputes within the ranks of their countrymen. The context in which they operated was further structured by

a number of other forms of association linking men from common villages and districts. But in order to explain these networks it is necessary to explore elements of youth socialization in Sekhukhuneland.

Youth Socialization and Migrant Organization 1900-1930

In the first decades of the twentieth century most Pedi youths spent much of their time in the countryside looking after stock, firstly small stock which were herded in the environs of their villages and subsequently large stock which often were kept at remote cattle posts. They could spend months away living on milk and the product of the hunt. When not herding, milking or hunting boys played musical instruments, sang and fought. Life at the cattle post could be harsh. It was bitterly cold in winter and food could run short . But these boys also had considerable freedom from parental control and many migrants remember these as heady days when they "rode cattle at a gallop" (S.Motubatse) and "drank milk like calves"(Mampuru).

Education at the cattle post and more generally amongst herders was largely in the hands of their peers and older youths. Only a tiny minority attended the handful of mission schools in the area and these children were overwhelmingly from the small christian communities. Especially in the central reserve areas hostility to Christianity remained strong and converts usually lived in separate sections of the villages. Christian and "traditonalist " youth tended to remain in distinct groups with limited fraternization and even open hostilty between them. Any youth from a traditionalist family who was baptized risked being given a thorough beating by his parents and or the chief.Indeed, one of the main reasons that attendance at schools was so low was the parental fear that the schools were primarily recruiting grounds for Christianity.

Non-christian youths had clearly defined leaders who emerged through switch fighting competitions. On the day of Mothibo " Bundles and bundles" of sticks would be cut and the fighting would continue all day until in the evening when the boys would return singing to the village to present the overall champion to the chief who would appoint him as the leader of the youth.(L Motubatse p15) Champion musicians, singers and dancers also emerged. Once leaders have been established the youths were no longer known as basemane (boys) but masoboro (uninitiated youths). These adolescents formed a distinct sub group. Their parents were not held responsible for their actions but they were also not full members of the community. They administered their own internal forms of - often rough - justice . They were expected to engage in petty theft and to be insubordinate and cheeky. They " formed a lawless gang whose actions fall largely outside the pattern of tribal law." Their parents lamented this behaviour and punished it severly when they got the chance but they also understood that it was a

phase which would pass with initiation.

Initation was held in the individual chiefdoms approximately every five years and its first phase the bodika preceded the second the bogwera by one to two years. Initation was an institution of central importance within Pedi society " a cornerstone of the whole social and political organization" and it, of course, also served to mark the transition from youth to adulthood. It was compulsory for all youths of the appropriate age, which included lads from their early teens to their mid twenties, to attend. They were secluded for three months at a time in lodges in the mountains. The instruction they received laid great emphasis on rank, the office of chieftainship, and the authority of age. Boys were schooled in the history of the community and in the economic, political and sexual roles that they would assume as adults . During initiation and also more generally youths had it drummed in to them that their prime loyalty and responsibility lay in the countryside to their parents and to the households they woud one day establish themselves. Urban areas were Makgoweng - the place of the whites. They were warned that locations, and especially urban women were, dangerous, disease ridden and degrading. And they had the example of christian youth - who it was believed simply abandoned their rural responsibilites - held up to them as an example of truly delinquent behaviour.

Each initiation group was formed into a regiment led by a royal son and the process was designed to cement the loyalty of the members to the chieftainship, to re-inforce the bonds between age mates and to create relationships of solidarity and mutual co-operation that would last through life. There remained only marriage and establishing a household between the young man and full adult status. John Kgoana Nkadimeng realised after his initiation at the village of Manganeng "From now on you are a man, you must think and behave like a man, you can now attend meetings... you are responsible, you don't just go (around alone), you must be with the group , you must have discussions about the problems facing the village." He also reflected " It has a political element because it means that people come togther to recognise that as one they can do nothing but together they can do something." A man also retained " a special link with that group".

Missionaries and converts viewed initiation as the bedrock of paganism and chiefly power and normally prohibited youths from attending. This deepened the cleavages between the groups still further for a non-initiated man could not be made privy to the affairs of initiates. Even later in towns when migrants held meetings, however educated a man might be "if you have not been to initiation school ... you are nothing man".(Nkadimeng) This exclusion was something which many christian youths felt deeply and attempts were made within christian communities to incorporate elements of traditional initiation. Confirmation was

presented as an equivalent experience and Godfrey Pitje remembers that informal ages sets were widely recognised amongst christian youth. But a yawning gulf remained.

For much of the nineteenth century young men would only undertake their first spell of migrancy once they had been initiated. A trip to the mines was to some extent incorporated as a stage in the transition to manhood. But by the twentieth century while it was considered to be preferable to wait until intitiation before looking for work the realty was that many youths left for town before initiation. But this did not mean that they missed intitiation or the processes that surrounded it. The tendency of Pedi migrants to cluster at particular points of employment ensured that, while entire age grades seldom found employment at one place, sections often did and and could practice many of the activities, including singing, dancing and fighting appropriate to masoboro. Indeed its seems to have been the practice for masoboro to cluster at certain local mines partly for this reason. Penge and Premier Mines in the twenties and the Anglo -French Colliery [redacted] at Witbank in the 1930s are some examples.

As soon as a decision was taken by the chief to establish an inititiation group word would be sent to youths working in mines and towns that they must return home . The network of mine police played a central role in communicating this informatiom and ensuring that the masoboro could return home. Workers to replace the initiates would also sometimes be sent from their villages. Lebike Motubatse recalls,

"There in the compounds there were police from our place. They would call you there in the compound... They would say" you of this place listen at your place this year initiation is taking place ...the uninitiated that are working here can go home"(Motubatse L 11)

They were assisted in this by the members of the previously formed regiment and some of these men would also return to officiate at the initiation of their "younger brothers".(L.Motubatse p21)

After initiation age mates scattered more widely but the existence of elements of chiefly authority in the compounds , the clustering of Pedi migrants and the enforcement of ethnic divisions on certain mines meant that standing by rank and regiment and close bonds between age mates were not left behind in the countryside as workers journeyed to the towns and masoboro became men . Migrants lived with workers from their home villages and districts ,they discussed matters of home and they also dealt with disputes that developed amongst themselves. Men also travelled between the different mines visiting their village and age mates and engaging in a range of actvities with them from drinking to debate.

At this stage Pedi migrants remained very wary of locations. Some went both there and to the town centres. Mohube Phala for example remembers going into Johannesburg, riding on rickshas and buying drink from the Ma-chine (the chinese) But many liked little of what they saw. Sekgothe Makotanyane expressed a fairly typical attitude when he recalled

"I just didnt like the location. I just wanted to work or come home if not working. I thought that the location people might mislead me and I didnt like them or their behaviour. I didnt like that it was easy for one to find a woman there and forget to come back home"

Any man who became involved with an urban woman would be shunned by his fellows and the elders on the mines would deal with him severly .Lebike Motubatse recalls

" our elders... were not permitting that you, a child having come to the town, should desire (urban women). They said " you will die soon. The women of the towns kill people. It was a binding regulation (and if you breached it) they would drive you out of the compound...It was a disgrace ...they will just part ways with you ."

There was some homosexuality in the compounds but it does not seem to have played a central role in the world of Pedi migrants. Men were encouraged by their elders to go home if they could no longer stand compound conditions and short contracts and the relative proximity of Sekhukhuneland to the Rand also helped to reduce the need for homosexual release.(e.g.L.Motubatse, M.Mampuru,Kgaphola, Mogase Sekhukhune)

In this world ties based on membership of specific villages remained strong but broader identities were also played a part. In Sekhukhuneland the people thought of as being Pedi were primarily members of the dominant Maroteng chiefdoms. Other people would identify themselves by clan and chiefdom as say a Koni from Pokwani or Tau from Manganeng. In the world of the mines and towns where rather cruder ethnic categories predominated men both found themselves placed in wider groupings and realised that they needed to employ broader categories. The term Pedi came to be widely used and employers and officials often lumped all Transvaal Sotho together under this appellation. But migrants tended to group themselves into people from the south side of Pietersburg and those from the north. A division which in historical terms broadly coincided with the distinction between those groups which had been subject to the Pedi Kingdom and those which had not.

