

https://dspace.org/

Chiefs, migrants, the State and ethnicity: the Leihlo La Naga Migrant Workers Organisation 1978 - 1986

Ritchken, Edwin

1990-02-06T06:06:39Z
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/8069

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

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG
HISTORY WORKSHOP



STRUCTURE AND EXPERIENCE IN THE MAKING OF APARTHEID

6 - 10 February 1990

AUTHOR: Edwin Ritchken

TITLE: Chiefs, Migrants, the State and Ethnicity : The Leihlo La Naga Migrant Workers Organisation 1978 - 1986

AFRICANA LIBRARY

Chiefs, Migrants, the State and Ethnicity: The Leihlo La Naga Migrant Workers Organisation 1978 - 86

"We in Mapulaneng are actively involved in the history of our people. History has been shaping the future of our land, we are now going to shape the kind of history we want for our land. We are not prepared to be shaped by history, we want to be the makers of history"

"We demand the whole place. If we accept what they give us we can find that we blundered".

Introduction

Mapulaneng is a district of Lebowa located mid-way between Nelspruit and Phalaborwa in the North Eastern Transvaal. In 1978 migrant workers from Mapulaneng called a meeting at a municipality compound to form a migrant organisation. The organisation was called Leihlo La Naha (LLN) - The Eye of the Land. The first two aims and objectives as listed in the organisations constitution are as follows:
1) The realisation of the Mapulaneng's aspirations and convictions with the motto: Mapulana First.
2) The elimination of discrimination on the ground of Race, Tribe, Religion, language and sex; and instead create conditions in which equality of opportunity can be exercised.

Hence, we are straight-away confronted by the ambiguity of ethnic ideologies and organisation. The organisation is both ethnically based but also hopes to do away with all ethnic discrimination.

This paper will attempt to show both a sensitivity to, and make intelligible, the ambiguities inherent in ethnic ideologies. It will demonstrate that ethnic ideologies are neither necessarily tribalist nor are the necessarily produced from above to serve a reactionary and conservative political agenda. Ethnic ideologies, like all ideologies, are sites of intense struggle from above and below.

The first section will offer a critque of the approach to ethnic studies advocated by Vale (1989). It will derive an alternative means of conceptualising the problems inherent in ethnic studies.

The second section will provide a brief overview of the history of the chieftainship and the political culture in Mapulaneng, emphasising the changes that have occured since the implementation of the Bantu Authorities Act in 1962.

The paper will then offer a couple of historical case studies of different Pulana migrant organisations in the 1950s. It will demonstrate how migrant organisation, in certain instances, was based on regional or ethnic networks. However, this did not

prevent migrants in their individual capacities, and the migrant organisations, from systematically participating in broader urban based organisations and struggles.

The final section will offer a history and analyses of the LLN. This will cover the issues of urban support networks, struggles with the chieftainship and land related struggles.

Approaches to the question of Ethnicity

Leroy Vale (1989) attempts to provide a broad "interpretative overview" of the state of studies in ethnicity. He asserts that there are three variables in the creation and implanting of the ethnic message:
1) A system of indirect rule served to define the boundaries and texture of the new ideologies. By defining the "tribe" as a particular group according to specific cultural features the reality was soon forced to follow these administrative constraints.
2) There must be a group of intellectuals or culture brokers. The role of this group is to create and "sell" the ideology to all sectors of the society. Ethnic identity came to be specified then by a combination of of the written histories, grammars and accounts of "traditional customs" produced by local culture brokers and also by the operation of the administrative mechanism. Ethnic ideologies then also served to cement alliances between the foreward looking petit bourgeousie and the administratively recognised "traditional" chiefs.
3) Lastly, ethnic identities were accepted by migrants because it was in their interests to do so. "African men and their lineages accepted that it was in their essential interest to support the new structures of chiefs, their courts, and their educated petty bourgeois spokemen and agents. It was also for this reason that men, when returning at the end of their contracts from the mines or farms or plantations, gave chiefs the gifts that constituted one of their most important sources of income.....the ethnic apparatus of the rural area - the chiefs, "traditional" courts, petty bourgeois intellectuals, and the systematized "traditional" values of the tribe as embodied in the ethnic ideology - all worked to preserve the very substantial interests which these men had in their home areas" [Vale, 1989,?].

At its crudest Vale's model of ethnicity can be summarised as follows: Ethnicity is an ideology forged by culture brokers (the petit bourgeois) to cement alliances with recognised chiefs within the context of a colonial administration. This ideology was accepted by migrants as it served to preserve their very substantial interests these men had in their home area.

This model is both instrumentalist and functionalist. Ethnic ideologies are produced by the petit bourgeois to serve a poltical goal through masking their specifc economic interests and political agendas. Ethnic ideologies are passively accepted from below because the people who propogate them, despite being functionaries of an oppressive colonial administration, serve the

people's interests. Similarely, there is only one definition of ethnic identity, that being the one propogated by the culture brokers or petit bourgeois. Such definitions, according to Vale, would seem to be beyond redefinition from below according to migrant's specific interests. Clearly the relationship between chiefs, the petit bourgeois, the broader colonial administration and migrants and their households have been idealised.

The relationship between and within these different sectors is forged in struggle. As ethnic ideologies provide definitions of the "traditional" rules governing the relationships within and between a number of these sectors, these ideologies will always already be a site of intense struggle. There is no one definition of ethnic identity but a constant struggle between competing ideologies. As Webster notes: "I prefer to view the issue as one in which people have a repertoire of ethnic features to draw upon and they make skilful and sometimes imaginative use of the possibilities engendered. They [the people] are consumate cultural entrepreneurs" [Webster, 1989,p16]. The efficacy or otherwise of particular ethnic ideologies will be the outcome of a specific historical process and the experiences and constraints that the process produced. Ethnic ideologies (like all ideologies) are inherently ambiguous. They can be used to mobilise against outsiders and insiders. Similarly, they can be used to exclude or incoporate.

