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Witzieshoek: women, cattle and rebellion.

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University of Cape Town

WITZIESHOEK: WOMEN, CATTLE AND REBELLION

ABSTRACT

This study focusses on the 1950 Witzieshoek rebellion from a gender perspective. It examines the context within which the rebellion occurred, spanning a period from 1930 to 1950 and looks at the impact of the rebellion on the state.

The years leading up to the Witzieshoek rebellion were characterized by crisis as the government struggled to maintain authority over the African masses in general and African women in particular. Witzieshoek residents had to contend with growing deterioration of resources, migration and the implementation of a betterment programme. These had a differential impact on men and women in the reserve, leading to a loss of power in male authority structures and increasing autonomy for women. This fed into and moulded the development of a culture of resistance in the community which exploded in 1950 when the majority of the inhabitants revolted against the Native Affairs Department and the Trust.

The Witzieshoek rebellion was a desperate bid to return to older and more familiar ways of organization which had been based on the productive and reproductive capacity of women. The men and women who rebelled were denouncing the organization of the community on Trust and Departmental terms. The response of the state to the rebellion was to appoint a Commission of Enquiry. The Commission, operating at a time when 'native' policy was being fiercely debated, was unable to offer the kind of solutions that Nationalist Party policy would eventually demand. Both the rebellion and the Commission of Enquiry failed to bring about any meaningful change to the conditions in Witzieshoek.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AG	Attorney General
ANC	Additional Native Commissioner
AssNC	Assistant Native Commissioner
AO	Agricultural Officer
CC	Chief Charles Mopeli
CNC	Chief Native Commissioner
DNA	Department of Native Affairs
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
HAD	House of Assembly Debates
Mag	Magistrate
MNA	Minister of Native Affairs
NC	Native Commissioner
NRB	Native Reserve Board
NTS	Native Affairs (Naturelle Sake)
POA	Principal Agricultural Officer
SAB	South African Archive Depot
SEA	Secretary of External Affairs
SNA	Secretary of Native Affairs
US	Under Secretary
VAB	Free State Archive Depot
WVA	Witzieshoek Vigilance Association

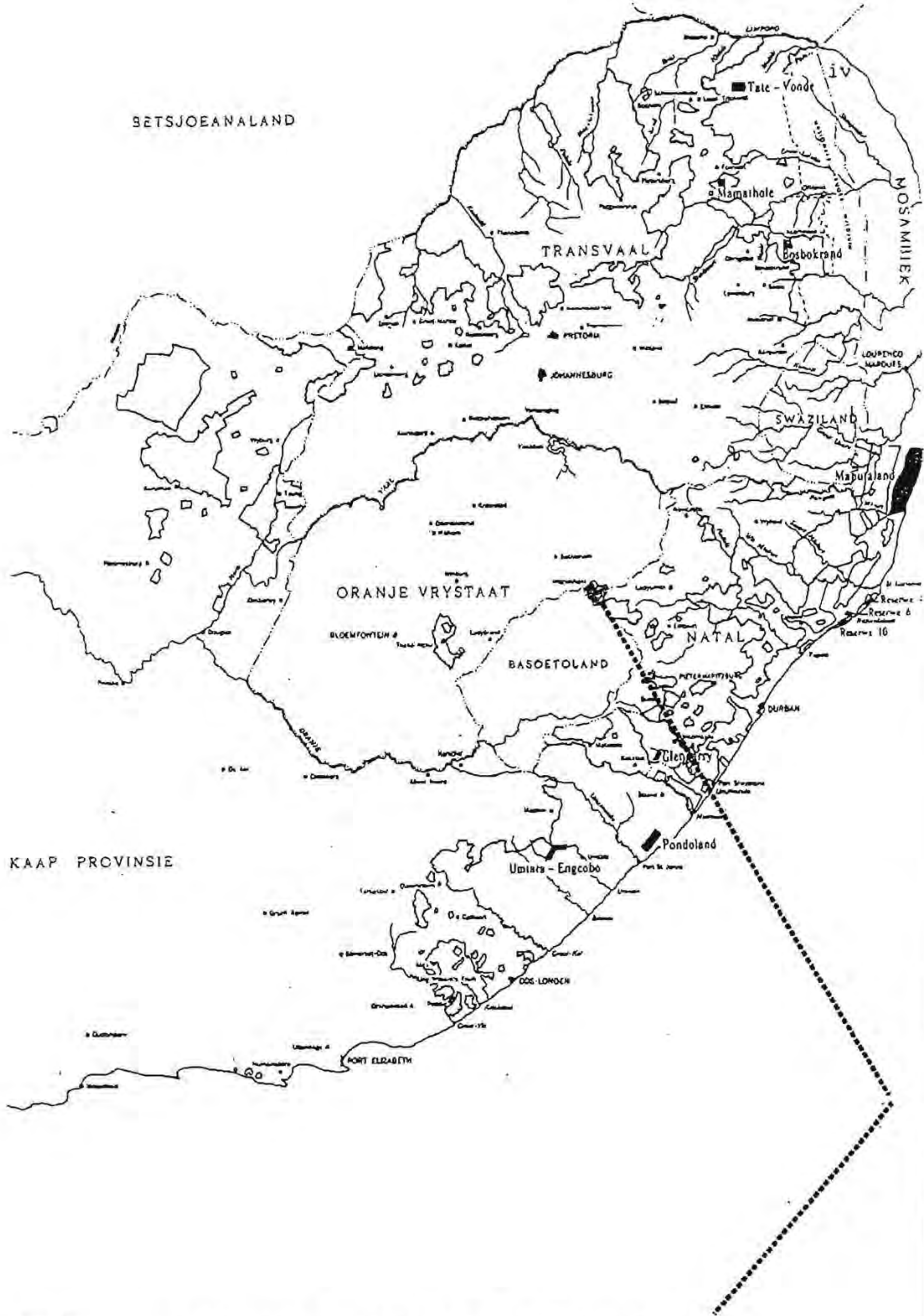

fig. 1 GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF WITZIESHOEK IN SOUTH AFRICA ,1954