Rurally based patterns of association were thus continued in modified form in the compounds but a variety groupings more to the specific to the mines also developed. One was that close friends would form savings groups which were in essence rotating credit associations in which a number of migrants contributed every week or month and each would take turns in drawing the full

amount. However one of the most interesting forms of association was too fluid to be called a group. One informant simply described it as "the collection".(Radingoane) If a man was injured money would be collected to assist him to travel home and some men might be delegated to travel with him home. But the main role of "the collection" came in the event of a workers death. At that stage a man who died at work was buried in the mine cemetry. But money would be gathered so that the his personal effects could be taken home, his wife and parents told of the circumstances of his death and sometimes given an amount of money. It was strongly felt that his family should know his true fate and not be left wondering whether he had simply abandoned his rural responsibilites and been sucked into town life. As one informant expressed it. "There are some people who are just taken by the leg of the locust and vanish there in the wilderness". (Mampuru) For despite all the barriers which they attempted to erect rural communites nonetheless suffered a steady haemorrhage of men to the towns and some families were left with the anguish of not knowing whether their sons or husbands were dead or alive.

Malaita: migrant organization amongst domestic workers

Pedi migrants outside of compounded employment also created a rich variety of associations. One of the most important and certainly one of the most visible of these were the Malaita groups who gathered on Sundays and marched to the venues for their boxing contests. In Marabastad in the 1930s and 1940s the residents would gather

" to look at them in rival batches march up Barber street. They had on shorts,tennis caps, tennis shoes and handkerchiefs dangled from their pockets. They crouched, shook their fists in the air so that the plastic bangles round their wrists clanged. They moved with long strides like a black army .. they sprang and shouted"

It was a sight that struck fear and sometimes loathing into urban black and white observer alike. But participants had a rather different self image. One remembers how on the East Rand when they marched to their battle grounds on Sundays .

" We dressed well, we blew whistles, we could be seen by each and everyone. We were not hiding away in order to ambush people".

The implied contrast is with the " tsotsi who hide in the grass and kill people"(Ngoanatsomane Sekhukhune)

The fact that Malaita were visible does not mean however that they were well understood. When the forerunners of these groups appeared on the streets of Johannesburg in the first decade of the century whites and educated Africans viewed them through the still more sinister lenses provided by black peril scares and the criminal activities of the ninevites. Criminality has also provided an important foil against which historians have examined these groups and this has tended to obscure the probably more pertinent backdrops of rural youth organization and the range of

social forms crafted by migrants on the Rand.

These Malaita groups were, from their inception overwhelmingly composed of domestic workers and were significantly Pedi (Transvaal Sotho) in composition. One starting point in understanding the development of the Malaita is to examine the context in which Pedi youths entered domestic service on the Rand in large numbers. It is possible that some Pedi men were attracted into this employment on the Rand by the relatively high wages paid in the closing years of the nineteenth century but the main movement into "the kitchens" came in the first decade of the twentieth century.The depression on the Rand starting in 1906 resulted in a reduction of wage levels for domestics and created a market for relatively poorly paid youths. This demand was also assisted by the black peril scares of the time which meant that " householders, thinking it safer to do so, prefer to employ youths for indoor work"(TNAD 1908-9 p51.) In Johannesburg the white working class areas made most extensive use of this form of labour.

The youths appears to have been largely drawn from Pietersburg and Sekhukhuneland. These districts were hit by a series of crop failures from 1902 to 1907 which lead to serious local food shortages. This in itself generated pressure for lads to find employment. It was reported in January of 1905, for example, that" large numbers of boys are leaving to seek work amongst them being many boys from twelve years upwards"SNA30/3946/05. However these youths position in rural society was to be even more seriously threatened. As we have seen the principal role of youths from was cattle herding and they also occuppied a transitional lesoboro status. In 1904 East Coast Fever struck in these districts and by 1908 there had been "severe losses of horned stock" and considerable proportions of the herds " were concentrated at posts of isolation" and kept "under the charge of approved native guards".( ) All of this coming in a context were herds were stll making slow recovery from the devastation of Rinderpest. Virtually at one fell swoop the position of adolescent youths within the rural division of labour underwent massive reduction. And against this backdrop it is hardly suprising that increasing numbers were recruited for domestic labour or made their way to town. Most were too young and probably too malnourished to get employment on the mines. And though urban domestic wages may have been declining they were massively higher than anything that these lads could earn in local employment.

It was probably these youths that contributed to the rapid growth of a Malaita presence on the streets and while these groups clearly drew some inspiration from previous forms of organization on the Rand, much of what we know of them - from their patterns of leadership through fighting,music, dancing,singing and even petty thieving - shows strong affinities with masoboro organization and culture in the countryside. This is not to suggest that the urban experience was not important. Clearly the

nature of their work and living conditions played its part in shaping the the ~~nature~~ of these Sunday outings. Equally this first decade was a time of flux and change in which new forms were being crafted and a variety of patterns competed for dominance. But nonetheless central to this process was the attempt by increasing numbers of rural youths newly in urban employment to create a world which provided some continuity between their previous lives as herders ranging across the Sekhukhuneland veld and their present circumstance as skivies cooped up in the kitchens and backyards of Bez. Valley.

This is also not to suggest that all these youths stayed clear of serious crime and vicious behavious and there is evidence that some engaged in both. But it is to argue that it is mistaken to see these as central to this pattern of association as a whole. As black peril scares receded and as the Malaita became a more familiar part of the urban landscape they came to seen by many as more of a nuisance than a threat. In 1926 Selope Thema remarked that they were in most cases "ignorant boys employed in domestic sevice" and by 1929 Umteteli Wa Bantu was commenting that they were " not usually of the criminal type ". In 1939 one of the fullest accounts that exists of these groups concluded that " the criminal aspect of the gangs is quite small". Certainly Pedi migrants who had experience of these groups in the 1920s and 1930s distinguish sharply between their behaviour as "play for boys to show off their strength" and the activities of criminal gangs.

Oral and documentary evidence for the decades before the Second World War suggest that the Malaita were mainly uneducated, non Christian youths from the northern and eastern Transvaal. They were usually under the age of 21 and once they had passed through initiation and marriage their involvement in Amalaita groups diminshed. While the vast majority were domestics in Pretoria and on the Rand a small minority were in compounded employment and some were unemployed. There is some evidence especially in Pretoria that gangs were based on specific suburbs but the oral evidence which I have gathered stresses the regional and - to a lesser extent ethnic - basis of the groups. Men from Sekhukhuneland would form one group and compete and conflict with groups of men from "north of Pietersburg" or groups described as "the Venda" or the "Lobedu." It also seems probable that village based networks played an important part within these broader categories. But there was also an important multi-ethnic dimension for an overall champion would be recognised by all the groups and the men from one urban centre would comptete against men from other towns. (eg Mampuru, Ng Sek)

Pedi youths usually headed for suburbs in which men from their village were already employed and indeed it was often through these networks - especially through the assistance of older workers - that they secured employment. Individual suburbs could even become dominated by workers from particular districts and this may have contributed to the apparently suburban basis

of some Malaita groups. However these youths were nonetheless divided between different households and lived and worked alongside domestics of diverse origins. One former domestic recalled that in the 1930s

" While during the week we were together with workers from other places on Sundays we (youths from Sekhukhuneland) separated ourselves and came together as one."(Maredi)

These adolescents were also proud of their rural origins and looked askance at urban lifestyles. As Mogase Sekhukhune observed

"Malaitas were people who boxed...They were rural people....who work in the town in the kitchens but they didnt go to the locations. They didnt like (urban) women."

Involvement in these groups helped youths to counteract the atomization, degradation and drudgery of their working lives. They also provided continuities with the rural worlds in which they had previously moved and assisted them to retain their distance from urban temptations in the crucial years of initiation and marriage during which their rural responsibilites were cemented.

These groups also provided their members with more concrete support. They kept each other acquainted with what jobs were available and provided those who lost or could not find work with food and shelter. The Malaita nkgwete (champions) would also receive money from their followers. Most men would leave this rather rugged form of recreation by their early twenties. But dropping out of Malaita activity did not mean that these men severed their ties with rurally based networks. Older domestic workers kept an eye on the activities of the younger men from their home areas and they also clubbed together to assist one another in the event of death or disease.

