

THE TRIBAL PARADIGM AND ETHNIC NATIONALISM: a case study of political structures in QwaQwa

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In South Africa 'traditional' chieftainships and tribesmen of all sorts saturate the media. The colonial categories of Tribe and Chief appear to be as entrenched and as unchanged as ever, albeit enmeshed now in 'homeland' civil service bureaucracies. Co-opted 'homeland' leaders commonly espouse ancestral ties with great chiefs of the past. The composition of 'homeland' government cabinets evoke a picture of dynastic rule through royal lineages. Homeland residents are called upon to identify with a tribal name as a necessary affiliation for obtaining citizenship and material rights in their 'homeland'. In short, the tribal paradigm appears to have been successfully integrated with the broader ideology of Ethnic Nationalism, and to have remained a significant structural basis of 'homeland' government.

The political reorganisation of South Africa's reserves poses a particular problem for the analysis of political process in these territories. Tribe and Chief are undoubtedly remain powerful ideological categories. Yet, as is all too evident in the 'homelands', neither Ethnic Nationalism, the tribal paradigm, nor correspond with the material conditions of the majority of 'homeland' residents. They also fail to explain how colonial categories of government serve the political and material interests of 'homeland' leaders.

To resolve this paradox a first premise is to avoid face value treatment of the categories, Tribe and Chief. While understanding that they are more complex than just a decaying edifice of class interests now being eroded by capitalist interests in the 'homelands'. Their persistence suggests complex processes within the political structures of the 'homelands'. In order to understand these processes, this paper focuses on the manipulation of the colonial categories by co-opted 'homeland' politicians in order to highlight the dynamic of political and ideological structures of Ethnic Nationalism.

For the purpose of this discussion, the paper focuses on Qwa Qwa.¹ Qwa Qwa is situated at the juncture of Lesotho, the Orange Free State and Natal. Previously known as Witsieshoek, this reserve became the legislated 'homeland' known as Basotho Qwa Qwa in 1974. Qwa Qwa is supposed to be the place of residence for Africans whom the South African government has

designated to be 'South Sotho' people. The area of Qwa Qwa is approximately 480 kms,² containing one town called Phuthaditjhaba. Over a third of the territory consists of mountain slopes while on much of what used to be arable land now stand large shanty towns that house most of the *de jure* population of 500 000.

Since the 1950s aspirant leaders in Witsieshoek have organised themselves around the South African government's emerging political programme for this and other reserves. This programme, commonly titled as 'Separate Development', proposes that 'tribes' which share a common language, territory and history be brought together to form a national ethnic entity. For Witsieshoek, this programme has virtually run its course. From the 1950s to 1975 authorities of the two designated political units in the reserve, the 'Bakoena' and the 'Batlokoa' 'tribes', were brought together to constitute administrative bodies capable of taking on more responsibility for the government of the reserve as a whole. During 1975, Witsieshoek became Qwa Qwa, a self governing territory with its own legislature and civil service. The fledgling legislative assembly was expanded to include members elected from the recently created 'South Sotho' citizenry and subsequently, a Chief Minister and his Cabinet were appointed to manage the newly formed ministries. The official perspective is that Qwa Qwa will gain its independence at some stage in the future in the manner of the Transkei, the Ciskei, Bophuthatswana and Venda.

Qwa Qwa seems to have successfully welded its tribal political structure into the broader ethnic nationalist paradigm. Several points need to be addressed, however, to comprehend political processes in this 'homeland'. Firstly, the installation of the ethnic nationalist paradigm has become a lynchpin of conflict amongst co-opted and aspirant leaders in the territory. In that conflict, the political structures of the past and the present have been manipulated. Secondly, the manipulation of those structures, and of Separate Development generally, by local actors has opened new channels for the abuse of political authority and, hence, made Qwa Qwa more susceptible to authoritarian government.

Thirdly, between the ideology of Tribe and Chief and the new reality of an ethnic nationalist 'homeland', there are contradictions which are significant because the former has some popular legitimacy. Finally, the current conflict between local actors and its discussion by residents commonly eschews recognition of class interests and any challenge to the entire state construction of ethnicity.