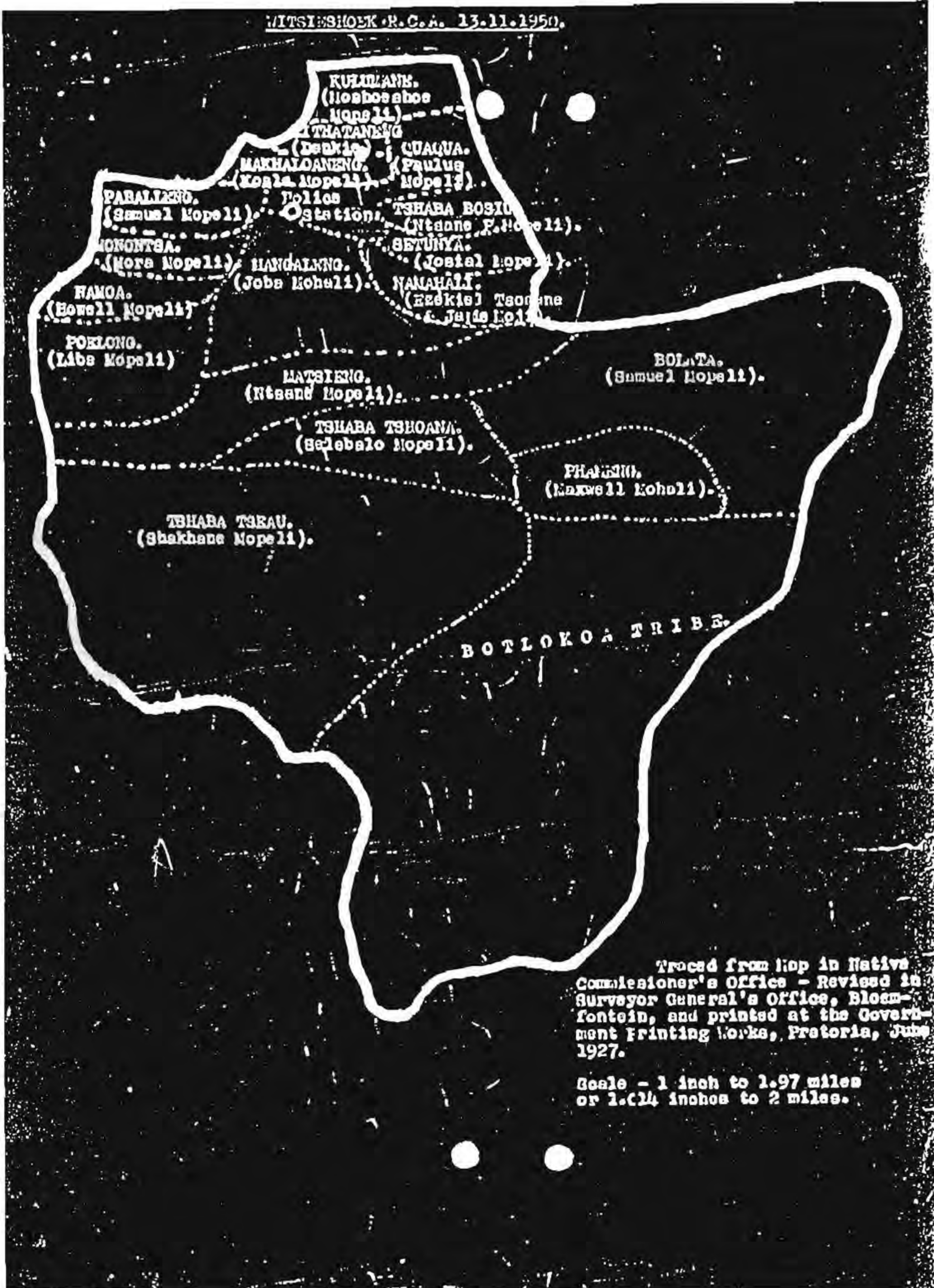

fig. 2 MAP INDICATING THE GEOGRAPHICAL BREAKDOWN OF WITZIEŠHOEK INTO VILLAGES AND THEIR RESPECTIVE HEADMEN.

fig. 3 LOCATION OF GRAZING CAMPS IN WITZIESHOEK, 1950

NOTICE

WITZIESHOEK.
26 - 8 - 1950

We the tribe of Mopeli' living in the Witzieshoek reserve, wish to make it public that, we do not want the Trust function on to stay in the Witzieshoek reserve.

We say, "Away with Trust with its Squatter System!" "Away with Trust with its Slavery System!"

We want, The Regime of the Late Chief Paulus Mopeli' that is, "The Tribal System"!

We want, "The Tribal System." "We love, The Tribal System!"

The Tribe of Mopeli'.
Witzieshoek.

TSEBISO

WITZIESHOEK
26- 8 - 1950.

Rona sechaba sa Mopeli' se phelang ka hara Witzieshoek, re tsebisa ka phatlalatsa hore ha re batle Trust ho Sebetsa kapa ho lula ka hara Witzieshoek.

Re re, "Trust e tsamaee le Melao ea eona ea khatello ea ho senya naha ena ea Khotso!" Re re, "Trust e tsamaee le Melao ea eona ea Bokhoba.

Re batla, "Puso ea mofu Morena Paulus Mopeli, e leng, Puso ea Sechaba" Re batla, "Puso ea Sechaba," Re rata, "Puso ea Sechaba"!

Sechaba sa Mopeli,

fig. 4 NOTICE DELIVERED BY WITZIESHOEK REBELS TO THE TRUST, 1950.

fig. 5 THE MARCH OF THE LINGANGELE, 1950

CHAPTER ONE

WITZIESHOEK: WOMEN, CATTLE AND REBELLION

INTRODUCTION

The Witzieshoek community[1] was illuminated for a brief period in 1950. Newspapers reported and Parliament debated a fierce clash that occurred between some members of the community and the police in November of that year. The community of Witzieshoek, however, had been engaged in a struggle with the Department of Native Affairs and the South African Native Trust for over a decade before this clash took place.

In 1936 parliament had passed the Natives Trust and Land Act which created a Native Trust body responsible for acquiring additional land for the reserves and supervising their development. The programme of development devised by the state and implemented by the Trust was labelled 'betterment' and was introduced to the reserves in 1939. Hence 1939 heralded a turning point in the organization and functioning of Witzieshoek as the Trust and its officials began to administer their programme of betterment.

The Trust imposed its own system of organization onto the Witzieshoek community, which severely disrupted the way in which the latter had operated prior to 1939. The relationship between the officials of the Trust and the

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[1] In order to avoid referring to a particular 'tribe' or 'group', I have chosen to use the concept 'community'. I have differentiated between the variety of people that make up the Witzieshoek community on pp. 11-14. In referring to Witzieshoek as a community, I am therefore not referring to a homogenous group of persons, but to a differentiated group of people that inhabit a particular geographical area.

Witzieshoek inhabitants was thus characterized by tension, which manifested itself in the form of resistance on the part of the members of Witzieshoek.

Resistance to the Trust over this period was not marked by a clear distinction between 'us and them'. Internal dynamics within the community and the national political economy had complicated the nature of resistance. The chief, Charles Mopeli, for example, occupied an ambiguous position in the community. On the one hand, he served as an organ of the Trust and the Native Affairs Department whilst on the other, he continued to represent the community's grievances against the Trust. The equivocal nature of his position was further destabilized by the interference of the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association[2] in the affairs of Witzieshoek. As the conflict between the Trust and the Mopeli community of Witzieshoek deepened, Chief Charles' ability to sustain his position as representative of both the Trust and the people was hampered. By the time resistance had developed over the decade into a full blown rebellion, the chief no longer represented the rebels.

The Witzieshoek rebellion which took place between 1949 and 1950 was distinguished by mass action, intimidation and sabotage. Male and female rebels took part in demonstrations, operated in a spirit of non-cooperation, destroyed fences and other symbols of betterment and intimidated officials of the Trust. Although the rebels' main aim was to eliminate the Trust, their major demand was that a Commission of Enquiry be set up to investigate the community's grievances against the Trust. This echoed a demand first made by the community in 1946. The state acceded to this order and set up a Commission of Enquiry which began its proceedings on 1 November. The Commission

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[2] Witzieshoek inhabitants working in the towns as migrant workers.

was not acceptable to the rebels, however, and their insurgency continued.