Thus it can be seen that there were areas of broad similarity between some of the patterns of association which developed in the suburbs and in the compounds.In both contexts though in modified form elements of masoboro culture were maintained and youths remained encapsulated in rural networks which in part shielded them from the allure of urban life. Once initiated married and increasinlgly acquainted with the towns, the closeness of some of these bonds slackened somewhat but linkages with other men from Sekhukhuneland continued to play a key role in the lives of migrants and were potentially crucial in the event of disaster. The importance of these bonds did not preclude interaction with wider groups or forms of association which which were not based on village or regional ties. Neither did it mean that men felt that it was appropriate for ethnic divisions contrived by the state and employers to be imposed as the central divisions in the world in which they lived and worked. But migrant organization though widespread tended to be informal and introverted. There is little evidence that non-christian and unschooled migrants had contact with either wider political or labour movements in the decades before the second world war.

Elite Ethnic Associations

Another form of organization amongst Pedi in the towns were formal ethnic associations. In the first decade of the century a Bapedi Union was established probably in Pretoria. In the late 1930s there are references to a newly formed Bapedi Union, a Bapedi Club, and a Bapedi National Society on the Rand. The limited evidence that I have on these groups suggests that they were dominated by Christians, those with some education, and those settled permanently in towns. In Johannesburg in the 1930s the main centers of activity were Sophiatown and Alexandria . The Bapedi club was founded by J Maketa Tema who had primary school education and in 1931 opened " the Sophiatown Plumbing Works". The clubs' menbers were "all..Bapedi" and it was intended " to keep people off the streets on Sundays and to keep them from drink " it held " dances and concerts" and promoted sports. Improvement and self-help seems to have been central themes in the activities of these organizations. In 1937, for example, the Bapedi Union proclaimed its objectives - significantly in English - as being to "unite all Bapedi on the Rand and to make them know one another, to make some means to those who are homeless of getting jobs and to deal with matters which affect them."(Bantu World) Exactly what assistance was actually given remains unclear.

Interview material also suggests that these organizations increasingly took on the role of burial societies collecting funds to provide for a decent and christian burial for members. The first "Bantu Burial Society" was founded on the Rand in 1932 but there was a considerably longer history of such institutions amongst Afrikaaners and Coloureds. (Iliffe)Burial societies spread rapidly amongst the urban African population in the 1930s and were pervasive by the 1940s. In 1944 - for example - some 65% of households in Western Native Township subscribed to such societies.(African Studies 1944)

It is unlikely that these "Bapedi" associations in the 1930s saw themselves as having a primarily political role. There was, however an overlap of membership and even leadership between them and political organizations. In 1939 for example, H. Nkageleng Nkadimeng was both assistant secretary of the Transvaal African Congress and Secretary of Bapedi National Union.(Xuma Papers) This overlap and the relatively educated and Christian membership that both represented, ensured that there was much less of a gulf between them than there was between the ANC and the world of most Pedi miners and domestics in the 1930s. And, while these ethnic associations cultivated relationships with a rural elite of chiefs and educated men, they remained remote from most migrants from Sekhukhuneland working on the Rand.

Changes in Employment and Accomodation 1935 -1950

In the late 1930s and the 1940s significant shifts took place in the nature of Pedi employment on the Rand. Some Pedi migrants had from the first years of the century found employment in the shops, hotels, offices and industry that developed on the Rand.

But the overwhelming majority remained as mineworkers and domestics until the 1930s. The resumption of economic growth, in particular the expansion of secondary industry from the mid 1930s, was accompanied by an increasing tendency for Pedi migrants, after a few years of service either on mines or in the suburbs, to seek more lucrative employment elsewhere. A fairly typical pattern seems to have been for workers with domestic experience to seek employment in the service sector or as messengers in the city, while men with mining experience tended to take work in the burgeoning factories of the rand. Some migrants once they had a degree of familiarity with urban life and language simply went from place to place until they found work. But they blazed paths which many others then followed and village clusters developed at specific factories . Harrys Hat Factory in Doornfontein, for example, became a mecca for men from Manganeng. Migrants ability to find work was also assisted by the attitude of many employers. John Nkadimeng recalls of the 1940s that many businesses had a policy of employing migrants .

"They didn't like the people who come from the townships - they liked people who came from outside. Many factories were like that at that time. You see (migrants) were not unionized, they were not conscious of this question. We didn't know anything about trade union rights and all these things, whereas the people in the townships ..knew a lot."

But although some concentration of workers took place the scale of these enterprises meant that the clustering of workers which had taken place in the mining industry gave way to a rather more atomized pattern. There were exceptions, however, and probably the most important of these was Iscor in Pretoria which became an increasinly important focus of Pedi employment from the late 1930s.

In the 1940s and 1950s a considerably smaller but nonetheless significant shift was also taking place into self-employment. A number of men intially supplemented their incomes and later turned fully to actvities like tailoring, hawking and taxi driving. Others established shanty shops in Masakeng and other squatter camps. And while those who succesfully made this transition were relatively few in number they came to play an important role in the wider migrant world. They moved widely amongst the migrant groupings selling their wares and services and carrying with them news and messages.

Changes in the nature of employment also resulted in migrants finding new kinds of accomodation. Migrants left suburban backyards and the mine compounds. A number of their new employers such as the parastatals and the municipalities had their own compounds. But workers in offices and factories also had to find accomodation. One possibilty was what became known as the "locations in the sky" which were created by men moving in to the servants quarters on top of blocks of flats. Another possibility were the thé hostels of the East Rand and Johannesburg and a bed in one of these often came with the job. The Johannesburg City Council had established Wemmer Hostel in 1924, Wolhuter (known as

Jeppe by migrants) Hostel in 1932, Mai Mai hostel in 1940 and Denver Hostel in 1946. Jeppe and Denver hostels, in particular, housed increasing numbers of Pedi workers.

These new compounds and hostels showed some continuity with the mine compounds - not least of all in their often unhygenic and overcrowded conditions. As Timothy Lerutla who lived in Johannesburg in the 1940s put it

" Jeppe Hostel was ridiculous - life there, I don't even want to describe it, because we had to live like pigs".

But there were also a number of ~~important~~ key contrasts. One of the most important of these was the fact that ethnicity was not the official organizing principle of this world. In the hostels and compounds, clustering by village and district did take place but nonetheless men from a variety of backgrounds could and did share rooms. While ethnic tensions existed the "factions fights" which bedevilled the mines were not a common feature of hostel life. The structures of control and authority which were so central to mine compounds were also nowhere near as pervasive in the hostels. All in all the world of the hostel dwellers was considerably less regimented and controlled than that of miners.

Hostel dwellers were also less removed than compounded migrants or suburban domestics from a wider urban world. On the East Rand hostels were often built in the locations while the Johannesburg hostels were sited close to the city centre. This did not mean that tensions between migrants and urban Africans vanished, but it lowered the barriers which had existed between migrants and city life. It was very much easier to gain access to and hold meetings in the hostels than it was in the mine compounds and they became centres of interaction for a very much wider group of migrants than actually lived in them. In Johannesburg, as we shall explore further, Jeppe and Denver Hostels, which lay just to the east of the city centre became important focal points where men from the mines , municipalities, kitchens, offices and factories could meet.

These changes in migrant employment and accomodation were partly facilitated and partly accompanied by changes in the educational levels of Pedi migrants. As we have seen there was considerable hostilty to education amongst "traditionalist" communities in Sekhukhuneland and there was also miserly provision of educational resources. But in the 1920s and particularly in the 1930s this began to change. The virtual stranglehold which the Berlin Missionary Society had on schooling in the area was loosened and a number of other missions including the Anglicans and the Catholics established primary schools. Also, although the repeated requests for the estblishment of non-denominational schools were refused, levels of migrant hostilty to mission schools diminished somewhat, as men with long experience of life in the cities started to impress on their sons the need for some schooling to be able to secure reasonable employment.