THE TRIBAL PARADIGM AND SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT IN WITSIESHOEK

When Witsieshoek became subject to Apartheid legislation it had been a reserve for nearly a hundred years. The reserve was formed in 1867 by the Orange Free State government to accommodate a group of refugees from Moshoeshoe's Basotho polity. The leader of the refugees was Mopeli Mokhachane, half brother of Moshoeshoe, and previously a chief (*morena*) within the latter's political hierarchy.

Mopeli Mokhachane negotiated a treaty with the Orange Free State government independently of Moshoeshoe as a result of an accumulation of events. During 1867, the colonial forces once again had military control over much of the land used by Moshoeshoe's followers. Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest that Moshoeshoe's authority over his subordinates was in doubt. In 1866 his son, Molapo, who was the chief of many communities in what is now north eastern Lesotho, conceded this land to the Orange Free State government in a private treaty (Thompson, 1975:288-90). There also seems to have been some intrigue amongst Moshoeshoe's other sons at this time over the political future of the Basotho polity,² and Mopeli Mokhachane's own future as a chief was in doubt as a result. By August 1867 Mopeli Mokhachane had concluded his treaty with the Orange Free State government and subsequently he left for Witsieshoek with a following of approximately 700 people (J de v mis, vol 43, 1866:29).

Although Mopeli Mokhachane's followers were no more than refugees of war led by a competent leader with a few trusted advisers, the treaty with the Orange Free State government elevated the identity of the group. Once under the jurisdiction of the settler republic, Mopeli Mokhachane became the chief ('Kapitein') above a stratum of subordinate chiefs ('onderhoorige kapiteins') of the 'Bakoena tribe' (Eybers (ed), 1981:320; 325). Colonial construction of African political units had deemed that Mopeli Mokhachane's clan name (shared by all his agnates within and beyond the Basotho polity) identify specifically his own following, and thus the 'Bakoena tribe' was born.

The experience of Mopeli Mokhachane and of his followers indicates the economic reasons for the formation of 'tribes' on the highveld. Indigenous pastoralists and farmers needed land which was rapidly coming under the control of the colonial settlers, and which was only being allocated to recognisable groups. Hence, it was in the interests of many African refugees to form groups according to colonial settler conception of African society. In this manner Witsieshoek was settled by two more groups between 1867 and 1875.

Identified throughout the colonial area as the 'Makholokoe' and 'Batlo-

koa' tribes, these groups were no more than splinter formations from a number of chiefdoms which were disintegrating in the face of the colonial invasion of the highveld (Keegan, 1983). Both of these groups were settled on land separate from each other and from Mopeli Mokhachane's following. The status of the different groups in relation to each other, however, was not fixed. In terms of the 1967 treaty, Witsieshoek was the territory of the 'Bakoena' tribe. Yet, although oral tradition records that Mopeli Mokhachane objected to the immigration of other 'tribes', he was overruled by the Orange Free State government. Instead, Mopeli Mokhachane retained a status as the most senior African authority in the reserve.

Nonetheless, informants on the history of the 'Makholokoe tribe' assert that this community remained an autonomous unit until 1910 when their chief agreed to its incorporation into the 'Bakoena tribe'. In contrast to this, oral history records that the 'Batlokoa tribe' consisted initially of about 50 people under the leadership of Koos Mota who, despite asserting territorial independence for his following, accepted a position as a chief subordinate to Mopeli Mokhachane.

This somewhat flexible construction of administration in the reserve marked the parameters of the tribal paradigm in Witsieshoek. The early years of the twentieth century witnessed the formalisation of tribal divisions in the reserve. On the basis of *de facto* existence of a 'Batlokoa tribe', the 'Batlokoa' chief used a personal dispute with the 'Bakoena' paramount chief to obtain official demarcation of the reserve into two tribal areas in 1925.

Although the political structure of the reserve gave the impression of an insular society, this was not matched by the economic conditions of the residents. Shortage of arable land was a growing problem (Report of the Native Land Commission, UG 22, 1916) such that many residents were migrant wage workers. This contradiction became fully apparent during resistance to agricultural betterment schemes which began in the 1930s, and which culminated in a popular but unsuccessful rebellion in 1950 (Hirson, 1977; Moroney, 1976).