Before turning to my case study of Pulana ethnicity it is useful to summarise previous studies of ethnicity in order to provide a fuller backdrop to the conception of ethnicity suggested above.

Webster (1989) provides a novel depiction of ethnicity as a site of struggle. In the KwaZulu border community that Webster studied the men actively spurn their "Thonga" heritage, while a large number of their womenfolk actively embrace it. This phenomena has reached the point where the men talk Zulu whilst the women talk Thonga despite the fact that they share a household. The answer to this anomaly lies in the difference between traditional rights and obligations in Zulu and Thonga tradition. Gender relationships as defined in Zulu culture are substantially more patriarchal than their Thonga counterpart. As a result the use of one language or the other within the context of household gender relationships implicitly draws on these differing "traditions" to legitimate a particular demand. The struggle over ethnic ideologies in these communities has reached the point where the respective actors are literally talking different languages. Ethnic ideologies are a site of struggle for those incorporated by them.

Before starting on the body of the paper it is worth referring to Meyer's (1980) seminal piece on the "Origin and Decline of Two Rural Resistance Ideologies". In this essay, Meyer acknowledges the counter hegemonic potential of "red" or traditional identities and ideologies. The history, customs and values embedded in "traditional" ideologies offer a constant alternative set of assumptions about the social order to that of the

ideologies propogated by the ruling hegemonic order. This points to the necessity of remaining sensitive to the "resistance" potential of ethnic ideologies.

This paper will demonstrate how a Pulana migrant organisation produced a definition and a particular vision of Pulana society. This vision differs fundamentally from that defined by Apartheid ideology and by the rural administrative elite. The paper will show how, through a process of struggle, elements of this definition were implemented in practice into the poltical culture of the region.

The Political Culture of Mapulaneng: A brief history

The history of Pulanas can be characterised as one of fragmentation and marginalisation. Pulana history can be traced back to the Barbeton area. However, following a number of Swazi raids the grouping was forced to move north on at least three occassions. In the process the grouping began to disperse and split into several sections, each with its own chieftainship. The Pulana were scattered between the Lepelle (Olifants) river in the North and the orginal Barbeton area. Here they lived on the borders of the Swazi and Pedi domains and were subject to the constant threat of raids from both directions. According to tradition five wars were fought with the Swazis, until the battle of Mogologolo (Maripeskop) where the Pulana triumphed. The result of the above processes has been a fragmentation of a single centralised political authority into several different chieftainships. There are as many claims to the paramountcy as their are chiefs.

The Pulanas lived amongst a variety of other groupings. There was a sporadic stream of refugees from Mozambique who were given land to settle in by the Pulana chiefs. The Pulanas also lived amongst other dispersed groupings such as the Khutswe, Pai and Swazi settlments. This history is reflected in the Pulana language which is classified as Northern Sotho but in reality has strong Pedi, Kone, Kutswe, Swazi and Tsonga influences. There has also been a great deal of inter-marriage between these groupings.

The Pulanas have initiation school and an age regiment system. The names of the Pulana age regiments were the same as their Pedi counterparts, indicating possible alliances between the two groupings. It is important to note that the initiation schools were not exclusively Pulana. They were shared with whoever happened to be living the the communities where they were taking place, especially groupings of Tsonga (despite the fact that the tsonga have no tradition of initiation), Kutswe and Pai. Likewise the chief's court was attended by sub-chiefs (Indunas) and members of all these groupings when they fell under the relevant domain [see Ziervogel, 1954]. As a result of their relative marginalisation the Pulanas have developed a tradition of cooperation across ethnic groupings based on regional loyalties.

Having briefly outlined the major processes that structured the

broad political culture of the chieftainship, it is now necessary to briefly outline the recent history of the area and the career of an actor central to contemporary Mapulaneng, namely Matsiketsane Mashile.

Matsiketsane Mashile is a grandson of Maripe, the chief who successfully lead the Pulanas in their battle against the Swazis around 1864. This victory according to Maripe's descendents gave him claim to the paramountcy of all Pulanas. Mashile was made into a sub-chief of some five communities in Mapulaneng in the fifties. The communities were involved in tenant struggles with Hall and Sons, a farming enterprise that had been given large quantities of land in the Lowveld by the South African government. The use of child labour at the citrus estates, the monopoly of cattle sales and the taking of kraal-manure were central issues in these struggles. After exhausting official channels to achieve justice for his subjects, Mashile went to Johannesburg to seek help. He returned with Walter Sisulu and Govan Mbeki of the ANC. After his subjects had joined the ANC, the ANC provided legal assistance. When-ever there was a community problem, Mashile as a chief, would attempt to solve the problem along official channels. If this strategy failed (as it invariably did), the problem was referred to the ANC who would take the matter to court. Mashile used his position as chief to facilitate organisation. When the police arrived to investigate a meeting, what was an ANC gathering, became the chief's court. It was, according to Mashile, simply a matter of changing the minute book. The sub-branches of the ANC had committees which were headed by Mashile's Indunas. In this way a particular political culture was forged. However, when the ANC was banned, Mashile was arrested and jailed for two years under charges of sabotage.

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

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

There was a spate of forced removals into the area from surrounding townships but most especially from nearby farms as mechanisation was implemented and influx control was tightened. Between 1960 and 1970 the population increased in Mapulaneng from 27 016 to 66 583 people. By 1980 this figure had reached 106 700. As the population increased, so land hunger increased and the

position of migrants became more and more precarious.