Communities which lacked local mission insitutions in some cases set out to create their own schools . At Mafefe for example in the 1930s

" We had one teacher who taught us under the mohlopi tree, he would lean his blackboard against it. He " stayed in the village in a small thatched house which was built for him... he was hired by the community .. we paid him with chicken eggs." (Manailane)

Boys often alternated between spending one week herding and one week at school. But this drive for education did not only take place in the rural areas. Many migrants on the mines and in the hostels became determined to learn to read and write. Often they would turn to literate fellow migrants who out of concern or for a small fee would assist them with basic literacy. Men from Sekhukhuneland also turned to night schools to either upgrade their education or to acquire basic skills. The extent of this should not be exaggerated, the majority of migrants from the area were still without western schooling by the 1940s but many more men than previously were now leaving for town with some primary school education. They were literate in the vernacular and had some grasp of English which exposure to urban life could rapidly supplement. Some men became avid newspaper readers and they would tell their fellow workers the news of the day.

The consciousness of migrants was, however, also significantly affected by a rather different set of experiences . Sekhukhuneland became one of the main centres of recruitment for military service in the second world war. From the central magisterial district alone 1622 men enlisted and considerable numbers were recruited from adjoining areas. One reason for this high level of recruitment seems to have been a combination of drought and continuing chiefly authority and chiefly coercion At Mohlaletse men enlisted in regiments assembled by the Paramount " we were the soldiers of Kgosi Sekhukhune II" (Mafiri) While in other chiefdoms the process was less formal it was clear to individuals that if they failed to enlist their future in the chiefdom would be compromised. Many men were also led to believe that they would receive substantial rewards. One man recalled that he thought "I would get something splendid because I was fighting for the government" A widespread belief was that military service would be rewarded with land grants. (Lerutla etc)

The experience which ensued was a diverse one. For some it involved the grinding tedium and humiliation of standing guard armed only

"with an assegai. If you were approached you had to say "Halt"...if he refused to halt you would stab him with the assegai, if he had a weapon I would use a whistle for help".(Mafiri)

Other recruits were trained as drivers, or medical orderlies. Some found themselves in the Middle East and at last allowed to carry fire-arms but also facing the perils of battle.(Radingoane) The effects of this experience were not

uniform. However, it considerably widened the horizons of many men and one common strand which runs through all the accounts is anger at the meagre rewards which the servicemen received on their discharge. This anger was partly directed towards the chiefs and local officials who had encouraged them to enlist and found expression in a deepened distrust of all they said. This scepticism and the belief that they had been cheated of promised land was to be a significant legacy for rural politcs in the ensuing decades. However, many of the demobilized soldiers had little option but to seek employment almost immediately in towns where they would also play a part in the post - war political ferment.

Migrant Organization after the War

Many of the patterns of assocation which have been sketched above continued after 1945. Young men clusterd in compounds and suburbs and Malaita champions continued to bludgeon one another although they now usually did so under the approving eyes of the police and were seen more as an embarrasment than a threat by educated Africans. But new forms of association also started to appear which were shaped by the changes in employment, accomodation and education outlined above. The most pervasive of these new kinds of organization was burial societies. In the late 1940s and the early 1950s these societies ceased to be the preserve of mainly christian and urbanized Africans and a plethera of newly established societies came to claim widespread migrant membership.

The more diverse and atomized context which migrants found themselves in these years did not lead to the abandonment of the village and district based networks which had sustained them in previous decades. The solidarity of the compound and the suburb was replaced by more formal organizational structures which drew on the enhanced educational skills and earning power of migrants and used as their principal venues the centrally situated and relatively accesible hostels. The first stage of the development of these societies was that clusters of migrant employed in one of the urban centres - for instance Johanesburg, Pretoria or Springs - would hold a collection in the event of one of their number dying to provide a proper burial in town . His belongings were also sent home with somebody from his community to inform his family of the circumstances of his death.

In the post war period there was an attempt led by the sons of Sekhukhune II to create an overarching burial society called the Bapedi Advancement Society. Part of the impetus for this initiative was the desire to maintain chiefly authority in this changing context and also to ward off more radical claimants to the allegiance of Pedi migrants.(Mampuru and Nkadimeng) But this attempt to construct a society from the top down met with limited success. The main impetus for the rapid exapansion of these societies came from below ..

With the passage of time the loose local associations changed in several ways. Firstly their structure became increasingly village based - a development which was made possible by the increasing numbers of men involved and which also bore witness to the centrality of local ties in migrant networks . They also became more formalized with chairmen and treasurers appointed and regular, rather than sporadic, contributions elicited from members. Migrants were, however, extremely chary about handing over their pay and insisted on a number of checks on the proper handling of the finances. By the mid 1950s many of these societies had also opened bank and building society accounts. They developed special badges and membership cards. And it became increasingly common for the bodies of workers who died to be transported back for burial in their home villages with the members of the burial society also returning home for the funeral.

Bringing home the body of migrants partly reflected a continuation of the earlier concern that communities and families should know precisely what had happened to men who were away in the towns. But bringing home the body also had other connotations. In communties in which ancestors and their graves played an important part in the life of the village and especially in the affairs of their close kin, bringing back the bodies of dead men played an important part in ensuring a proper and harmonious relationship between the living and the dead. Particularly horrifying to migrants was the practice of incinerating paupers which developed in the 1950s on the Rand. For while burial in the city was bad enough the practice of incineration seemed to make the establishment of any proper relationship with ones ancestors impossible. However, the form of burial - an elaborate funeral, the placing of the body in a coffin and, increasingly, internment in a separate cemetry - all owed rather more to migrants observation of christian and urban forms than to "traditional" practices.

Burial societies, however, were not only concerned with ensuring a proper funeral. They were - as importantly - welfare societies which offered a variety of forms of protection for their members and their families. Firstly they provided for a lump sum payment to be made to the family of the dead migrant. Secondly in the event of a migrant becoming ill or being injured these societies provided funds and companions to ensure that the man reached home safely. Thirdly if a man lost his job or his accomodation members of the society would assist him with money, food and lodgings and help to find him alternative employment or housing. In the 1950s these societies formalised the mutually supportive roles that looser migrant associations had long played and provided crucial protection against the capricious fates which presided over urban life. They also provided a context in which the affairs of home could be mulled over and dissected in minute detail and they also provided a channel of communication between migrants and chiefs . It seems to have been fairly common practice for special meetings to be summoned to discuss specific issues which had come up in relation to home communities. By the mid 1950s my interviews

suggest that most migrants from Sekhukhuneland belonged to burial societies and these provided a central focus for migrant networks.

Migrants, Unions and Politics

The changed circumstances of migrants by the 1940s was not only expressed in the efflorescence of particularist burial societies. There was also an increasing involvement of migrants with unions and political organizations - particularly the ANC.

The ANC was no stranger to Sekhukhuneland.It had a rich history of connection with the area which stretched back to the first decade of the century and which cannot be done justice in this context. In the 1940s attempts were made to revive organization in the area and there were a number of sympathetic chiefs and clusters of local supporters of the movement. Nonetheless, the A.N.C.s relationship with the area remained primarily refracted through chiefs and the educated, Christian elite and it had limited grass roots support. As John Nkadimeng points out

> "There were ordinary people who were members but on a very small scale. The problem is that when the organizers went to organize they were inclined to speak to the chiefs" (Nkadimeng)

After 1948 it also became virtually impossible to organize openly in rural areas. The consequence was that most men who made links to wider movements in this period made these connections in an urban rather than a rural context.

The migrants who joined wider organizations in these decades usually had some of a number of characteristics . They had primary school education and, or, had attended night schools. Some had enlisted during the war. They lived in locations or hostels and they worked in secondary industry, the service sector or they were hawkers, tailors or taxi drivers. Mine workers and domestic workers do not seem to have forged wider links to anything like the same extent.

While access to education and consequent literacy were key criteria by no means all migrants who joined were men with schooling. As Mogase Sekhukhune pointed out " I didnt have education (but)...you know that here we are just the Congress by birth because we hate the ugly behaviour of the Boers"(Mogase2) Men like Mogase found that Congress also helped them to understand the context they found themselves in and to stand up to the whites they worked for and with " To make him aware that even if you are working with him, he must know that you are person ... This is how the Congress was helping the people like us who are not educated".