As the populace rallied around individual leaders, including chiefs and migrant workers, and local community organisations, the authority of the 'Bakoena' chieftainship as a whole crumbled. Popular respect for the 'Bakoena' paramount chief faded as his moderate but unsuccessful negotiations with the colonial authorities were openly challenged by militant chiefs and individuals who rallied under the banner of a militant group called *Lingangele* ('Those who stand firm') (Lodge, 1983:272). *Lingangele* appears to have been a militant faction formed by some members of a local migrant worker association known as *Leihlo le Sechaba* ('Eye of the Nation')

which had links with the Communist Party of South Africa (Hirson, 1977:124; Lodge, 1983: 270-73).

Furthermore, political affiliations were confused by the successful resistance of the 'Batlokoa' tribal area residents led by the regent and later, by her son and heir, Wessels Mota. Throughout their campaign the 'Batlokoa' leaders relied on the legitimacy of the tribal structures to achieve their aims. For instance, those people who were prepared to accept the South African authorities' regulations were threatened with expulsion from the tribal area. Also, according to informants, livestock culling regulations were sidestepped by the leaders' persuasion of the colonial authorities that yearly slaughtering of livestock during initiation ceremonies were effectively an indigenous culling programme.

The state Commission of Enquiry once the rebellion was put down never came to grips with these developments, locked as it was into the tribal perspective on African societies (Commission of Enquiry, 1951). In turn, the Separate Development programme accepted the tribal paradigm as a basis for projecting the broader horizon of ethnic nationalism.

Separate Development in Witsieshoek was implemented in the same way as in the other reserves. The 1951 Bantu Authorities Act which outlined the programme was applied to Witsieshoek in 1953. In terms of this Act, political authority in the reserve was divided between two 'Tribal Authorities', one for each designated tribe. Each Tribal Authority had to include 'the chief or headman of the tribe or community in question and councillors'. In Witsieshoek, the 'councillors' were nominees of the 'Bakoena' paramount chief and of the 'Batlokoa' chief. The Tribal Authorities were empowered to administer community affairs within their respective tribal areas. In practice, however, their actions were dictated by the local magistrates who intervened between them and the Union government.

Proclamation R110 of 1957 outwardly ratified the tribal status of the African authorities in Witsieshoek. Chiefs and village headmen were to be appointed according to local custom but official recognition would be given only to two newly proclaimed offices, 'chief' and 'headman'. The new office of chief was that of the locally described position of *morena emoholo* (paramount chief). The new office of headman was effectively a composite office which described any territorial authority under the overall jurisdiction of the 'chief'. Consequently, the local distinctions in Witsieshoek between *morena emoholo*, *morena* (chief) and *ramotse* (village headman) were set aside.

The Promotion of Bantu Self Government Act of 1959 detailed the ethnic nationalist paradigm which was to be adopted in the reserves. Various reserves were identified with particular ethnic categories. Witsieshoek

was identified as the territory of the 'South Sotho' people. This Act also endorsed the creation of a 'Regional Authority' in each reserve. These bodies were to be superordinate to the Tribal Authorities and they were to be formed from the senior leadership in the latter agencies.

The Regional Authorities marked the government's intention to grant Tribal Authorities increasing responsibilities of government of the reserves' populations. In Witsieshoek these intentions were modified by the creation of a Regional Authority in both of the tribal areas during 1962. Each Regional Authority however, was subordinate to the executive authority of Messels Mota, chief of the 'Batlokoa' tribal area.

Both the 1951 and the 1959 Acts defined the next step in the evolution of ethnic identities amongst the African population of South Africa. Each reserve was to be allowed in time a 'Territorial Authority'. The Tribal Authority of each reserve would substitute the Regional Authorities and would be a fledgling legislative body with limited administrative powers over all other agencies in the reserve. In short, the creation of Territorial Authorities would grant the reserves a limited form of self government. In 1969, a number of Proclamations created the Basotho Ba Borwa (South Sotho) Territorial Authority for Witsieshoek (Government Gazette, 1969). This body consisted of the 'Bakoena' paramount chief, the 'Batlokoa' chief and six councillors from each Tribal Authority.