The climax of the rebellion was the clash between the rebels and the police late in November 1950 which resulted in sixteen African and two police fatalities and over one hundred African casualties. The state responded by bringing to trial those who had taken part in the clash and who could be identified. The majority of those accused were convicted and sentenced to a variety of jail terms varying from two months to five years. The state had managed to crush the rebellion.

This study focuses on the Witzieshoek rebellion. In an attempt to interpret the actions of the men and women who rebelled, it charts the social history of the community from the imposition of betterment to the rebellion itself. The community of Witzieshoek is examined through a gender prism from the 1930s through to the 1950s. The differential impact of change on the men and women in the community is examined with a focus which shifts from a global view of the South African political economy to a detailed local analysis of the Witzieshoek community itself.

Chapter outline

This interpretation will begin with a chapter on the state and its interaction with the African community from 1930 to 1950, placing emphasis on gender. This chapter identifies the framework within which the Witzieshoek community organized itself and interacted with the outside world.

The period was marked by fiery debates within the state over the question of controlling the African populace as a whole. Debates were sparked by the unprecedented

movement of Africans, particularly women, from the rural areas to the urban areas, the escalating deterioration of the reserves, the bold political initiatives of organizations fighting for the rights of Africans, the heightened level of unrest within the rural and urban African populations and the increasing autonomy of African women. The 1930s, 1940s and early 1950s saw South Africa in a state of constant flux and the Witzieshoek rebellion was a reaction to that.

The next chapter looks specifically at the changes within the political organization of the community. It places Witzieshoek within a national political and economic context and examines its transformation.

The community was governed by a patriarchal system of organization. Over the period from the implementation of betterment up to 1950, the nature of that organization mutated. Male authority structures and relations inherited from the past were superseded by new systems of male authority introduced by the Trust. Both the old and the new were challenged by the conditions created by the national political economy. The result was that the nature of male authority in 1950 was very different from that of 1939.

The implementation of betterment and the Witzieshoek community's responses to it constitute the focus of the ensuing chapter. Betterment represented a technical solution to the underdevelopment of the reserves for the Native Affairs Department, Trust and state. To the Witzieshoek community it represented an invasion, one which severely dislocated their social, economic and political relations. All contact between the community and the Department, Trust and state became determined by the conflict between imposed technical solutions and resistant domestic relations.

The Witzieshoek rebellion itself can be defined as a process spanning 1949 and 1950, when the community actively resisted the implementation of betterment and Departmental rule. The fourth chapter plots the events of this rebellious period and attempts to explain it.

The show-down between the Witzieshoek community and the Trust was inevitable, given the conflict generated by changes in male authority relations, the implementation of betterment and the community's interaction with the broader South African political economy. The rebellion was essentially an outcry against these changes and a demand to return to systems of political, social and economic organization of the past, a form of organization which had been based on male authority and the control of women's reproductive and productive capacities.

The Department appointed a Commission of Enquiry into the Witzieshoek rebellion in 1950. Assessment of the Commission's report will form the core of the discussion in the penultimate chapter.

The Witzieshoek Commission's report, as a public document, was an important part of the debate over the control of Africans in the 1950s. It was characterized by a masculine bias which affected the representation of women and their place in Witzieshoek society. In its composition it reflected, ironically, a spectrum of views on 'native' policy. The contradictions and inconsistencies within its own recommendations and assertions highlight the incongruities in the broader party political debate. Its ability to influence policy decisions was curtailed by some of its more contentious recommendations.

The final chapter brings the story of the Witzieshoek community to an end. It emphasizes that the Witzieshoek rebellion was a blend of atavism and nationalism, and

shows how a disruption of the organization and control of women was a threat that the community as a whole could not ignore. Women, cattle and rebellion were inextricably linked in Witzieshoek in this period.

A Brief History of Witzieshoek

Witzieshoek was located in the north east corner of the Orange Free State. It bordered Lesotho in the south and Natal in the east.[3] The reserve was surrounded by high mountain ranges and foothills and comprised hill areas and plateaus interspersed with ravines.

The Witzieshoek community had been established in 1866. The Bakwena had settled at Witzieshoek after their defeat by the Boers at Mabolela. The Bakwena were a part of the Basotho nation and had regularly assisted the Basotho under Moshoeshoe at Thaba Bosiu in their on-going war against the Boers. Once defeated, chief Mopeli had requested President Brand for a piece of land on which to settle his community. Witzieshoek was granted to him and he established his first village at Qua Qua.[4]

The Batlokwa community (a much smaller group of Basothos) joined the Bakwena in Witzieshoek in 1873. In the period under inspection, the Witzieshoek reserve was still shared by the Bakwena and the Batlokwa communities.

Although the introduction of Trust rule in 1939 affected both communities, it was the Bakwena who rebelled in 1949 and 1950. The Batlokwa had raised their objections to the Trust alongside the Bakwena in meetings between the Additional Native Commissioner, the chiefs and the

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[3] Refer to figure 1.

[4] A S Mopeli-Paulus and M Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle. The story of a Man and a Small South African Tribe', unpublished, pp. 3-4.

people. Their regent had also refused to submit her cattle for culling in the first cull organized by the Trust in 1942. However, these actions, plus a few letters of complaint to the Department of Native Affairs, constituted their only demonstration of resistance to the Trust between 1939 and 1949. The Bakwena, on the other hand, had a far more tempestuous relationship with the Trust in this period which was marked by constant correspondence, petitions, non-cooperation and the employment of legal advisers. The rebellion in 1949 and 1950 was evidently a Bakwena effort as all correspondence was signed on behalf of the Mopeli Tribe; moreover all those convicted in the trial were Bakwena. The report of the Commission of Enquiry appointed by the government states that 'no open demonstration ... was launched by members of this tribe [Batlokwa]', apart from one incident where some members of the Batlokwa community were present at a demonstration. This led the Commission to conclude that

> [t]here is no further evidence that they took any further active part ... in the disturbances and Chief Wessels Mota stated in evidence that members of his tribe did not take an active part in the organization of the agitators.[5]

The inactivity of the Batlokwa could be attributed to the fact that they viewed themselves and were viewed by the Trust and the Native Affairs Department as a 'tribe' distinct from the Bakwena. They occupied their own region and in fact often conflicted with the Bakwena over a variety of issues. Interestingly, a particular bone of contention was the border between the two communities.

This examination of Witzieshoek therefore concerns the Bakwena under Chief Charles Mopeli and thus the terms

[5] Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witzieshoek Native Reserve, UG 26/51, p. 15.

'Witzieshoek community' or 'Witzieshoek rebellion' are not strictly accurate. In the discourse of the state, the press and the trial in the 1950s, the Bakwena or Mopeli community became associated with Witzieshoek and hence the term Witzieshoek symbolized that community. For the purposes of this analysis, references to the 'Witzieshoek community' apply to the members of the Bakwena under the chieftainship of Charles Mopeli.

Peasants and Witzieshoek

In order to understand the inhabitants of the Witzieshoek reserve more fully, it is necessary to discuss their identity as a group. This is a problematic task from the start because the Witzieshoek community, like other South African reserve communities in the middle of the twentieth century, was made up of a heterogeneous mixture of people. Their relationships with each other, the land and the broader economic and political society were diverse. Sean Maroney, who analyzed the Witzieshoek rebellion in 1976, labelled this disparate group of people as peasants and it is here that this examination will begin.