Trade unions provided one vital channel into wider involvements but contact with them was overwhelmingly the product of finding jobs in secondary industry. For many the experience remained a remote one with unions remembered mainly as people who collected

subs but had little wider impact.But for others unions provided an entrance to a new world of organization and politics . Elias Mathope Motsoaledi, for example, received a primary school education in Pokwane, worked as a domestic servant and then found employment in a boot factory where he joined the Leather Workers Union and the Communist Party of South Africa. He joined the A.N.C in 1948. John Kgoana Nkadimeng went as far as Std. 5 at mission schools at his home village, Manganeng and at Jane Furse. He also worked first as a domestic but then found factory work in Johannesburg. In the late 1940s while working at the International Tobacco Workers he joined the African Tobacco Workers Union. In 1950 he joined the A.N.C and went out to play a prominent role in both SACTU and the ANC.

For others the link to wider forms of organization came as a result of the desire to upgrade their education which led them to nights schools run by the Communist party. But in many cases the links were more diffuse. Migrants who found jobs in town and accomodation in hostels or locations found themselves exposed to wider political organization which had largely been absent from the world of the suburb and the mine compound. As Moruthanyane Kgagudi, who established a home and a tailoring business in Germiston after fifteen years of mainly mining and compounded employment put it, "I was(now) staying with the location people and they organized meetings in the halls. They(the ANC) told us about Bantu Education and the (governments plan) to cull our cattle and divide our land."

The migrants who joined unions, the SACP and the ANC in the 1940s and 1950s were always a small minority of the numbers of men from Sekhukhuneland in town. But they differed in important respects from most of the Pedi members of wider organizations in earlier decades. They were non christian initiated men who, despite their often higher levels of education, usually shared the same employment and accomodation as a large section of their fellow workers. They also joined or even initiated the burial societies which mushroomed on the Rand in these years. Individuals, such as Kgagudi, who established niches for themselves outside of wage employment, nonetheless catered to a largely migrant market and often travelled widely on the Rand supplying their goods and services to different groups of migrants. They often provided a key link between dispersed groups of men. In Kgagudi's case this went even further as he launched his wife into tailoring in Sekhukhuneland and moved regularly between town and countryside. These men could, and did, play a crucial role as brokers between their fellow migrants and wider movements. They were in contact with and accepted by these two worlds and they were able to communicate the concerns of migrants to the ANC and also translate the sometimes somewat abstract language of ANC politics into terms which had an immediate and powerful resonance for their compatriots.

A number of figures in the ANC also acted as particular magnets for men from Sekhukhuneland in the late 1940s.Probably the most important of these was Elias Moretsele. He was born in a chiefly

family in Sekhukhuneland in 1897, had joined the ANC in 1917 and was a stalwart of ANC campaigns in the 1920s and 1930s. He was appointed provincial secretary of the ANC in the Transvaal in the early 1940s. Despite his age and links to earlier generations of leadership Moretsele adapted easily to the more militant politics of the 1950s and succeeded Nelson Mandela as Transvaal President in 1953. He was steeped in the history of Pedi resistance and dispossesion and, despite having long lived in town, maintained his links with the countryside. Perhaps most important, however, was his cafe at 41 Pritchard Street . This was a regular haunt of the A.N.C. leadership "Lembede, Mandela, Tambo they would all take their lunch there" but many Pedi working in town and living in the Jhb hostels would also eat there "you see, you know the type of porridge that people eat, mostly from Sekhukhuneland, Moretsele had that type of porridge, it was very good for the people "(Bopape). The "old Man" became something of a father figure for men from Sekhukhuneland and there seems to have been considerable truth in the obituary comment in New Age that he "was a centre of the BaPedi people of the towns. To him they came for advice on matters big and small"

On the East Rand David Bopape played a similiar role although to a rather lesser extent. Born in 1915 in Thabamopo, to the north of Sekhukhuneland, he became a teacher and a central political figure in Brakpan. He was associated with the formation of Youth League and in April 1944 he was elected Transvaal Provincial Secretary of the ANC. Several months later he was dismissed from his post which resulted in a strike by pupils at his school and a stay at home by Brakpan residents. In the late 1940s he joined the Communist Party. He did not enjoy the same influence or contact with a wider migrant community as Moretsele but he played an important role in shaping the political thinking of a number of men from Sekhukhuneland.

One of the most important of these men was Godfrey Mogaramedi Sekhukhune who was from the royal family at Mohlaletse and who in the 1940s worked as a male nurse in a mine hospital on the East Rand. Bopape recalls " He heard I was organizing the ANC so he came to my place, then from there he attended meetings of the A.N.C. and he became a member of the ANC and a very , very, very sensitive student he was and then later he went back home." (Bopape) Godfrey Sekhukhune - a man of considerable charisma in his own right - was to play a vital role in the events leading up to the Sekhukhuneland Revolt.

Another important centre of influence by the beginning of the 1950s was a cluster of younger men living in hostels in Johannesburg. Motsoaledi played a crucial role organizing migrants resistance to rent increases and their support for ANC stayaways in Denver Hostel. Nkadimeng was similiarly influential in Jeppe Hostel.But there was a third figure in the group who is less well known but also appears to have had a considerable impact -Flag Boshielo. He was from Pokwani and had no school education . "He got his

education in the party school (after) he joined the party .. he worked in a bakery (where) there were a quite a number of communists . They recommended him because he was a very disciplined fellow, anxious to learn".(Nkadimeng) He was a keen political debater, evangelical in his politcal commitment and held in considerable regard. Nkadimeng believes that "he was the best man from my area". Certainly he had an important influence on Nkadimeng. After they met at a burial society meeting in the late 1940s he guided his political education and persuaded him to join the ANC in 1950.

Pressures on Migrants

Although new opportunities opened up for migrants in the 1940s as the decade drew to a close they increasinlgy saw themselves as under threat in both the urban and rural dimensions of their lives. The reasons for this and the nature of their changing consciousness are major topics in their own right and cannot be adequately dealt with in this context. But it is important to sketch some broad outlines to give a sense of the backdrop against which migrant organization evolved in the 1950s.

The most fundamental threat most migrants felt was to the rural world which played such a central part in their self-definition. For most migrants in these years the towns remained Makgoweng - the place of the whites. Despite their impoverishment, the rural areas and especially the reserves, represented places of refuge from white authority and from the social corrosion of capitalist relationships. Of course, the reserves were by no means immune to the effects of either of these phenomena but both communal tenure and chiefly authority provided barriers against white officials, employers and the market entirely dominating their lives. The residual resources of land and cattle which existed provided important support for many rural households and allowed some men the possibility of an early retirement from migrancy. Initially Betterment Schemes and then Bantu Authorities were seen as weapons finely honed to slice through to the heart of this world. Stock culling, the demarcation of land and the removal of "black spots" were seen as attemps to strip rural communites of their remaining economic props and it was believed that agricultural officers and co-opted chiefs would usher the white state into every nook and cranny of rural life.

At the same time migrants found their access to urban areas increasingly restricted. From 1945, after the brief partial respite from pass controls of the war years, migrants confronted a growing battery of measures designed to monitor and control their movements and employment. These regulations impinged most directly on men who had, or sought, employment in secondary industry and in the towns. The issuing of a consolidated "dompas" after 1952 symbolised this changing context for many and was keenly felt as yet another example of the state tightening its stranglehold on their lives. And the threat of being endorsed out of the towns to their homes, or worse still to the farms, loomed large in the lives of many workers.

Migrants also found that some of their accomodation niches in urban areas came under attack. The state moved against the "locations in the sky" established in blocks of flats. In the mid 1950s migrants were removed from their inner city sanctuaries and dumped into unfinshed hostels in Soweto far from their work. They had to try and recostruct their lives in the midst of an often hostile population while acting as the favoured prey of delinquent urban youth.

In these years many migrants felt themselves increasinlgy vulnerable in the towns and found themselves more and more often in breach of regulations. An image which comes up repeatedly in migrant reminiscences of this period is of an existence which was both often outside of the law and one in which they were increasingly victims of lawlessness. As Mogase Sekhukhune succinctly summed it up " As from 1948 was tsotsi life"(2p1) Mohube Phala recalled "When the government of the Boers of 1948 started it began with hardship(brought by passes p46) ....It changed many things because it cheated us.... It caused people to become tsotsis (p60).