Shortly thereafter, legislation (the Bantu Homelands Citizenship Act of 1970 and the Bantu Homelands Constitution Act of 1971) prepared the way for the transformation of Witsieshoek into Qwa Qwa. Proclamation R225 of 1971 converted Witsieshoek's Territorial Authority into a Legislative Assembly. Then in 1974, Proclamation R203 converted Witsieshoek into a self-governing territory of Basotho Qwa Qwa and sanctioned the reconstitution of the Legislative Assembly to include 60 members. These members included 40 nominated tribal representatives (26 from the 'Bakoena tribe' and 14 from the 'Batlokoa tribe') and 20 elected representatives of the 'homeland's' citizens. The elected representatives were to be members of political parties which could be formed by 'South Sotho' people and which could contest a number of constituencies which had been created within and beyond QwaQwa.⁴

General elections were held in 1975 in which TK Mopeli (paternal uncle of the 'Bakoena' paramount chief) and his *Dikwankwetla* Party won 19 of the 20 available seats in the Legislative Assembly. TK Mopeli was duly elected as 'Chief Minister' of Qwa Qwa by the Legislative Assembly (Verbatim Reports, vol 9, 1975:3). Subsequently, he appointed members of his party and chief Messels Mota to head the six government ministries (Verbatim Reports, vol 9, 1975:8).

The *Dikwankwetla* Party repeated its initial victory in the 1980 and 1985 elections during which time the Legislative Assembly had been used to consolidate the ethnic nationalist paradigm. In 1983, TK Mopeli's government decided to increase the number of representatives in the Legislative Assembly from 60 to 80 (Verbatim Reports, vol 29, 1983:162-63). The number of the tribal representatives (40) remained constant but in future, there were to be 34 elected representatives and the government would also be allowed to appoint six nominated representatives from the public. In short, the potential capability of tribal representatives to block initiatives of the ruling political party was annulled.

Furthermore, during the same year TK Mopeli outlined a new map of the electoral constituencies which would be formed for the 1985 elections. Three electoral constituencies were drawn in Qwa Qwa in place of the single existent constituency (Verbatim Reports, vol 29, 1983:162-65). Since these new constituencies cut across the tribal area boundaries, the door was open for political parties to compete against the Tribal Authorities for the new political affections of the residents. Likewise, the creation of new 'farm constituencies' challenged the authority of resident village headmen and directed the attention of residents to the authority of a new 'national' government. These constituencies were created in rural areas outside Qwa Qwa to draw in people who had been designated 'South Sotho' but who lived on farms in the Orange Free State, Transvaal and the Cape province (Verbatim Reports, vol 29, 1983:164).

Juxtaposed to these developments was the Qwa Qwa government's codification of the 'homeland's' chieftainship through the 1982 Qwa Qwa Administration of Authorities Act. In the wake of this Act, Qwa Qwa was divided into ten districts to which the government appointed ten chiefs. According to the Act, Qwa Qwa contains two tribal areas located around the 'Bathlokoa (Batlokoa) tribe' and the 'Mopeli tribe' (previously known as the 'Bakoena tribe'). Both tribal areas have a paramount chief. In the 'Batlokoa' tribal area this chief was superordinate to three district chiefs while in the 'Mopeli' tribal area, it is superordinate to seven district chiefs. Within each district the resident chief is superior to the stratum of village headmen.

The main body of the Act specifies the regulations governing the tribal authorities. In each tribal area, the paramount chief has to form a 'Tribal Council' consisting of himself and his nominated 'councillors'. In practice, these councillors are largely the district chiefs and village headmen. The Tribal Councils are the main institutions of 'tribal government' and they exist to 'administer the affairs of the tribe(s) in general'. What constitutes 'tribal affairs', however, is subject to the decision of the

Chief Minister of Qwa Qwa. 'Tribal affairs' currently include a variety of concerns, ranging from land administration to flora and fauna conservation, to local health and welfare. Concerns such as education, building construction, pensions and trading licences are in the control of the ministries.

In addition to the Tribal Councils, 'Community Councils' are supposed to be formed to carry out similar functions to the former bodies. In fact, the Community Councils are not meaningfully separate entities from the Tribal Councils. A Community Council must include resident chiefs and village headmen, in addition to community elected adult, male councillors, but the Act neither defines 'community' nor specifies the number of councillors who may be elected.