The notion of a definitive peasantry is one of the most contested areas of history. Teodor Shanin was one of the first historians to define and discuss peasants as a group. He maintained, in 1966, that the root of the '"maddening" peasant quality'[6] lay in its inability to neatly slot into the concepts created in modern society. He attempted to harness the maddening peasant quality by identifying five characteristics peculiar to peasants and peasant societies. In his opinion, peasants became identifiable if their relationship to land was

[6] T Shanin, 'Peasantry as a Political Factor', in T Shanin (ed), Peasants and Peasant Societies, (England and Australia, 1971), p. 239.

'traditionally defined' and not necessarily constituted through 'legal ownership', if the 'family farm' formed the basic unit of peasant production and reproduction, if functions were performed at a relatively 'unspecialized level' and if a 'highly traditionalist and conformist culture' existed. Finally, he also pointed out that 'the peasantry is a pre-industrial social entity which carries over into contemporary society specific elements of a different, older, social structure, economy and culture'.[7]

Eric Wolf, a contemporary of Shanin, emphasized peasants' relationships with forces outside the boundaries of their localities. He felt that a critical feature of the peasantry was the fact that it was in some way dependent on and exploited by such forces. In essence, a peasant was at the mercy of 'asymmetrical power relations which made a permanent charge on his production'.[8] In 1973, Sydney Mintz challenged this assertion, arguing that the 'internal differentiation'[9] within peasant societies was as definitive as their exploitative relationship with an outside force. In his opinion, studies of peasant districts should stress their lack of homogeneity and should examine internal relations between the more and less powerful peasants as well as external relations with other rural groupings.[10]

Colin Bundy produced the first major radical study on South African peasants in 1979. Drawing on Wolf, Shanin and others he described an African archetype. The African peasant was a cultivator, who with the help of his

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[7] Ibid, pp. 240-244.

[8] Quoted in C Bundy, The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry (second edition), (Cape Town, 1988), p. 5.

[9] S W Mintz, 'A Note on the Definition of Peasantries', Journal of Peasant Studies, 1/1, (1973), p. 93.

[10] Ibid., p. 94.

family, fulfilled both their subsistence needs and outside demands, such as taxes. Although this peasant had 'recourse to a specific traditional culture', colonialism had introduced a new culture which was imposed on the old. The African peasant was also 'dominated economically, politically and culturally by outsiders in a wider society', yet the extent and nature of that dominance varied over time and space.[11] Like Shanin, Bundy viewed the development of a peasantry as a process which he referred to as peasantization.[12] He asserted that in the South African case, the formation of the peasantry was coupled with 'social differentiation' within the peasant class as a section of that class became proletarianized.[13]

Bundy was criticized by Frederick Cooper in 1981 and Jack Lewis in 1984. Cooper's article was the most constructive, making an important contribution to peasant studies in South Africa. He was mainly concerned with Bundy's argument about the re-organization of class structure within the peasantry. He criticized Bundy for failing to delve deeper into the point that peasantization and proletarianization led to class differentiation amongst the peasants. Cooper asserted that Bundy needed to ask questions about the class interests in these societies, for example, 'how they (farmers) maintained and reproduced their privileged access to resources'.[14]

Cooper recognized Willaim Beinart's achievement in filling the gap left by Bundy's research. In Cooper's

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[11] Bundy, The Rise and Fall, p. 9.

[12] Ibid., p. 10.

[13] Ibid., p. 13.

[14] F Cooper, 'Peasants, Capitalists, and Historians: A Review Article', Journal of Southern African Studies, 7/2, (1981), p. 290.

view, Beinart's analysis of labour migrancy and rural production in Pondoland managed to 'analyse the changing nature of agricultural production and the two-way relationship of the organization of production inside a local area with the wider structures of South Africa'.[15] Although Beinart shied away from talking about a peasant or peasantry in his thesis and rather spoke about rural producers, Cooper points out 'Beinart's study would make much less sense without Bundy's overview'.[16]

Rather than focusing on the variety of definitions and interpretations that the South African historiography has produced, the arguments raised by Bundy and Beinart will be assessed in the light of the historical experience of the inhabitants of Witzieshoek.[17]

By 1930, the kind of peasant that Bundy had defined was a rarity in the Witzieshoek reserve. Only a few members of the community had the resources to produce a surplus to fulfil, in Wolf's term, their rent obligations. According to the Principal Agricultural Officer of the Western areas in his evidence to the Tomlinson Commission, only twenty families out of a population of 13,000 people obtained their whole income from farming.[18]

The majority of the community were engaged in a variety of other relationships with the land, with each other and with the outside world. This is not surprising,

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[15] Ibid., p. 296.

[16] Ibid., p. 297.

[17] South Africa has produced other studies dealing with peasants or rural producers. Fred Hendricks, Helen Bradford and more recently Sean Redding are among the historians who have contributed to this field.

[18] Evidence presented to the Commission on the Socio-Economic Development of the Native Areas within the Union of South Africa, (Tomlinson Commission), vol: 23, Questionnaire: Agricultural Officers, District: Witzieshoek, p. 1.

considering that both Bundy and Beinart concede that by the middle of the twentieth century the notion of a peasant in the rural communities was not as applicable as it had been earlier in the century. The political, economic and social relations within Witzieshoek and other reserves and their intercourse with the broader South Africa had effectively curtailed the ability of so-called peasant farmers to produce a surplus. In Witzieshoek, this led to a number of relations which could no longer be defined as strictly peasant-like.

Firstly, there were those in the community who were forced into wage labour to supplement production on the land.[19] The Agricultural Officer of the Western Areas estimated that approximately 2,700 families obtained part of their income from farming.[20] This group of people could be defined as having ties to the land, but at the same time having to engage in some form of wage labour outside the district. An important dynamic of this group was that in the 1930s the vast majority of those engaging in wage labour were men while women continued to cultivate the land.[21] An anomaly in the work of Shanin through to Bundy and Beinart is the fact that scholars did not explore the implications of gender and gender relations on the peasantry or proletarianization. In Witzieshoek between 1930 and 1950, women continued to be the majority of the cultivators while their dependence on outside wages increased.

Another group inhabiting the Witzieshoek landscape were landless squatters. This group could be further divided into cattle owners who grazed their cattle on communal

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[19] SAB: NTS, 2210, 372/280, AssNC (Assistant Native Commissioner) to DNA (Department of Native Affairs), 27/7/1938.

[20] <u>The Tomlinson Commission</u>, vol: 23, Questionnaire: Agricultural Officers, District: Witzieshoek, p. 1.

[21] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Melle to Chief Native Commissioner (CNC), 28/9/1950.

land and those with no access at all to any resource within the reserve. The Agricultural Officer for the Western Areas put this group at a figure of 200 families.[22] The Native Commissioner in Witzieshoek reported in 1948 that 'there are 600 or 700 families with no land'.[23] Each of these groups were further dependent on wages generated from an outside source. As with those persons who had access to land, the landless squatters were predominantly women. The persons engaging in outside labour constituted a further category which could be divided into those who laboured in the towns in manufacturing and mining and those who laboured in the farming sector. Work in the towns was the most commonly used source of labour for men and women in Witzieshoek because it provided higher wages.