For many migrants the increasing pressures on them in the towns led them to place a still heavier reliance on village and regional networks and this may have been one important spur to the rapid proliferation of burial societies in these years.Indeed the existence of these supports probably played a vital part in assisting migrants to maintain their footholds in the urban areas. But this onslaught also ensured that many were doubly determined to defend what rural resources and autonomy remained to them.

The consequence of this was a growing political ferment amongst migrants on the Rand. In hostels and compounds migrants discussed the unfolding state strategies and information spread widely. In the early 1940s men from the eastern Transvaal followed the imposition of Betterment and the bitter resistance to it on Trust Lands in the Northern Transvaal and felt that what they heard confirmed their worst fears. The Nationalists victory in 1948 deepened their sense of apprehension. For many migrants from Sekhukhuneland this political development recalled the days of "Kruger" when the notorious Abel Erasmus had installed puppet chiefs and exterminated their cattle.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s the "New Era of Reclamation" pronounced in 1945 made its unwelcome presence felt on the Trust and Crown lands which abutted the reserve areas in Sekhukhuneland. These reserves seemed to many to be a last redoubt which the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 was designed to undermine. Chiefly autonomy was seen as a vital protection for rural communities but at the same time many migrants feared that chiefs would have little stomach to resist the threats and blandishments of the state. From 1953 rumours that the Pedi Paramount Morwamotse Sekhukhune had, or would, agree to the

establishment of Bantu Authorities in Sekhukhuneland sent regular alarms through the migrant community on the reef.

Sebatakgomo

It was common for clusters of migrants - especially those linked in burial societies - to hold meetings in the hostels to discuss the affairs of their home villages and districts . Concern about what was happening to the land and cattle and the chieftainship became steadily more prominent in these gatherings. As Bopape recalls from at least the 1940s in

"Jeppe hostel and so on... they had meetings... on Sunday to discuss what was happening at home... they discussed about cattle and about the fields... (Trust Land Administration was) a particular issue because it allowed the... Commisioner to intefere in the activities of the people."

Members of the ANC and the SACP who lived in the hostels and who were members of the burial societies would participate in these meetings but outside speakers were also sometimes invited. Moretsele, in particular, seems to have attended a number of meetings in the Johannesburg hostels.

These meetings confirmed many migrants apprehensions about the implications of state restructuring in the countryside. Their existing organizations, however, where not really equipped to translate these concerns into political action. In the late 1940s the Bapedi Advancement Society had a primarily conservative orientation while the proliferation of burial societies in the 1950s provided for a diffuse and highly localised political focus. It was against this backdrop that the younger group of ANC and SACP members in the hostels started to consider the possibility of launching a migrant organization with a clearly political agenda.

The prime mover in this regard was Flag Boshielo who lived in Denver Hostel . His main inspiration was a fellow communist from the Zoutpansberg -Alpheus Maliba " unsung hero of the rural resistance in the northern Transvaal (in the early 1940s)... leader of the Zoutpansberg Cultural Association in Johannesburg, and of the associated Zoupansberg Balemi Association in the reserves"(Hirson) Maliba had been banned from Venda and restricted to Johannesburg. Nkadimeng recalls that Maliba" was much closer to us than the rest of the people. He was very, very close to us" and that despite his banning order " behind the scenes we were using him"(Nkadimeng p.24) Boshielo also entered into discussions with Mike Harmell, J.B.Marks and David Bopape.

The fact that two of the key shapers of this initiative were communists and other members of the party were consulted begs the question of whether it was the result of a broader party policy and strategy. The evidence to assess this is not currently available but it would seem unlikely. There appears to have been considerable controversy and doubt in the CPSA about the

"correctness" of Malibas' focus on the countryside in the 1940s and in the early 1950s the party was probably more concerned with coping with the immediate crises it confronted than revising rural strategy. The rather vague notion of the peasantry which formed the basis of its discussion of the countryside is also unlikely to have alerted the leadership to the posibilities of migrant organization. And as Bundy points out the party's pronouncements on rural issues at this time suggest both remoteness and paternalism.(Bundy p278)

It is equally improbable that this development was prompted from the apex of the A.N.C. hierarchy although Boshielo and Nkadimeng " used to draw a lot of inspiration from Comrade Walter Sisulu" (Nkadimeng)and Moretsele was a member of the National Executive by this time. However it appears that it was primarily on a regional level - from within the TAC - that a new migrant organization was crafted and the main artisans were a network of workers from Sekhukhuneland centering on Boshielo, Motswaledi and Nkadimeng. The latter two were on the Executive of the TAC in the early 50s as, of course, was Moretsele. Indeed it seems likely that these individuals helped to stimulate a greater awareness of rural issues amongst the national leadership. The fact that stock limitation was one of the targets of the defiance campaign may well have had more to do with their influence than " A page from Tabata's book? Or perhaps more directly the concerns of the Transkeians ... on the National Executive".(Bundy p.276)

As Nkadimeng recalls it,

"Sebatakgomo came about in 1954 after the defiance campaign with the issue of culling cattle...the curtailment of land ... and so-called soil erosion under the Bantu Authorties Act... we felt that many things were going to be done to our people in the country, and they were not sufficiently addressed. So we needed an organization, a group in the movement."

It was only in December of 1955 that the National Executive Committee of the ANC noted the "formation of a new peasants' movement".

The name chosen was one which had powerful resonances for men from Sekhukhuneland for

" Sebatakgomo in Sepedi is a call to war... when you are being attacked... some man will take his horn and climb the mountain and blow the horn and call Sebatakgomo ... it means there is war ... (it is) a rallying cry."(literally - a predator among the cattle)

The innaugural meeting was in Pretoria, at Bantu Hall, Lady Selbourne and Alpheus Maliba gave the keynote address. Boshielo was elected as Chairman and Nkadimeng as Secretary. The initial membership was drawn overwhelmingly from men from Sekhukhuneland who were already members of the ANC. As Steven Motubatse recalls "It was a branch of the ANC." But the organization set out to reach a much wider constituency. Pamphlets were prepared in Sepedi dealing with cattle culling, land demarcation and removals. But

probably the most effective means of reaching a larger audience was through meetings held in hostels. In Johannesburg, Jeppe and Denver Hostels became regular meeting places and gatherings were also held at Iscor in Pretoria in Springs, Benoni , Germiston and Witbank. By the beginning of 1956 the organization had drawn in a very much wider constituency then existing ANC members. However it was probably still stronger in Johannesburg than anywhere else.

Boshielo was forced to withdraw from formal involvement as the result of a banning order in 1955 and Nkadimeng took over as Chairman. But Boshielo continued to play a vital if less public role. A central committee was established which comprised of representatives of all the villages in Sekhukhuneland. Groups of migrants from specific communities would have their own meeting "a village meeting to discuss their common problems at the village and then they will bring the problems to the central committee, which is ... Sebatakgomo itself"(Nkadimeng,see also Mashego) Thus from its inception the organization tapped the village based networks which were so central to the lives of migrants in the city.

The membership was "From Sekhukhuneland because this is where we drew our strength"(Nkadimeng) and the movement was infused with Pedi symbolism and history. This allowed for the use of political symbols of considerable though regional power - not least of these being Sekhukhune I. Also of central importance to the success of Sebatakgomo was the fact that it catered for the attachment of many migrants to the institution of chieftainship. Many men, while dubious about the reliability of individual chiefs and concerned about colonial corruption of the office, nonethless remained wedded to the idea of chieftainship and committed to a perception of chiefs as representatives, protectors and symbols of their communities. The leadership of Sebatakgomo was sensitive to suspicions about the incumbents of chiefly office and realised that attempting to organise through chiefs was inadequate. But it was also aware of the continuing centrality of chieftainship in the thinking of migrants. As Johannes Mashego remembers "We were pushing this thing behind the chieftainship ..otherwise we were going to lose support."