Finally, the Act requires the formation of a 'Council of Chiefs' in each tribal area which must also include two village headmen and the chairmen of the Community Councils. These chiefs' councils are simply advisory bodies to the government ministries on the matter of duties and appointment of chiefs and village headmen.

Despite the complexity of the administration in Qwa Qwa, there is no ambiguity in the 1983 Act's perception of the type of society and the structure of authority in the territory. The chieftainship appears to be cast from a clearly defined African social mould. In reality, the Act reveals little of the actual history of local political power but its existence suggests a necessary restructuring of the tribal paradigm to subordinate the tribal authorities to the demands of ethnic nationalism. Likewise, Witsieshoek's legislative path from tribal reserve to nationstate casts little light on the contradictions which have developed within the territory's political institutions. The perspective on these contradictions which is offered below proposes that significant aspects of the material reality of political process in Qwa Qwa is to be found in the manipulation of Separate Development by local politicians.

THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN WITSIESHOEK/QWA QWA

The two outstanding figures to emerge during the era of Separate Development were Messels Mota and, since the early 1970s, TK Mopeli. Before 1970, Messels Mota had become the *de facto* supreme African authority in Witsieshoek. With the transformation of Witsieshoek into Qwa Qwa, TK Mopeli became the dominant politician in the territory. The changing political fortunes of these two personalities is a consequence of different reactions to Separate Development in Witsieshoek underscored by changing material interests in the territory.

Between the 1950s and 1974 the 'Batlokoa' and the 'Bakoena' authorities adopted different political strategies. Wessels Mota emerges during this period as a leader who exploited the features of the legislation which promoted political divisions of 'tribe' against 'tribe'. This strategy enabled him to raise the status of the 'Batlokoa tribe' *vis a vis* the 'Bakoena tribe' and in the process, his own status as a leader. The strategy of the 'Bakoena' authorities was to manipulate perceptions of the nature of African 'tribal' society and the history of the 'Bakoena' tribe. This strategy was used to reassert the primacy of the 'Bakoena tribe' and its chieftainship in the history of administration of the reserve. Significantly, both sets of strategies articulated popular attachment to land and the historical significance of agriculture for the African population. However crudely, these conditions were recognised in the tribal paradigm but in each case, their exposition was different.

The tribal paradigm had served Wessels Mota and his predecessors well as is evident in the official demarcation of a 'Batlokoa' tribal area in 1925, and in the residents' successful resistance against the agricultural betterment schemes. Resistance to these schemes, for instance, reflected economic interests in the 'Batlokoa' tribal area even though it was couched in terms of tribal custom. Government efforts to restrict herd sizes, to relocate villages away from mountain slopes and to create restricted grazing areas threatened local income from livestock, portended difficulties in using arable land to resite villages and implied increased government control over trade between residents and mohair traders from Lesotho.

Historical precedent pointed out a strategy for Wessels Mota but the Separate Development legislation provided the incentive for him to rise beyond his status as a tribal chief. With the institution of Tribal Authorities, the South African government effectively gave the 'Batlokoa' authorities political parity as a body with the 'Bakoena' authorities. It is not surprising then that Wessels Mota was the first African authority to accept Separate Development and to form a Tribal Authority (Rand Daily Mail, 01.03.74).

Subsequently, Wessels Mota was in a position to raise his own political rank. With parity at the level of the Tribal Authorities, he and his subordinates could block the establishment of a single Regional Authority and maintain that parity through the formation of two separate Regional Authorities. In turn, his appointment as the head of the executive committee drawn from these two bodies was undoubtedly influenced by the statutory political situation at the time. During this period the statutory leader of the 'Bakoena tribe' was the wife of the deceased paramount chief who was acting as a regent on behalf of her infant son. Her appointment was

considered unusual at the time as convention held that only men hold political office. In the context of the patriarchal attitudes of the population, Wessels Mota held a personal advantage, as a chief of a tribe and as a man, for recognition as the 'senior' authority in Witsieshoek. These accumulated conditions then put Wessels Mota in a position to obtain equal representation for the 'Batlokoa' and 'Bakoena' 'tribes' on the 14 member Territorial Authority, and for himself to be elected as the 'Chief Councillor'. As Chief Councillor, Wessels Mota had arrived at the highest political position then available in the reserve.