Despite having a variety of relations with the land and outsiders, members of the Witzieshoek reserve exhibited traits common to both the peasants described by Bundy and the rural producers described by Beinart. They too drew on a traditional culture, but at the same time had to deal with the infiltration of new cultures. Ironically, an argument forwarded by Redfield in 1955 and 1956 (criticized by Shanin as being 'too narrow'[24]) provides insight into the tension between traditional and new cultures in the Witzieshoek case.

Redfield claimed that the peasantry emerged as a result of the encroachment of the town or city on 'tribal' culture. Consequently, the local authority was subordinated to the city, leading to the breakdown of familial cohesion and traditional customs. Redfield

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[22] The Tomlinson Commission, vol: 23, Questionnaire: Agricultural Officers, District: Witzieshoek, p. 1.

[23] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Minutes of the Meeting of Chiefs and People, 8/7/1948.

[24] Shanin, 'Peasantry as a Political Factor', p. 255.

viewed the peasantry as 'people in transition. Inwardly they were orientated towards the local community, but outwardly they related to the town'.[25] Redfield's points about local orientation towards the town and subordination to the town, apply to Witzieshoek between 1930 and 1950. The increasing dependence of the Witzieshoek members on towns, particularly Johannesburg, and the interaction between town and countryside infringed on the political, economic and social organization of the community and hence on cultural interaction. Beinart, in his examination of migration and its impact on local production in Pondoland, contended that 'migrancy, along with other changes in the economy, created tensions over the control of resources in the family.' This in turn had an impact on traditional practices, such as bridewealth, as migrancy provided younger men with access to resources to fulfil their own marriage obligations.[26] This was also true of Witzieshoek.

Like the peasants found in the pages of Bundy's book, the Witzieshoek inhabitants shared a common experience of political, economic and cultural domination, which intensified with the implementation of betterment in 1939. They too exhibited social differentiation in their development over the 1930s and 1940s. However, Maroney's classification of the Witzieshoek inhabitants as pure peasants is inaccurate.

The Witzieshoek rebellion has received limited historiographical attention. Sean Maroney's analysis was a 'preliminary investigation' which appeared in Africa

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[25] S Chodack, 'The Birth of an African Peasantry' Canadian Journal of African Studies, *V/iii*, (1971), p. 340.

[26] W Beinart, 'Labour Migrancy and Rural Production; Pondoland c.1900-1950' in P Mayer (ed), Black Villagers in an Industrial Society. Anthropological Perspectives on Labour Migration in South Africa, (Cape Town, 1980), p. 86.

Perspective in 1976. His examination was followed in 1978 by Baruch Hirson's study of rural revolt in South Africa where the Witzieshoek rebellion was included as an example. In 1982, D A Kotze wrote a more detailed account of the rebellion and its causes for the African Studies Journal. Tom Lodge incorporated a brief analysis of the rebellion in his book, Black Politics in South Africa. The validity of these perspectives will be tested in the discussion that follows.

Conclusion

This thesis cannot claim to speak on behalf of the African women of Witzieshoek. It does however, attempt to weave a gender analysis into the story of the rebellion. The aim of this examination is not only to add to the history of the Witzieshoek community and South African history at large, but to demonstrate the necessity of gender as a tool of analysis when approaching the history of the South African rural landscape.

CHAPTER TWO

GENDER AND THE STATE IN SOUTH AFRICA 1930-1950

Introduction

> **Witzieshoek has been a scandal which has shattered the equanimity of this country. ... These occurrences are proof ... that the whole of the so-called native administration with its reserves, its synthetic tribalism, its puppet chiefs, has suffered a complete collapse.** [1]

In the period between 1930 and 1950, the 'native question' dominated the white political agenda. The problem of how to control and administer Africans was the most contested issue within the state as well as in the party political arena. At the heart of this matter was a debate between restricting the movement of African women to the towns, and enabling women and their children to settle permanently in the urban areas. The increased migration of women out of the reserves during the Second World War had created a predicament in the control and administration of the African populace as a whole.[2]

Linzi Manicom has argued that the state should not be viewed as a 'unitary and monolithic structure', but rather as a 'complex set of institutions'.[3] Between 1930 and 1950, a variety of state institutions attempted to

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[1] HAD (House of Assembly Debates), (1951), vol. 76, col. 8421.

[2] C Walker, Women and Resistance in South Africa (second edition), (Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1991), p. 70.

[3] L Manicom, 'Ruling Relations: Rethinking State and Gender in South Africa', (paper presented to the conference on 'Women and Gender in Southern Africa', Durban, 1991) p. 19.

administer and control Africans. The most important was the Native Affairs Department which presided over a bureaucratic mass of institutions and persons from a national to a local level.[4]

The Department was headed by the Minister of Native Affairs who was assisted by the Native Affairs Commission. The Secretary of Native Affairs was under the authority of the Minister and was expected to ensure that government policies and legislation was carried out and that the Department functioned efficiently. The Department was represented on a regional level by Chief Native Commissioners, who in turn presided over Native Commissioners who administered Departmental policies on a local level.[5]

1930-1945

Crisis in reserve production

Behind the ever-increasing movement of Africans from the reserves to the urban areas, lay a crisis in reserve production which was characterized by the degeneration of reserve resources.[6] The first half of the twentieth century saw the stagnation of production in the African reserves. The reserves, functioning as both dumping grounds for Africans and labour reservoirs, faced two

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[4] Summary of the Report of the Commission for the Socio-economic Development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa, UG 61/1955, p. 65.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Bundy, The Rise and the Fall, p. 224.

contradictory problems: lack of labour power and over-population.[7]

Over-population had occurred due to the fact that the reserves housed an expanding African population within restricted borders. Whereas population increase often resulted in landlessness and over-use of resources, the loss of labour power to the urban areas provided no relief. This was because African methods of exploiting resources effectively had been severely undermined by the migrant labour system which had operated from the previous century.[8]

The years between 1930 and 1945 saw the deterioration of the reserves and increased competition for resources. Already in 1930 the reserves were described as rapidly turning into 'rural ghettos'.[9] For the rest of that decade and up to 1945, those living in the reserves, including Witzieshoek, were forced to contend with gross over-population, erosion, disease, malnutrition, a decrease in soil fertility and lack of labour power. In addition, the permanent residents, consisting predominantly of women, had to contend with a series of droughts which plagued the reserves throughout the 1930s.

In Witzieshoek itself, pauper and famine relief were constant necessities from 1930 to 1945. In 1936 the community appealed to the Assistant Native Commissioner for an increase in the mealie supplies to the 'infirm and indigent people', arguing that the quantity supplied was 'inadequate'. According to Chief Charles, famine in the area was on the 'increase' and 'starvation' was a

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[7] F Molteno, 'The Historical Significance of the Bantustan Strategy', Social Dynamics 3/2, (1977), p. 18.

[8] Bundy, The Rise and Fall, p. 224.

[9] Ibid., p. 1.

threat.[10] This situation was largely due to a protracted drought that had occurred during the early 1930s. In 1940, the Native Commissioner appealed to the community to meet their local nutritional needs themselves as 'most' relied on 'imported mealies'.[11] In 1944 Chief Charles Mopeli reported that 'most' of the community bordered on starvation as a result of 'continuous rains and frost' which led to 'not as much as a dish full of grain' being reaped.[12] This crisis in reserve production in Witzieshoek as well as in other reserves had an impact on migration.