Gazankulu and Lebowa were created in the early seventies. "Sotho" people were 'encouraged' to move into Lebowa and "Shangaans" were to move into Gazankulu. Although no force was used to move people, the shortage of land lead to the victimisation of people living in the 'wrong' ethnic area by their neighbours. It was believed that preference would be given to the ethnic group corresponding to a particular homeland, in the allocation of land and business licenses. Discrimination in the settlement of disputes also occurred at the Induna's and chief's court against the "other" ethnic group. These issues resulted in a bitter exodus of people into their respective ethnic homelands.

Lastly, this period saw the transformation of the chief from political ruler to a bureaucratic figurehead. The chief now received a salary from first the South African government and then the Lebowa government. The administrative powers of the chiefs were vague except in their ability to veto any development or meeting in their area. However, in the absence of the migrant workers, a number of chiefs took advantage of the absence of any popular accountability through the leveling of taxes, the demanding of gifts from migrants if they wished to get employment through the labour bureauxs and the chief's right to allocate business licenses to the highest bidder.

The position of the Mapulaneng chiefs re the Lebowa government was relatively ambiguous. Although the chiefs received their salaries from Lebowa, under Phatudi's government there was allegations of "regionalism". There was a generalised belief that a disproportionate quantity of resources were allegedly channelled in Phatudi's "home-region" whiles't other regions remained underdeverloped. Marginalised in relation to the regional government's resources the chiefs were not able to meet the expectations of their subjects. Likewise, the chiefs were not able to provide businessmen with access to capital through the Lebowa Development Corportation.

Dissatisfaction with the Lebowan administration was not limited to the chieftainship. There was (and still is) a belief that Mapulaneng has never been legally proclaimed as being part of Lebowa. This marginal status was percieved to be the reason why there was no development of infrastructure in the area. "We pay our taxes to Lebowa but get nothing in return" [Interview, LLN exec, 13/12/89]. "Under the jurisdiction of the Lebowa Government, Mapulana forfeited or lost a great deal. Every labour is taken to Seshego to modernise their people and their land, while we are left BEREFT or DEPRIVED" [Minutes, MB,2/1984].

In 1973, Matsiketsane Mashile's younger brother, Segopela, returned from banishment in the Transkei. In 1978, after he was requested by his followers to do so, Segopela became a member of the Lebowan Legislative Assembly.

Having briefly contextualised the situation in Mapulaneng that coincided with the formation of the LLN in Soweto, we are now in a position to examine the history of the migrant organisation.

Migrant Organisation in the cities 1950-78

The LLN did not emerge out of an historical vacuum. A number of executive members of LLN had experienced forms of migrant organisation in the 50s. It was this model and tradition of organisation that they drew upon when they formed LLN. Hence, it is both useful and informative to outline the structure and functioning of these organisations. Sophiatown and Daveyton have been chosen as the case studies as these areas are now LLN strongholds and a number of members of the executive committee of LLN personally experienced these structures.

In Sophiatown, Newclare and Western Native Townships migrants initially organised themselves by grouping together into common yards. "Too many families stayed together from Mapulaneng...not so much in WNT only in Newclare...At Rissik avenue there were too many Pulanas. Pollack Park as well. Also at Meyer Street...By having these yards they were making themselves to come together to speak their problems from the cities and at home" [CC,16/8/89]. These yards served a number of functions: "We were fearing the Russians. By staying together we were able to defend ourselves. We had an alliance with the Tswana against the Russians" [ibid]. If someone lost a job, the yards would use their networks to organise another job "or get you carried home. Central to migrant concerns was the thought of being buried in the cities. "even if you die then you know they can transport you home" [ibid]. In the event of a death, the yard would organise its networks to make contributions towards transporting the corpse.

In the early fifties these networks were formalised into an organisation called Sello Sa Batau (SSB), The cry of the lion; The lion being the symbol of the Pulana. The meetings of SSB were refered to as Kgotla, the traditional meeting of the communities under the chiefs in the rural areas. "One yard there were special men called, like now as we are having Lekgotla, one man is now a secretary, we call him Mapalane, this Mapalane should now consult the modulsetulo which is now the chairman proper. Now he gets to send to the other yard that we have a problem here lets see each other on a Sunday" [ibid]. Sophiatown, WNT and Newclare each had a branch of SSB. There was a single chair overseeing all three branches. Of interest is the absence of chiefly representatives on the structure. According to my informant, the executive members of SSB were factory and domestic workers.

Initially the main function of SSB was to help transport a corpse back to the countryside. The Lekgotla also solved disputes between neighbours. If a member of the Pulana community needed a pass to come to the cities, or a permit for accomodation or employment the SSB would attempt to solve the problem. "My pass

was made for me by SSB" [ibid].

The organisation did not function in isolation from other popular organisations operating in the Sophiatown area. "It is to complain about the houses, that they should complain to Sofasonke to give them more houses, and the complaints of the pass business...It was for the community" [Interview, C Chiloane, 16/8/89]. The Sofasonke was also the channel to speak to advisory board members. A number of members on the executive of the SSB were also members of the Sofasonke party. The link between the organisations was fundamental: "I joined the Sofasonke through the complaints which were from SSB" [ibid].