But Sebatakgomo was not limited to Pedi migrants only. "We were not necessarily regional, we were prepared to allow people who understood us to become members of Sebatakgomo"(Nkadikmeng) and - aside from the role of Maliba - there is some evidence of participation by people from other areas of the Transvaal.(N Sek.) Although at the outset there were some critics within the ANC who accused Sebatakgomo of being tribally based the rapid growth of the organization tended to still these voices. Sebatakgomo also forged links with the farm workers organization established by Gert Sibande in the eastern Transvaal. And in 1956? a committee known as Lekwe(le)bepe (between the Vaal and the Limpopo) was established in Johannesburg to co-ordinate activities in rural areas - especially those in Zeerust and Sekhukhuneland.

Unfortunately at present the activities of Lekwebepe remain unrecorded.

Despite these wider links the primary focus of Sebatakgomo remained on the north-eastern Transvaal. Migrants moving between the town and countryside kept their home communities informed about urban activities and kept Sebatagkomo abreast of rural developments. Part of the strategy adopted was to insist on open meetings - pitsa - to discuss developments and to remind chiefs that "Kgosi ke kgosi ka batho". (A chief is a chief by the people) . Some specifically Sebatakgomo gatherings were held in Sekhukhuneland but permission to hold public meetings was routinely refused by the native commissioners. Nonetheless individuals who had suffered the implementation of betterment were brought to talk to communities who had no direct experience of these measures.

Sebatakgomo also had a number of members who lived in the area permanently. One of the most important of these was David Bopape's protege, Godfrey Sekhukhune, who was by then based at Jane Furse Hospital. When the urban leadership went there " that was our station. We would first go to him. We would let him know that we are coming. He would make arrangements."(Nkadimeng see also Godfrey Pitje)

He also provided a valuable link into the politics of the paramountcy attending meetings at Mohlaletse and monitoring developments there.

In 1955 the organization took up the issue of the states attempt to remove a number of "black spots" neighbouring on Sekhukhuneland . The Pedi paramount under the influence of some of his councillors was wavering on the issue. But Sebatakgomo persuaded him not to go along with these plans. The credibilty that this gained them stood them in good stead the following year when the NAD, tired of waiting for voluntary submission to Bantu Authorities in Sekhukhuneland, decided to force the matter to a conclusion.

From early in 1956 a series of meetings were called by officials to try and persuade communities of the benefits of Bantu Authorities. News of these gatherings travelled swiftly on migrant networks, renewing fears that the chiefs would give their consent. Sebatakgomo responded by sending one man from each village accompanied by a member of that chiefly family back to Sekhukhuneland to find out what was happening and to impress on the chiefs the bitter opposition of their subjects to NAD policies. A letter spelling this out was also sent to Morwamotse and Nkadimeng and seven other men - including Morwamotse's nephew - travelled to Mohlaletse to hold a public meeting there to discuss the issue and to seek re-assurance from the Paramount. The letter never arrived, the meeting was banned and - after some tense moments - a large crowd which had gathered was forced to disperse by the police. But Morwamotse

told Nkadimeng " You go back and tell my people that I have not signed for the land".(agreed to Bantu Authorities)

By late 1956 Sebatakgomo was gathering considerable momentum but then it suffered a major set back. On December 5 the Treason Trial arrests began and Moretsele and Nkadimeng where to spend the next five years embroiled in court proceedings. This in combination with the bannings of Motsoaledi, Boshielo and Maliba meant that the founding core of the movement were now barred from formal involvement. Nkadimeng and Moretsele resigned from the executive and a new Chairman , Lucas Kghapola was elected.

Kghapola was a man of some education and from a chiefly family. He was also a long standing, though not very active, member of Congress and his activity as a hawker had brought him into contact with many of the groups of migrants on the Rand. He was to prove cautious and somewat conservative. One of his first intitiatives was to change the name of the organization. He argued that Sebatakgomo was too confrontational in tone and would alienate chiefly support. He suggested the name Fetakgomo in its stead. This name was drawn from the Pedi expression ." Feta kgomo o swara motho" (Leave the cattle and take the people) which refers to a past in which chiefs prospered by incoporating groups rather than raiding their cattle.

Although less active in the day to day affairs of the organization, Nkadimeng and the other founder members continued to exercise a major influence on policy decisions. A wider network of ANC activists remained involved in the movement and occupied a number of key positions on the executive . They also continued to travel to Sekhukhuneland. Martin Ramokgadi remembers that

"As a member of the ANC I had to go there and give moral support, try to organize, so I used to go their frequently to find out whether people are actually doing the job properly"

and Kgaphedi Lerutla who had previously often acted as a taxi driver for the ANC in Alexandria now found his services increasingly in demand to drive activists along the long and dusty road to BoPedi. But ANC activists when in Sekhukhuneland would present themselves as members of Sebatakgomo or Fetakgomo rather than stressing their Congress affiliation.

In early 1957 a major new initiative was taken. While to some extent reassured about Morwamotse's intentions, increasing concern was felt - with good reason - that the Paramount was not being kept properly informed by his councillors and that they were conniving with white officials. At a mass meeting at Mohlaletse his councillors were forced to stand down and new more reliable men were appointed in their place. Some months later a new body was formed to liase with the men in the towns, to give advice to the chiefs and to organise resistance in the rural areas . This was called the Khudutamaga . It was a mainly commoner body which

met at Mohlaletse and comprised representatives from all the villages in the area . It was, in short, a rural counterpart to Fetakgomo. But although part of the impetus for its establishment came from the towns it was a parallel rather than a subordinate body.

A number of the office bearers had some experience of wider political organization but in deference to rural practice they were mainly composed of older men some of whom had rather narrower political experience than their urban counterparts. They were, however, steeped in the history of Pedi resistance and popular peceptions of the appropriate exercise of chiefly authority. They were determined that their land, cattle and political institutions should not fall prey to the state. The Khudutamaga came to command very widspread rural participation and support. And all those who opposed Bantu Authorities became known as Makhùdudtamaga while the small minority in favour were known as Marangeras after the Africans who policed the agricultural activities of the residents of the the Trust farms. These developments also played a central role in stiffening chiefly resolve not to submit. It was made clear them that any other course would bring them into head on collision with their subjects.

But 1957 also saw new state initiatives as the NAD lost patience entirely and intervened increasingly directly. A number of local leaders were deported, including Godfrey Sekhukhune, and attempts were made to install more pliant individuals in office. Morwamotse was threatened, suspended, and finally on the 21 March 1958, deported to the Transkei. This was a move perfectly designed to unite as wide a constituency as possible in opposition to the government. In addition, on the 17 of March, the ANC was banned from operating in Sekhukhuneland and it was made an offence for anyone there to be a member or even to use an ANC slogan or sign.

The main effect of this increasingly direct state intervention was marked expansion in support for the Khudutamaga and Fetakgomo. Branches of the latter organization multiplied and membership soared on the Rand, in Pretoria and in Witbank. Part of what facilitated this rapid growth was the fact the migrants grouped in burial societies now joined Fetakgomo en masse and in some areas local branches of Fetakgomo and local burial society organization became virtually indistinguishable in composition. Mothibe Nampuru , for example, recalls that in Pretoria "Fetakgomo and this burial society were one thing".

The leadership of Fetakgomo - partly on the advice of Nkadimeng - increasingly turned to lawyers for assistance. They were directed to the Harry Bloom, Shelsmoth Muller, Tambo and Mandela and other lawyers who normally worked with the ANC. The Khudutamaga and Fetakgomo now increasingly turned their attention to raising funds to meet legal expenses. But a number of major demonstrations were also organized. In July of 1957 some 8000 men donned ceremonial dress and gathered at Mohlaletse and

handed petitions bearing 30,000 signatures to NAD officials demanding the return of Godfrey Sekhukhune and other deportees. After the banishment of Morwamotse another major demostration was organized. Despite the restrictions on him Nkadimeng addressed a meeting at Jeppe Hostel and his speech gives a vivid example of the language of politics within Fetakgomo.