In response to the political ascendancy of Wessels Mota, the 'Bakoena' authorities did not contest the overt logic of Separate Development. Instead, these authorities manipulated two sociological conventions: one, that kinship in general and lineages in particular formed a fundamental basis of tribal social structure; and two, that tribes had a primordial attachment to defined territories and to particular traditions. By these means the 'Bakoena' authorities accumulated the necessary conditions to obtain a favourable dispensation in the political structure of an ethnic nationalist Qwa Qwa.

Settlement in the reserve by the 'Bakoena tribe' before any others, the primary status given to Mopeli Mokhachane by the colonial authorities, and the consistent prominence of the office of the 'Bakoena' paramount chief in the administration of the reserve, were empirical claims which could be elaborated as propaganda to influence the South African government. In addition the 'Bakoena' authorities propagated the inaccurate impression that political authority in their tribal area had always been held by a 'royal lineage' of Mopeli agnates. In fact, Mopeli agnates only began to constitute a majority of the chiefs during the reign of Ntsane Mopeli, Mopeli Mokhachane's successor. Yet, even by the 1950s, several chiefs and most of the village headmen were not Mopeli agnates.

Yet, Proclamation R1200 of 1957 added credibility to the 'Bakoena' authorities' claims. Following the rationalisation of political offices to 'chief' and 'headman', most of the Mopeli chiefs took the state salaried position of 'headman' and thus obscured from official sight the locally recognised village headmen (ramotse). One consequence of these developments was that legislation since the 1950s has spoken of the 'Mopeli tribe' in favour of the 'Bakoena'.

Another tactic of the 'Bakoena' authorities was to ensure that their tribal area remained the largest in the reserve. Whenever land was allocated to Witsieshoek as in the 1950s and in 1964 (Makhanya, 1970:193) they appealed successfully for its inclusion in the 'Bakoena' tribal area. As a result, they accumulated a scarce resource which not only attracted immi-

grants to their tribal area, thus making the 'Bakoena tribe' numerically larger than the 'Batlokoa tribe', but also refueled popular perceptions about the nature of African 'tribal' society.

By these means the 'Bakoena' authorities undermined the personal political victories of Wessels Mota, and accumulated significant empirical reasons to support proportional representation for the two 'tribes' in the political structure of the 'homeland'-to-be. Consequently, the newly constituted Legislative Assembly of 1974 included 26 representatives of the 'Mopeli tribe' and 14 from the 'Batlokoa tribe'. In the meantime, TK Mopeli who was a close advisor of Mampoi Mopeli, the 'Bakoena' regent and mentor of her heir (H Robinson, personal communication) had become involved in the political development of Witsieshoek as a member of the Territorial Authority. Following the success of his *Dikwankwetla* Party at the polls in 1975, his election as 'Chief Minister' was inevitable.

A new political era in Witsieshoek's history had begun. TK Mopeli inherited a complex political structure which had yet to be tested against the South African government's ideals of ethnic nationalism. Although the last decade has seen TK Mopeli consolidate his political position in Qwa Qwa, the many contradictions within the 'homeland' political structure have become apparent.

ETHNIC NATIONALISM IN QWA QWA

Since 1975, the elaboration of ethnic nationalism in Qwa Qwa has been on a separate tangent to the material conditions of the majority of the population. For the majority the economic realities of residence in Qwa Qwa are harsh. Most of the people are recent immigrants to Qwa Qwa who have been displaced from predominantly rural homes elsewhere in South Africa as a result of population relocation policies and changes in the broader economy of the country (Krause, 1982; Robbins, 1982; Morris, 1976; Sharp, 1982). An intimation of their plight is indicated in the extraordinary growth in the territory's population. Since 1970, this small 22km x 22km territory has witnessed increases in the *de jure* population from 23 860 to an estimated 200 000 in 1977, to 300 000 in 1980, to 500 000 in 1984 (Krause, 1982:2; Niehaus, 1984:13).

There has been no corresponding development of the economic infrastructure in Qwa Qwa. Much of the available arable land has been taken over for housing the population such that agriculture has a place only in history for most residents. Wage paying jobs are rare in Qwa Qwa. For instance, figures from one official record that in 1983 Qwa Qwa's three industrial sites in Phuthaditjhaba housed about 73 firms who employed only 4 382