There was also a link between the SSB and the local branch of the African National Congress (ANC). The ANC had three sub-groups who met at night during the week to discuss any issues. The membership of the groups were determined by their proximity to the meeting houses. A number of individual members of SSB were members of the ANC. A stronger link was forged at the level of the executive members where executive members of the SSB were also executive members of the ANC. "Marule was an executive member of the ANC and of SSB. Some Sundays we would meet at his house for Lekgotla in the morning and some of us would remain, that is to discuss the issues of the ANC. Malele, Makubedu and Chiloane were also heads of the ANC but they did this in private" [ibid].

The relationship between Sofasonke and the ANC, as perceived by my informant was that of a civic association and a national political organisation. "We asked the government to give us houses because the government has a place to stay and there are not enough hospitals and farms. There they take those grievances to the Sofasonke. Now the Sofasonke makes the other way around for the ANC where they campaign now...To me the Sofasonke was a ladder to go over to the ANC" [ibid]. More cryptically: "To me Sofasonke was the best. Because the fact was they are pushing now the ANC. The ANC could not speak without those people there. It had no power without the Sofasonke The ANC would use the Sofasonke as a leading sheep" [ibid].

The SSB disintegrated with the removals from Sophiatown. However, the functions of SSB continued in the form of the recently formed Burial Societies. "From that Lekgotla we formed a burial society. We are now collected. We are now many being SSB then we move to the burial society...Our burial society was formed in 1958. Its name is Mashile le Sekhukune...A person gives himself a problem by collecting money. It [the burial society] is to keep money ready for any person that dies to get him home. In SSB when somone dies people would contribute. In Mashile le Skhekhune every month you contribute" [ibid]. A multitude of burial societies emerged in this period and were to remain functioning despite the trauma of the removals.

Burial societies initally took on a number of the support functions of the SSB. These functions included employment and

accomodation support networks and general welfare activities. However, by the early seventies it would seem that the societies restricted their activities to burials.

It would be misleading to reduce the significance of Burial Societies to support networks. In order to understand the meaning of these organisations it is necessary to briefly deviate into the meanings of traditional ideologies.

The most central concept underlying african ideologies is that of 'botho', what it means to be a human being. This definition offers criteria, such as kindness, sharing and gentleness, for relating to and judging people irrespective of their ethnic affiliation. The concept opens up the possibilities at least of inter-ethnic affiliations within traditional ideologies.

Mdluli (1987) points out that the concept of 'botho' can be used to justify all shades of ideological and political practices. Inkatha, for example, uses the concept to justify ethnic exclusiveness. Meyer, likewise poses the question as to whether traditional ideologies "among the rank and file may transform itself from a phenomenon of cultural ethnicity into an ideological weapon in the political struggle" [Meyer, 1982,p71]. However, there is evidence to suggest that this process has already started at an organic level: "When we talk of 'botho' we are not talking of any race. We are talking of being human. That is why it was not difficult when they were drafting the freedom charter" [Interview with R Dibekoane, 10/1/89].

From the concept of 'botho' comes the concept of 'mahloko' meaning "sharing the pain". According to "tradition" in the event of a death, the deceased's family informed the chief. From there the chief would inform the entire community of the event. Men would help in the digging of the grave, while women prepared food for the feast that followed the burial. The aim was to take the burden of the event off the family's shoulders, to "share the pain". This process ensured unity and cohesion in the community, making the "community a family". It was this cohesion that burial societies attempted to maintain by "sharing the burden" of a migrant worker's death. The burial societies, in this context, are more than just economic support networks. They maintain some of the central elements in traditional ideologies.

It is worth noting that these ideologies have, in certain instances, undergone reworking. "The freedom charter when it says the people shall share, it means Mahloko, meaning that the people shall share even the pain. Who ever has the pain we must share it... Under capitalism people don't care, but under the charter we will all do things together" [Interview, R Dibekoane, 10/1/89].

A comparable structure to the SSB emerged in Apex squatter camp. Within the camp there was a section reserved for Pulanas. New arrivals would firstly present themselves to the Pulana Kgotla

which met every weekend. The Kgotla would allocate them a site for a shack after the arrival had been introduced to the main Kgotla under Markus Madingoane. The Pulana Kgotla would try any cases that arose between households. If a party was not satisfied with the decision, they were then able to appeal to the main Kgotla. In the event of a death it would also collect funds for the transport of the body.

The leadership of the Pulana Kgotla had a direct relationship with the chieftaincy in the countryside. The chair of the Kgotla was a close relative and Induna of a functioning chief, while the secretary was Matsiketsane Mashile, the grand-son of the (alleged) Paramount. Mashile was also Markus Madingoane's secretary at the main Kgotla. Mashile worked at Amato textiles where he was shop-steward with African Textile Workers Union a South African Congress of Trade Union affiliate. His involvement in Squatter politics did not prevent him and a number of followers from attending meetings called by the ANC in nearby Brakpan. He was to become a member of the ANC in 1955 and was later to take that experience back to the countryside where he opened a branch of the ANC.

Leadership of the squatter camp was not decided through elections. "Madingoane's leadership was not like today when one follows a voting procedure. He knew his tradition" [Apex resident quoted in Bonner, 1989, p23]. Mashile described Madingoane as "a frightening man...both a lawyer and a witchdoctor" [interview,MM]. In replaing the gap left by the absence of the chieftainship to their recently urbanised constituencies, the squatter leaders were expected to provide direction in both the material and the spiritual realm.

The Pulana Kgotla was to survive the dismantling of the camp and the movement of people into Daveyton. In Daveyton it continued to function until the late sixties.

Through the sixties and seventies, employment networks and the burial societys were to maintain links between the migrants while they were in the cities. In 1978 these networks were formalised in the creation of Leihlo La Naga.