Migration

Migrant labour had become the 'dominant force in the social and economic life of the rural periphery of southern Africa' by 1930.[13] Migration before the late 1930s had predominantly been a male endeavor. For example, in 1936 fifty four percent of the adult male population was residing outside of the reserves.[14]

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[10] SAB: NTS, 7849, 46/336, Chief Charles (CC) to Assistant Native Commissioner (AssNC), 10/8/1936.

[11] SAB: NTS, 6814, 29/318, Minutes, Chiefs and People, 24/6/1940.

[12] SAB: NTS, 7849, 46/336, CC to Additional Native Commissioner (ANC), 30/5/1944.

[13] C Walker, 'Gender and the development of the migrant labour system c.1850-1930: An overview', in C Walker (ed), Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945, (Cape Town, 1990), p. 176.

[14] Bundy, The rise and fall, p. 225.

As most of those leaving the reserves had been men, the modus operandi of reserve life had been disrupted.[15] Male migrancy had not only disrupted women's productive and reproductive capacities and broken down the family unit, but women had to bear the burden of producing, without their male counterparts and with shrinking resources.

Although women had also begun migrating out of the rural areas as early as had men, their rate of migration reached significant proportions only in the 1930s. In 1936, 142.3 per cent more African women resided in the towns than in the beginning of the previous decade.[16] (This was a small percentage relative to the men in towns.)

Walker identified the 'deteriorating quality of rural life' as the chief reason behind migration in this period.[17] Towns represented an escape from the deteriorating rural landscape and the insecurities generated by absent husbands and sons.

By the late 1930s 'a massive haemorrhage of women was occurring from the labour reserves to the towns.'[18] Walker points out that the actual rate of migration of women varied regionally, dependent on factors such as a region's ability to maintain control over its women, the extent of male migration, the accessibility of the towns to the rural area and European education.[19]

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[15] Walker, 'Gender and the development', p. 177.

[16] Ibid., p. 188.

[17] Ibid., p. 189.

[18] P Bonner, 'Family, Crime and Political Consciousness on the East Rand, 1939-1955', Journal of Southern African Studies, 14/3, (1988), p. 395.

[19] Walker, 'Gender and the development', pp. 190/191.

In Philip Bonner's case study of Basotho women, those who were married and had to deal with abandonment or widowhood or insecurity due to neglect or conflict in their new marriage homes, dominated the ranks of women migrants.

The women migrating out of Witzieshoek faced similar pressures. Atwell Mopeli-Paulus, a member of the African elite and chief's family in Witzieshoek, included Witzieshoek women migrants in his narration of his experiences on the Rand in 1939 which was published in Drum in 1954. 'Lack of land has driven the women to places like this, for they all once followed husbands to the reef where they went to work on the mines for money.'[20] Mr Modernwane, another member of the Witzieshoek community, recalled women 'running to the towns' in this period.[21]

> You [the husband] don't send money any more, the poor woman is struggling with the children. Eventually you [the wife] also go there [town]. Perhaps you go there with the intention of getting money from him. When you get there you find that you are not accepted any more and you just remain.[22]

Whatever personal factors were pushing African women into migration, the root cause was the decline in production in the reserves.

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20 Drum, December 1954, p. 66.

21 Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane, Witzieshoek, 16/4/1993.

22 Ibid.

The state responds: segregation, influx control and betterment

Segregation

The state response to economic decline in the reserves and the position of women migrants on a national level must be examined in the framework of its policies and discourses between 1930 and 1945 which were exemplified by segregation.

The segregation policies of the state spanning 1930-1945 directly reflected the views expressed by General Jan Smuts in his speech on Native Policy in Africa in 1929. Smuts subscribed to the beliefs of liberal assimilationists 'who believed in the capacity of the black man to "rise" ', but at the same time condemned assimilation with the white populace.[23] His views resonated with the fear which had emerged in the early part of the century, which stemmed from eugenic beliefs in the undesirability of miscegenation. Smuts' arguments on segregation and the policies it generated presented a strategy to prevent 'unhappy social results - racial miscegenation, moral degeneration of both [races], racial antipathy and clashes'.[24] These were not simply characteristic of misguided assumptions about the numbers of Africans flooding into the towns, but were part of a general 'paranoia about civilization's retrogressive tendencies.'[25]

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[23] S Dubow, 'Race, Civilization and Culture: the Elaboration of Segregationist Discourse in the Inter-War Years'in S Marks and S Trapido (eds), The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism, (London and New York, 1987), p. 83.

[24] J C Smuts, Greater South Africa. Plans for a better world. The Speeches of General the Right Honourable J C Smuts, (Johannesburg, 1940), p. 49.

[25] Dubow, 'Race, Civilization and Culture', p. 76.

Smuts insisted that the 'native' policies of the past had redirected interest away from 'native' life and in order to give the 'natives' 'bones to chew at', a 'new policy' was required.[26] This was one that would 'foster an indigenous native culture or system of cultures, and cease to force the African into European moulds'.[27]

According to Saul Dubow, Smut's ideology was bound up with the notion that the cities represented an 'alien environment' for 'the African' who was 'naturally' part of the land'.[28] In this context, the town was cast as a 'site of vice and immorality' where 'the African' was in grave danger of degenerating.[29] Smuts argued that the movement to and from the reserve of 'the African male', however, would not be problematic as long as the 'family life in the native home will continue along traditional lines.' In his opinion, this would prevent ideas absorbed in the urban areas from emerging in the reserves.[30]

Native policy imbibed this ideology between 1930 and 1945 in a system of what Saul Dubow termed 'differential development or segregation'.[31] The 1937 Native Laws Amendment Act which set up apparatus to rid the towns of 'surplus' Africans was a direct application of liberal policies of assimilation.

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[26] Smuts, Greater South Africa, p. 43.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Dubow, 'Race, Civilization and Culture', p. 75.

[29] Ibid., p. 76.

[30] Smuts, Greater South Africa, p. 55.

[31] Dubow, 'Race, Civilization and Culture', p. 84.

It was introduced to parliament by Minister Grobler who asserted that 'the effect of the influx of young natives into surroundings foreign to their mental outlook and culture is one of the most serious problems we have to face.'[32]

State policies and legislation within the reserves intersected with gender issues. Segregation sought to establish a 'tribal home' and hence affected female migration directly.

> The women and children will continue to carry on their native life at home, will continue to work in the homes and in the fields as they have done from the immemorial past. The men, instead of lying in the sun, or brawling over their beer or indulging in ... tribal warfare, will go out to work and supplement the family income.[33]

The movement of women outside of the 'tribal home' was not consistent with segregation. Furthermore, behind male migration, a necessary part of industrial development in the late 1930s and early 1940s, lay the desire to change the sexual division of labour within the reserves. 'Among the men the thin edge of the industrial wedge is introduced, and they rightly become the breadwinners which they have seldom or never been.'[34] Segregation policies between 1930 and 1945 thus sought to control women and interfere with the sexual division of labour within the reserves.

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[32] Minister Grobler, quoted in Dubow, 'Race, Civilization and Culture', p. 86.