" I (asked) them how can they be proud anymore when there king has been taken away and they sit here with other people. What do they tell them, what do they say about their own life? I said everybody - I threw (down) a pound. I said we spend more pounds on drinks and things - you must spend pounds on this one. We must leave here in buses, in everything. Everywhere we are, we must go to Sekhukhuneland with petitions to demand the return of our King. "

On the 13 May 15000 men from the Reef and the reserve gathered at the Native Commissioners' office at Schoonoord to demand the return of the Paramount. Their request was fobbed off by very nervous officials and the men moved away to a nearby clump of Marula trees. There speakers urged that no taxes should be paid and that no officials or police should be allowed into the villages until Morwamotse was returned. Senior royals from Mohlaletse also

" gave the order that now each and every one should kill the "rangers" as they are responsible for the arrest of our King"(N. Sekhukhune)

On the 16 May the police went to arrest one of the speakers - Phaswane Nkadimeng - at Manganeng. The community attempted to prevent his removal ,the police panicked and opened fire killing a man and a pregnant women and wounding others.

In the aftermath of this shooting "rangers" were attacked first at Manganeg and then throughout Sekhukhuneland. By the 17 of May seven men had been killed, many more had been injured and the property of "rangers" has been put to the torch. Police swarmed over Sekhukhuneland and villagers took refuge in the mountains. There were over three hundred arrests and trials on charges ranging from public violence to murder continued over the next two years. Initially 21 individuals were sentenced to death but after a series of appeals this number was reduced to 14.

Members of the Khundutamaga were prime targets for the police and it ceased to function. The main activity of Fetakgomo from May 1958 was liasing with lawyers and raising the funds required to pay for the defence costs of the numerous cases. Migrants dug deep into their pockets to foot this bill. Each member of the organization payed an annual membership fee of $7-10 shillings which must have been at close to a months salary for many and additional contributions were solicited. Fetakgomo also had to contend with heightened attempts by the police to infiltrate and break the organization. Meetings were increasingly held in secret - a large donga near Denver Hostel being one venue - and the tight networks from which Fetakgomo was composed proved difficult for the police to penetrate and members and leaders

weathered harassment and violence. When the police arrived at meetings or when individuals were arrested they would simply present themselves as being engaged in burial society activities and could produce burial society records to prove their point.

Internal Tensions

As we have seen Fetakgomo grew very rapidly in 1957 and 1958 and my interviews suggest that it came to include in its ranks the majority of men from the reserve area of Sekhukhuneland working on the Rand and in Pretoria. Yet this growth was not without its own difficulties. The initial core of the movement were clear that their ultimate allegiance lay with the ANC. But as the movement expanded it incorporated many individuals whose main interest lay in local rather than national politics and who were attracted by the marked Pedi character of the movement. Many of those who joined in 1958 and 1959 did not fully comprehend Fetakgomo's wider linkages. Some members found that the experience of Sebatakgomo and Fetakgomo and the role of the ANC within it helped to transform their political consciousness. James Mashego who was an assistant treasurer on the central committee but was not previously a member of the ANC, for example, came to see the role of Fetakgomo as "Organizers of the rural areas" for Congress. But many remained doubtful about the ANC and while they knew the political allegiance of individuals like Moretsele and Nkadimeng they consoled themselves that they were men from Sekhukhuneland and therefore understood their needs and were loyal to Pedi political traditions. Some go as far as to assert that while they were grateful for assistance from the ANC that they would not have worked with the organization if it had not contained men from their home area.

In 1958 and 1959 there seem to have been some disagreements about strategy within Fetakgomo which related to this context. It appears that some of the members of the movement were pressing for an open identification with the ANC but this was succesfully resisted. As D.K.Hlakudi who was chairman of the Pretoria branch of Fetakgomo puts it

"we said no, we are just fighting for our land not on the side of the ANC because they will involve us we dont know where, we said we are only talking about Sekhukhuneland that is our own place".

Others, including some Congress members, argued that Fetakgomo should not attract publicity that it should remain "underground."

These differences did not however develop into an open breach. But they do indicate a central contradiction which confronted the movement. Sebatakgomo and then Fetakgomo were able rapidly to expand their membership partly because they were sensitive to and well versed in a regional political culture and issues. But as the movement expanded a particularist political definition became increasingly powerful and entrenched at the expense of the national political agenda which was the ultimate inspiration for its foundation. Although it is possible that this shift would

not have been as marked had key leaders and ideological craftsmen like Boshielo, Moretsele and Nkadimeng not been forced to scale down their involvement.For Lucas Kghapola and some of their other succesors were much less inclined to maintain a creative tension within the organization.

The height of Fetakgomo's organization and mobilization was in the years 1958 - 1961, years in which the state was forced to beat a somewhat undignified retreat in Sekhukhuneland. The Paramount and most of the deportees were returned and attempts to impose both Bantu Authorities and Betterment Schemes were shelved. Many men and women languished in prison but a succesfull campaign was waged to get the remaining death sentences commuted. The NAD was forced to proceed rather more slowly and cautiously in the 1960s concentrating on undermining support for the Paramountcy amongst the subordinate chiefs by offering to elevate their positions if they co-operated. As the immediate crisis passed and the politics of stealth succeed the politics of confrontation many of those who had joined Fetakgomo at the height of the conflict dropped out and the movement waned. A core of members remained, however, and although Lucas Kghapola resigned as chairman after intense police harrassment, his place was taken by John Phala who was one of the more active ANC members in Fetakgomo.

The mortal blow to the organization came from changes within the Paramountcy. Morwamotse died in 1965 and his wife Mankopodi acted as regent for their son Rian. Mankopodi had been much less firm in her opposition to Bantu Athorities than her husband and in the changed context of the late 1960s she was able to strike a deal with the NAD, without proper consultation with her subjects, by which she accepted the establishment of a Tribal and a Regional Authority. This lead to a rupture between Mohlaletse and the urban leadership of Fetakgomo in 1968. In the early 1970s some attempts were made by John Phala and others to involve the remnants of the movement in a Transvaal wide organization which would also take the name Lekwebege but the arrest of Phala in 1976 on charges of possessing explosives and his subsequent imprisonment on Robben Island seems to have hamstrung this initiative.

Conclusion

As predicted at the outset there is considerable evidence that, in the case of the Sekhukhuneland Revolt at least, a migrant organization - Sebatakgomo - did provide a highly effective bridge between national political movements and mounting rural resistance. It further seems that the wider role of the ANC in rural resistance in the Transvaal in the 1950s requires research and reassessment.

Sebatakgomo was initiated from within the TAC but it also drew on a lineage of forms of migrant association which stretched back to the origins of Pedi migrancy. Before the Second World War these groupings showed considerable continuities with rural youth culture and played an important role in maintaining young mens

links to rural society. Village and district based networks continued to play an important role in migrants lives as they grew older and could be crucial in the event of misfortune. But these patterns of association remained informal in structure, introverted in their concerns and remote from wider political and union groupings.

Changes that took place in the nature of the education, housing and employment of migrants from the late 1930s both resulted in a formalization of migrant networks in burial societies and opened migrants to wider influences. Of central importance in this period was the mounting concern felt by migrants about state restructuring in the countryside and the emergence of a group of men who were able to act as brokers between their fellow workers and the ANC and SACP. Their sensitivity to the issues which concerned migrants and to the nature of migrant political consciousness enabled them to build an organization which was far more explicitly political than anything that had preceded it. They were also able to draw on the strength and vitality of existing migrant networks and burial societies to both create their own structures and to expand rapidly and widely. However, their success also brought difficulties as the particularist vision of the mass membership asserted a growing influence at the expense of the more central political focus of the founders of the movement.

Postscript

Fetakgomo crumbled in the late 1960s but the burial societies continued. They suffered further fragmentation - one common cleavage was into urban and rural sections. Also as unemployment levels started to rise it must also have become increasingly difficult for these groups to offer as broad a range of benefits as they had in the 1950s. Certainly by the 1970s the societies connected to Sekhukhuneland had rather more modest functions. But while migrant organization survived, the ultimate implementation of Bantu Authorities and the continuing deterioration of rural resources ate away at the foundations of a world view which saw the countryside as a place of refuge and the towns as the place of the whites. In the 1970s it seems likely that migrant networks were mobilized through hostels once again but this time the focus was firmly in the towns and the principal vehicle was the independent trade union movement.