The Eye of the Planet: Leihlo La Naga Organisation Movement

The organisation was formed in 1978 at the muncipality compound based at 17 shaft crown mines. "We called all Pulananas to 17 shaft". A number of networks were used to mobilise people for the meeting. Firstly, and according to my informants, most importantly, the burial societies were notified of the meeting. Next, workbased and compound networks were mobilised to come to the meeting. Lastly, chiefly representatives in the city were notified and told to alert their followers of the meeting. An interim committee were elected. The committee consisted of:

- a businessperson based in Daveyton
- a railway worker based in Soweto
- the clerk from the municipality compound

The aims of the organisation as listed on the constitution are as follows:
1) The realisation of the Mapulaneng's aspirations and convictions with the motto: Mapulana First.
2) The elimination of discrimination on the ground of Race, Tribe, Religion, language and sex; and instead create conditions in which equality of opportunity can be excersised.
3) The promotion and safeguarding of the welfare of Mapulaneng and her people within South Africa as it can be done by the Organisation Political means.
4) The protection of customs and cultural heritage of the people in Mapulaneng; that is, people constituting Mapulana nation.
5) The protection of civil and political liberties of the Mapulana throughout South Africa, therefore maintaining the rule of law.
6) The introduction of free and compulsory Education for all of Mapulaneng people and the creation of same and equal learning with similar facilities.
7) The promotion of social progress and the energetic development of a modern economy and encourage independent agricultural farming.
8) The establishment of co-operation between employer and employee in the economic sphere.
9) The ensurance [sic] of a common and undivided loyalty to all the people of Mapulaneng.
10) In all respect our Motto: "A RE THIKISANENG" (LET'S WORK JOINTLY) shall be maintained for the promotion of harmonious relations with our neighbours for the common good of all.

It is worth noting that membership of the organisation was open to any resident of Mapulaneng as well as "those who are of the Mapulana tribe by birth".

The organisation was to intervene in a number of contexts. These can be divided as follows:
1) Migrant support in the cities
2) The chiefs and migrant support in the countryside
3) The Lebowa government, Gazankulu and the Land Question.

1) Migrant Support in the cities

By 1978, the economy was begining to enter a recession following the withdrawal of foreign capital in response to the 1976 riots. Influx control was being enforced and accomodation was extremely limited given the government's policy of using accomodation as an indirect form of influx control. It is in this context that the organisation's attempts to support migrants in the city should be understood.

The first major service the organisation offered was to hire a bus to take migrants to Mapulaneng once a month. Members were often robbed on their way home in the trains and on the railway busses. The postal service was also an unreliable means of sending money to the rural household. A bus hired specifically

for members of the organisation would deliver migrants or their relatives to Mapulaneng without risk of losing their wages.

It is worth noting that regional loyalties were considered as important as ethnic loyalties. The organisation decided that the bus service was available to "carry members or a person who is trusted home every month from any ethnic group because LLN does not tribalise any person. Any person can join so long as he understands the whole issue" [interview, C Chiloane, 5/1/89].

The bus also served as an organisational base. "Before collecting monies there was a prayer and now collecting of balance of the deposit given to the bus. And then songs were sung and a meeting was held" [ibid]. The bus operated from 1978 to 1988 when "the breaking of the bus was made by taxis"[ibid].

Initally much of the support offered by the LLN was informal. "When somone was short of accomodation we would privately speak to our contacts at the hostels, either the security or the clerks for accomodation...When somone's wife was visiting and he lived in a hostel, we would arrange accomodation for him at a house so he could be with his wife." [interview C Chiloane, 5/1/89]. When a member lost his job, the organisational networks would be mobilised to find him another. If there was a complaint of an unfair dismissal the executive referred the member to the Black Sash advice office.

The Chair of the organisation was recognised by SATS as the chief worker representative at Johannesburg station. The chair used his contacts within SATS to organise a recruitment office at Mapulaneng. "From Mapulaneng most of the people in SATS were brought by Mashego [the Chair]" [Interview C Chiloane, 5/1/89]. The first secretary of the organisation also used his position as clerk in the Municipality compound to arrange for contractual employment for people from Mapulaneng.

The Chair also spoke to a number of other firms on the Witwatersrand where he had friends who would help him speak to relevant people. "Mashego spoke to the municipality, the Brussel Foundary, Fred and Sons and the Jam factory that is now Nampak" [C Chiloane, 5/1/89]. These jobs were often reserved by the organisation for members who had worked on the mines for five years and were qualified to look for jobs in the cities. It is worth noting that the jobs organised in this way were independent of the labour bureaus and any chiefly interventions.

In 1982 the Chair and the Secretary of LLN joined the South African Railway and Harbour Worker's Union (SARHWU). "Before SAR came to SATS, Mashego was an operator of this Legotla [the works committee]. When SATS started they took him as a head rep from SAR... We wanted a union for the whites so all the powers will be the same. But they refused us. This is when we went to SARHWU" [C Chiloane, 5/1/89]. The two executive members then took it upon themselves to organise a number of stations at the Witwatersrand. "We were called to organise them in SARHWU and LLN too. In the

other way we were doing both angles, not one. That was a better idea" [C Chiloane, 5/1/90]. The Chair of LLN was to become the senior shop-steward at Johannesburg station and a key figure in the 1977 strike. During their December holiday the two executive members also organised a number of stations in the Eastern Transvaal.

2) Leihlo La Naga and the Chiefs

"The aim was for LLN to be our voice in the countryside" [interview, LLN exec, 13/12/89]. A number of complaints were labelled against the chieftainship:
1) Decisions are made at the Kgotla during the week without migrants being present.
2) School building funds were being embezzled.
3) The chiefs were setting taxes of R5 for water, R2.50 for a clinic, R10 for the chiefs car and the chiefs were demanding gifts before a migrant could get a permit to apply at the labour bureaux.
4) The councils of the Tribal Authorities were only business people. "That is why we make this organisation. Businessmen do not feel pity for the poor" [Interview, LLN exex, 13/12/89].