[33] Smuts, Greater South Africa, p. 55.

[34] Ibid.

Influx control

> Rural to urban migration of women not only directly challenged the authority of state and capital..., it presaged the creation of a fully urbanized, proletarianized generation of families, with attendant problems of social control and the demand for social services.[35]

The fact that African women were on the move between 1930 and 1945 pointed to a weakness in the structures set up by the state to control such movement. The state, under the auspices of the central government and the Native Affairs Department, enforced restrictions on the movement of African women directly and indirectly in the period under examination.

The amendment to the Urban Areas Act in 1930 sought to control the movement of women directly. It demanded that only women who were joining their husbands or fathers who had been employed in the towns for two years continuously, could acquire special permits to reside there.[36] The failure of this form of direct control, however, prompted a further amendment to the Urban Areas Act, in 1937. This made a certificate of permission from local home authorities a prerequisite for entering the towns. Again, this legislation was thwarted as women could quite easily obtain passes to visit or to find husbands or to enter the towns bordering their reserves from whence they could move onto the reef.[37] In addition, direct control implied direct policing. Taking into

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[35] M Lovett, 'Gender Relations, Class Formation, and the Colonial State in Africa', in J L Parpart and K A Staudt (eds), <u>Women and the State in Africa</u>, (Boulder and London, 1989), p. 24.

[36] P L Bonner, ' "Desirable or Undesirable Basotho Women?" Liquor, Prostitution and the Migration of Basotho Women to the Rand, 1920-1945' in Walker (ed), <u>Women and Gender</u>, p. 243.

[37] Ibid., pp. 245-246.

account the sheer numbers of women flocking into the urban areas, and the staff shortages as a result of the second world war, such a system was difficult to operate.

Before 1948, the state relied more heavily on indirect forms of control, a phenomenon that Cheryl Walker describes as 'a reinforced patriarchal tradition'.[38] This involved an intimate alliance between central government and the African male elite in the reserve societies, an alliance which sought to restrict women's movement at source.[39] An important part of this process was the enforcement of customary law in a new form which reinforced and highlighted control over women.

Walker applies Martin Chanock's assessment of Rhodesia, where the male African elite stressed their control over women when presenting customary law to the white government because they encountered the government at a point of insecurity, to the South African case.[40] According to Walker, women continued to be disadvantaged in this way after the colonial period ended as such forms of control 'were extended by the South African state after Union.'[41]

However, the notion that 'African women belonged in the rural areas under the control of male guardians and chiefs', which underlay the endeavors of both the government and the African male elite, did not hold true.[42] In practice, African women were using their adroitness to dodge direct and indirect controls, and to migrate to the towns.

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[38] Walker, 'Gender and the Development', p. 186.

[39] Bonner, 'Desirable or Undesirable', p. 245.

[40] Sited in Manicom, 'Ruling Relations', p. 15.

[41] Walker, 'Gender and the Development', p. 185.

[42] Ibid., p. 186.

As Walker correctly points out, unlike male migration which was characterized by conventionality (in other words was a 'societal response to new pressures and opportunities' offered by colonialism), female migration represented 'a challenge to existing norms and relations of power'[43] which were based on a patriarchal tradition. Because women were still responsible for production in the reserves and were theoretically under the control of male homestead heads, their choice to migrate was a form of 'desertion' or 'escape' rather than a sanctioned decision.

Influx control and the female urban subject

Having reached the towns, African women posed additional problems for white male dominance. This was because they were outside the realm of chiefly manipulation and had the ability to set themselves up as independent producers. Yet again, state-imposed laws failed to curb women's productive activities from 1930 to 1945. Beer-brewing and prostitution were targeted by the state which made both illegal and deportation the punishment. Women responded by concealing their trade and evading police raids: they even resorted to rioting.[44]

Bonner points out that during this era women became adept at manipulating the law. They would engage solicitors who would circumvent the due process of law by creating all sorts of difficulties. If convicted, the women would refuse to divulge from whence they came or just disappear into the streets of some other location.[45] Mopeli-Paulus

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43 Ibid., p. 189.

44 Bonner, 'Desireable or Undesireable', pp. 241-244.

45 Ibid., p. 244.

described the evasive tactics adopted by women in his article in Drum. He illustrated how women would bury barrels full of liquor which would then be guarded day and night. In the event that a policeman happened to patrol nearby, the women would signal each other by crying out; 'A-ah It is unbearable!' and run away to avoid arrest.[46]

Margot Lovett argues that the colonial state regulated women 'indirectly through the language and the authority of kinship.'[47] This was also true of the South African state between 1930 and 1945. The use of language as a mechanism to entrench male power went beyond the confines of kinship, however. The state carefully constructed a negative stereotype of women in the towns which permeated official and unofficial discourses. According to Manicom, the 'proper' urban subject was 'being constructed as masculine'.[48]

State-enforced laws presented women in the towns as subjects existing outside of state and patriarchal control and therefore as criminal and anarchic. As opposed to women in the rural areas who were referred to as wives, daughters and tribal members and thus as subjects under the control of men, laws to monitor women in the urban areas cast them as prostitutes, beer brewers and the unruly.[49] Consequently, the same African woman was transformed in state discourse from a wife into a prostitute if she moved from countryside to town. In other words, from the end of the 1930s to 1945, the state constructed the 'true' African woman as a subject under

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[46] Drum, December 1954, p. 65.

[47] Lovett, 'Gender Relations', p. 28.

[48] Manicom, 'Ruling Relations', p. 21.

[49] Ibid., p. 23.

the authority and the responsibility of men domiciled in rural areas.

African men also struggled to maintain some sort of autonomy in the towns. This directly affected the ability of the state to control women as so much of their control was dependent on African male authority. Lovett identified the 'social control' of the African elite as a crucial element in the colonial state's power. According to Bonner, because African women were a tiny minority in the urban areas of the East Rand, they could take advantage of the opportunity provided by 'unlimited womanless men'.[50] Instead of having to deal with a partner who might, for example, commit assault or infidelity, a woman could simply 'up and leave', moving on to the next willing man. Moreover, women's capacity to secure an independent income reduced their dependence on men's incomes and hence on men. The result was that in the towns women thwarted the authority of men whilst at the same time being beyond the social control of male elders in the reserves.

African men, therefore, also had a stake in constructing women in the towns in a negative way. For example, Mopeli-Paulus' description of people from Witzieshoek revealed the same stereotypes of women as the state's discourse displaying the friction between the town and Witzieshoek. As these women were no longer subject to the forms of control and power operating in the reserve, Mopeli-Paulus deliberately condemned their behaviour. His aim was to contrast their disagreeable behaviour with the behaviour of those in the reserves who purportedly enjoyed such control.

Mopeli-Paulus took a strong stance right from the start of his story. 'The location at Benoni where I stayed,

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[50] Bonner, 'Family, Crime and Political Consciousness', p. 397.

seemed an important centre for Africans from all over the Reef, and I soon learned to hate it.' Mopeli's distaste for town life began with the 'drunken people' who 'drowned' the streets of Benoni on weekends.[51] He traced this kind of behaviour to the brewing of liquor, which women were responsible for in the townships. Women were placed centrally in this hateful world. The irony was that women from Witzieshoek became eligible for condemnation only once they had entered the towns. Women's role as brewers of liquor was not inconsistent with their role in the reserves where they also embarked on such production, but Mopeli successfully recast that role in town in a negative light through his use of language.