The migrant organisation had an alternative vision of the role of the chieftainship. "The chief should just call his people for Lekgotla and settle any cases brought foreward. A chief before was not to be paid by the government. It was only for a chief to make peace with his tribe" [interview, C Chiloane, 5/1/90]. The aim of the organisation was to open up an office in Mapulaneng to organise jobs and accommodation for migrants independently of the chieftaincy. The organisation also hoped to work with the chiefs to develop the communities' infrastructure and

The organisation attempted to implement its vision by coopting the chieftaincy into its ranks by establishing a working relationship with the chiefs in the development of the communities' educational fascilities and infrastructure. Chiefly cooperation was essential for the organisation to hold meetings in Mapulaneng. At this stage we are in a position to continue the narrative around the history of the organisation.

The interim committee organised a meeting at the magistrates office to introduce itself to the chiefs and the magistrates and to get "registered" by the relevant authorities. They were very aggressively received and the credentials of the businessperson was not accepted as he was permanently resident in "the cities". The meeting refused to register the organisation.

The committee was able to organise a meeting at the Molotele Tribal Authority to introduce itself to the chiefs and the residents of Mapulaneng. At the meeting a number of complaints were raised.
- The land shortage caused by the division of the land into Lebowa and Gazankulu.
- People from Mapulaneng were not receiving jobs from the Lebowa

government.
- There was no "university" in Mapulaneng and it seemed doubtful that the Lebowa government would build one. It was resolved that LLN should try and organise a university as this would "help create unity".

However, at the next meeting, the three buses of migrants were met by police. "LLN was told that it was poison." The meeting continued despite the fact that it was surrounded by the police "aiming machine-guns at the group".

On the Rand elections were held for the urban areas executive committee. Before the creation of LLN the means of communicating with the rural areas were through chiefly representatives living in the urban areas. Each township had an Induna representing one of the nine Tribal Authorities in Mapulaneng. Hence, each township had nine Indunas. If a person had a problem he was supposed to approach the Induna from the Tribal Authority where he lived. The aim of the election was to streamline this system into one chiefly representative per township for the whole of Mapulaneng. The purpose of the streamlining was allegedly to build a "spirit of Mapulaneng" not just of each tribal authority; to create unity amongst the Pulanas. Indunas were chosen from eleven townships to form the urban areas executive committee along with the general chair and secretary who were railway workers based in Soweto. The meeting was attended by the recently elected member of parlianment for Mapulaneng S W Mashile.

However, at a later date the "real" elections were held. At these elections the "top urban executive" committee was elected at a secret "Kgotla". Approximately eighteen members were elected. All the members of the "top executive" committee were workers. Five of the members were working at South African Transport Services. The remaining members worked at engineering factories and were domestic workers. There were two Apostolic Faith Mission Priests on the executive. Eight members had their homes in Mapulaneng under the jurisdiction of the Setlare Tribal Authority. Six members lived under Moreipuso Tribal Authority. Two members lived under Mashiloane TA and one member was drawn from the Thabagolo and Matibela TA. Two of the members were women. Members were drawn from a total of nine townships. Six members were from Soweto and three were from Daveyton.

It was this "top executive" committee that consituted the "reception committee" for Matsiketsane Mashile's return from the Ciskei in 1978. A date was arranged to meet Mashile "with gifts" and hold a feast at the site of Mashile's house (which now fell under Gazankulu). "On the set date, the chiefs of Mapulaneng decided that LLN had chosen Matsiketsane to be the paramount-chief of Mapulaneng. After this event all chiefs ignored us...Today, LLN is said to be for Matsiketsane" [interview, LLN exec, 14/12/89]. Implicit in Matsiketsane's return was the reopening of a succession dispute with the Setlare Tribal Authority making a working relationship with all the chiefs very

doubtful.

In 1983 the LLN backed the two Mashile brothers for the elections for the Lebowa Legislative Assembly. Five buses were sent for a meeting held at a Secondary School in the area. Despite a strong police presence, the meeting was held and the Mashile's candidancy was endorsed. The brothers took the two available seats. "They were sent to speak to the Lebowa government as LLN" [interview, LLN exec, 14/12/89].

A working relationship was established between the two brothers and the migrants. "Every time we didn't want to see a chief because we had an MP in the Lebowa government" [Interview, LLN exec, 14/12/89]. The MPs intervened in a number of issues: "There were problems with the police. We were not able to pay taxes on all items eg dogs, goats, bicycles, stands, donkeys, Lebowa tax, chief taxes at the end of the year...Lebowa police made a roadblock. If you hadn't paid taxes, then you were jailed and fined R50. MP Mashile fought all these items until he defeated them. Women who were making gardens in the valleys were arrested. Segopela [the younger of the two brothers] fought it" [Interview, LLN exec, 14/12/89].

The Mashiles also assisted in employment related problems. They made applications to a number of large companies to "have Pulanas in large numbers" that is to open up recruitment offices in Mapulaneng. They followed up on pension schemes for widows when there husbands died. They intervened on behalf of workers in the case of unfair dismissals (very often with success). They became "a community advice centre". The Mashile's became the migrant's voice in Mapulaneng.

A branch of LLN was opened in Mapulaneng. This branch was then supposed to constitute the "head-office" of the organisation. In order to understand to constituted the executive of the branch it is necessary to briefly deviate into the effects of the decline of the chieftaincy. The decline of the chieftaincy resulted in a substantial vacuum at a grass-roots level. This vacuum manifested itself in confusion amongst the bureaucracy as to under whose jurisdiction a particular administrative task lies. To this must be added that fact that bureaucrats in Lebowa, as a rule, are not effectively accountable to their superiors or the Lebowan populace for their actions. This has resulted in a number of possible channels to follow in order to get things done. Hence, this vacuum could provide a space in which an Induna, agricultural officer or even a clerk could exert an arbitary, corrupt and extremely oppressive bureaucratic power. Or, on the other hand, as Miedzinski points out, "While absolute confusion dominates the rural power structures, it is this very confusion that generates the alternative, legitmate power structures. It is those who can assert the power to regulate people's lives who emerge to fill the space created by the breakdown in the traditional and imposed structures" [Miedzinski, 1987,p19]. Hence, we have the creation of opposing political factions and grass-roots leaders, struggling to assert their legitimacy, and

to build a following amonst the rural populace. In this competitive situation, going to someone for advice is no longer just a friendly act between neighbours, it is a reflection of the legitimacy, effectivity and power that a particular faction wields.

Just as the migrants were drawn to the Mashile brothers so it was not long before alternative grass-roots leaders and factions, struggling with a corrupt and unaccountable bureaucracy, sought help from, and gave their support to, the Mashile brothers. In this way the two brothers created a vast network of supporters and forged a political culture specific to Mapulaneng. However, more importantly for our purposes, it was under the banner of the Mapulaneng branch of the LLN, that the alternative grass-roots leaders in Mapulaneng were formalised under a single organisational structure.

It was the Mapulaneng branch alongside the Mashiles and the Urban branches that a new struggle became central to LLN's agenda. The "Land Question" reopened the possibilities of having an alliance with at least some of the chiefs.

3) The Lebowa Government, Gazankulu and the Land Question

This section will examine how LLN attempted to maintain its definition of what land consitutes Mapulaneng. The organisation also tried to define what the appropriate form of regional government for the area should be.

The constitution of LLN defines the area of Mapulaneng as follows. "Mapulaneng refers to the area lying within the Lepelle (Olifants) River in the North from the Lebombo mountains up to the confluence of Lepelle and Tubatse (Steelpoort) Rivers; in the West is the Tubatse (Steelpoort) River leaving Dullstroom in the West down to Machadodorp including Carolina (Shakwaneng); in the South it bounds by an imaginary line including Barberten inside further down along the Lebombo mountains to Komatipoort from there a 35 degree joining the Lebombo mountain to the Olifants River." Hence, despite the fact that Mapulaneng as defined by the South African government comprises three relatively small segments of land in the North-Eastern Transvaal, according to LLN, Mapulaneng comprises most of the North-Eastern Transvaal. "We demand the whole place. If we accept what they give us we can find that we blundered".

According to the LLN the Pulana claim to the land is intrinsic. "Now we are pledged to show these people that according to our culture it is TABOO to buy land with money, land is brought by the SHEDDING OF BLOOD" [Minutes, MB, Feb 1984].

The first step the organisation took to try regain control of the land was to launch a campaign against the Lebowa government. At the beggining of 1984 the Mapulaneng branch of LLN called a meeting to forge an alliance between the Pulana and two other groupings, the Khutswe and the Pai.

At the meeting, the following history was offered: "We received them with open arms as our brothers who had fled from their tortured land (Shanganeese), We never knew we were sealing or frustrating our fate. We used to meet with them (Swazis and Shangaans) to decide the affairs of our land, at Bushbuckridge. Our union did not please the WHITE PEOPLE. Since EXPLOITATION would be difficult to cultivate. Then they deemed it fit to sow seeds of RESENTMENT amongst us, consolidating their claim while hiding behind a wall of TRIBALISM. They pointed out that we are not the same people since we are having different languages. A BAIT WAS OFFERED. Unfortunately, our brothers, SHANGAANESE, knowing that they had no land, accepted the bait, through lies and promises, they were predjudiced against us. My brother and I tried to raise a questioning voice, the consequence thereof was such to be regretted = DEPORTATION. During our stay in exile the land was divided amongst three tribes, viz: PEDIS, SHANGANESE AND SWAZIS." [Minutes of meeting, MB, 2/1984].

During the meeting there was a tension between holding Pretoria responsible for the divisions and equating the homeland governments with their ethnic groupings. "All these was brought into existence by Pretoria. Pretoria struggled to divide and sow seeds of resentment against we africans" was mentioned alongside the following: "How long do they (Lebowa) think we can endure this drudgery, for the sake of the PEDIs and their sly and cunning attitudes".

At the meeting the alliance was forged with the Pai based on the complaint that as non-Swazis living in KaNgwane, they were being discriminated against in the same way that the Pulanas were discriminated against by Lebowa. "A complaint [made at the chiefs court] against the Swazi subject is regarded as a torture against the government or Tribal Authority. This is very frustrating indeed" However, the alliance was forged out of more than the common experience of discrimination. "Alas, the three tribes are now coming together to bridge the gap that was opened by central government. "LET US UNITE AND FRUSTRATE THE EFFORTS OF OUR ENEMIES, JUST LIKE WHEN OUR FOREFATHERS FOUGHT AGAINST THE SWAZIS TOGETHER AND DROVE THEM AFTER THEY HAD SUFFERED MANY CASUALTIES OR DEATHS" [Minutes, feb 84].

By the end of 1984, the "land question" was to come to a head. The Consolidation Commission changed a boundary between Mapulaneng and Gazankulu which resulted in the loss of a relatively small triangle of land. However, the loss of land was percieved as symbolic of the process of land dispossessin that accompanied the creation of Gazankulu. The result was a violent clash between residents of Mapulaneng and Gazankulu which resulted in the burning of at least 45 houses. The Mapulaneng branch of LLN organised the Mapulaneng side of the conflict at a physical, diplomatic and legal level.

A further result of the conflict was the withdrawal of Tsonga

from school in Mapulaneng. Tsonga parents allegedly retaliated by damaging four schools in Mapulaneng. Despite attempts to reverse the language teaching situation, for once the Mashiles and the chiefs agreed that there would be no Tsonga at the schools. There is no doubt that specifically anti-shangaan feeling in Mapulaneng had reached a new height. This was explained by a local leaders as follows: "It is no good explaining to the people abour Pretoria, when they are the ones taking your land now".

The urban branch of the LLN launched a campaign to pull Mapulaneng out of Lebowa and back under central government. There was some debate as to weather to ask for a seperate Pulana homeland but that was only accepted on the provision that Pretoria refused to take direct control of the area. The reasons for rejecting a seperate homeland was largely that it would further entrench the powers of the chiefs. Furthermore chiefly disputes would increase and intensify: "If we try to rule ourselves there will be too much witchcraft. We will have dug a grave to bury a corpse only to find parts of the body out in a couple of days" [interview, C Chiloane, 5/1/90]. There would be a number of advantages of being administered by the central government. Under central government, the communities would no longer have to build their own school and clinics. Pensions payments under central government would also be more reliable. The organisation also hoped that the Mhala district of Gazankulu (ie the part of Gazankulu adjacent to Mapulaneng) would also fall under Pretoria, hence ending the conflict between the two areas for "once and for all".

The LLN launched the campaign by calling a meeting of the chiefs to nominate members of the Tribal Authorities to join LLN for the campaign. However, only one chief attended the meeting and nominated representatives.

The organisation approached Peter Sole, an opposition Member of Parliament, who attempted to get clarification from the relevant government minister on the status of the area. When Sole had no success he referred them to the Transvaal Rural Action Committee for further advice. LLN then wrote to the Minister of Constitutional Development. If there had been any anti-Shangaan feeling in Mapulaneng, this was not reflected in the letter.

> "We have lived in Mapulana district as long as we can remember. Our forefathers came here long before the white man. We let the Shangaan people live amongst us when they needed a place to stay. We lived in peace with them...If this is not possible, we would like to be part of central government again. This might be best because we would not be in any homeland and these governments would not be always fighting over our land. This also means that we would be certain that we can keep our South African citizenship like Mr P.W. Botha promised" [Correspondence to Wilkens, 29/10/85].

In a further letter, the organisation denied any popular local involvement in the conflict: "Here, you have redrawn boundaries

without consulting us, the people involved. Instead you only consulted the Lebowa cabinet...
We earnestly request that the central government take over this land because Lebowa and Gazankulu are fighting over it and there is no peace. This has been going on since 1984 when there was fighting at Buffelshoek....We do not want to fight anymore at Mapulaneng and do not want to be mixed up in a fight between Lebowa and Gazankulu" [Correspondence to Wilkens, 22/10/86].

Clearly, ethnic organisations project themselves in different ways to different audiences. As yet there have been no positive replies from the central government to these approaches.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that ethnicity should not be dismissed as a construction from above. Ethnic ideologies have powerful resonances to those living them, and as a result, are sites of intense struggles. Implicit in these ideologies are powerfull counter-hegemonic assumptions to those definitions propogated by the ruling grouping. It is towards this potential that political analysts should be sensitive.

Ethnic ideologies are also not necessarily ethnically exclusionist. This paper has shown how, in certain instances, ethnically based organisations have articulated fundamentally with broader organisations and struglles.

Ethnic ideologies project themselves in different ways depending on the audience. At one level, when mobilising the masses in times of crisis the disource of LLN was "tribalistic". However, in the context of its internal meetings and in its representation to outsiders, specifically the South African government, the organisation presented an entirely different face. It is towards these ambiguities that analysts should be sensitive.

This paper has attempted to show how an ethnic ideology has been defined from below and implemented into organisational practice. However, the presence of an ethnic ideology was not in itself sufficient to ensure unity amongst all sectors of the population and state tolerance of the organisations activities. The issues transcended the immediate significane of the ideology.

* This paper is still very much work-in-progress and under researched. It has the status of a research programme rather than a completed work. Hence, it is not for quotation with authors permission.

Thanks are due to Peter Delius for his invaluable help and advice. Without Clive Glaser this paper would not be intelligable. Special thanks to the LLN exec, especially Cornelious Chiloane.

Interviews

(All interviews performed by the author).

C Chiloane (CC), 16/8/89, Soweto.
5/1/90, Soweto.

LLN Exec, 13/12/89, Soweto.
14/12/89, Soweto.

R Dibekoane, 10/1/90, Johannesbburg.

Unpublished Material

Minutes of the LLN: Soweto Branch (SB).
Mapulaneng Branch (MB).

Bibliography

Bonner P, The Politics of Black Squatter Movements, Unpublished, 1989.

Mayer P, The Origin and Decline of Two Rural Resistance Ideologies, In Meyer "Black Villagers in Industrial Society", (1980)

Mdluli P, Ubuntu-Botho, Transformation, no 5 , 1987.

Vale L, The Creation of Tribalism, Berkley Press, 1989.

Webster D, Abafazi Bathonga Bafihlakala, (Unpublished) 1989.

Zierfogel D, The Eastern Sotho, ? (1954).