He wrote that he was 'curious to know how the business was carried on' and immediately set it apart by wondering whether it was 'anything like our home brew which we make in the reserve.'[52] By using the words 'we' and 'our' Mopeli-Paulus created an inclusive atmosphere. He skillfuly placed the brewing in the towns outside the comforting terms 'we' and 'our' by explaining how it differed. 'I was told that it was, first, beer like any other beer, but made into a quick brew by mixing it with yeast and even methylated spirits, to make a quick drink.' Finally he wrote 'I have found a dead hole of my people, where some came with hungry eyes to steal at prostitutes, and others to become drowned in drink.'[53] Not only did he make use of emotive language like 'dead', 'steal' and 'drowned', but he linked prostitution to the whole notion of drink and hence devalued women further.

Christine Obbo's findings in terms of African women's struggle for economic independence in East Africa can be

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[51] Drum, December 1954, p. 65.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid., pp. 65-66.

applied here. She maintains that men, confused over what the role of women should be, used them as 'scapegoats', lashing out at them in order to re-assert some sort of control.[54] She goes on to argue that women were viewed by African men as the 'bearers of African culture' and hence had to be prevented from assimilating Western culture.[55] Towns provided the meeting point for such contact; hence the desire to restrict women's presence in them. 'Urban migration is bad for women because it corrupts their virtue, leads to marital instability and erodes traditional norms.'[56]

Bonner postulates that Basotho women (and therefore Witzieshoek women) in particular bore the brunt of such negative stereotypes. He maintains that they were blamed for a number of social problems ranging from crime to violence to immorality, all associated with liquor and prostitution.[57] The reason behind the singling out of this particular group of women was that they constituted the majority in the sphere of liquor production.[58] The unprecedented influx into the towns of the Basotho women as well as women from all over the reserves in the 1930s and 1940s, on a scale much larger than before, had created a panic in the corridors of power.

Betterment

The government also reacted to the growing deterioration of the reserves. Beinart examined the nature of state

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[54] Obbo, African Women. Their Struggle for Economic Independence, (London, 1980), p. 11.

[55] Ibid., p. 15.

[56] Ibid., p. 27.

[57] Bonner, 'Desirable or Undesirable', pp. 230-231.

[58] Ibid., p. 222.

intervention in the reserves between 1900 and 1960. He argued that between 1930 and 1950, 'the welfare of the soil often emerges as the cutting edge of justification for intervention in peasant agriculture.'[59] In 1936 General Smuts stated that 'erosion is the biggest problem confronting the country, bigger than any politics'.[60]

Betterment was devised within a conservationist discourse which took root in the 1920s in South Africa and was formulated in the 1930s into a strategy to combat declining productivity in the reserves. The South African Native Trust was formed in 1936 as a part of the Native Trust and Land Act and was set up with the purpose of rehabilitating the scheduled areas set aside for exclusive African inhabitance. Proclamation 31 of 1939 provided for the declaration of betterment areas in the reserves after consultation with the local population had taken place.[61]

Betterment, devised as it was as a grand strategy for development within the reserves, was problematic not only as a broad concept but in its application at the reserve level. This essentially meant that even before betterment was implemented in the Witzieshoek reserve, for example, its ability to succeed was severely curtailed. This was because its execution was incongruous with the conditions existing in the reserves.

According to Beinart, the government viewed the betterment process in purely technical terms, but once applied betterment tended to interfere in the social

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[59] W Beinart, 'Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development: a Southern African Exploration, 1900-1960', Journal of Southern African Studies, 11/1, (1984), p. 53.

[60] Smuts quoted in Ibid., p. 68.

[61] J Yawitch, Betterment the Myth of Homeland Agriculture (Johannesburg, 1982), p. 11.

structures and relations in the reserves.[62] On the most fundamental level, betterment was intended to create a productive African subsistence peasant who employed the methodology advocated by betterment officials. It was presumed that the conditions existing in the reserves enabled the creation of such a peasant. Yet this assumption was inherently problematic. In the first instance, the male African had been targeted as the potentially productive peasant. In a context where the majority of men were absent from the reserves for extended periods during the year, targeting men bordered on the ridiculous.

This was borne out by two reports, one on betterment in general by Edward Roux and one on Witzieshoek in particular by Melle. In his analysis of reconstruction in the reserves in 1944, Roux argued that 'the chief difficulty' was that the farmer was 'away at work on the mines ... for most of the year.'[63] Melle, the under-agricultural officer for Witzieshoek, illustrated the contradiction between betterment and migration. In a report on the reserve, he stated that the 'highly unsatisfactory agricultural and pastoral methods so common in the Native areas' were enforced by the fact that 'most' Africans earned their living in industry outside the reserve to which they returned periodically which made 'agricultural education virtually impossible since the men were seldom available to teach'.[64] Hence, the system of 'part time farming and part time labouring' was 'fundamentally unsound' due to the fact that it meant

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[62] Beinart, 'Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development', p. 83.

[63] E R Roux, 'The Native Reserves and Post-War Reconstruction', (Cape Town, 1944), p. 4.

[64] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part: 2, Melle to Chief Native Commissioner (CNC), 28/9/1950.

that 'the Native ... neither becomes a skilled farmer nor a consistently efficient workman.'[65]

The targeting of men alone was also inconsistent with the conditions of organization already in existence in Witzieshoek and in other reserves. In Witzieshoek, agricultural production had customarily been divided along sexual lines. Women were primarily responsible for production at home and in the fields, whereas men were exclusively in charge of pastoralism. However, male assistance at ploughing and harvesting time was essential.[66] By the time that betterment was implemented, this sexual division of labour existed only in theory as in the absence of men, women were taking on all the responsibilities of agricultural production.[67]

This was exacerbated in Witzieshoek by the fact that the Trust had no specific policy geared towards educating women, in terms of agricultural production. General education was in the hands of the Dutch Reformed mission which had very specific aims for women. In 1944, for instance, the mission introduced housecraft as a subject for the girls in their school.[68] The church mapped out a definitive role for women which had very little to do with agriculture. It proposed a course for women which included mother care, health care, weaving, spinning, knitting, washing, cooking, gardening and *rudimentary* agriculture.[69]

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Molaba, Witzieshoek, 11/4/1993.

[67] UNISA: AAS219, Interview Prof Kotze with Mr G M Mohale and Interview Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

[68] SAB: NTS, 7555, 811/327, request submitted by Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) Mission, February 1944.

[69] SAB: NTS, 7349, 168/327, Dr C H Badenhorst, thesis: Witzieshoek, 'n Projek vir Staat en kerk.

The Dutch Reformed Church perceived African women through its own religious prism and hence sought to wean them from their usual responsibilities and to restrict their activities to the domestic sphere. Such a perception was carried through to the state and the Trust, the latter being unable to encompass women in its own betterment strategies. The non-existence of agricultural education for women, bar a few elementary pointers, coupled with the creation on the part of the Dutch Reformed Church of a new mould within which women should act (sanctioned by the Trust) meant that the concept of 'the productive agricultural subsistence peasant' was a non-starter.

The state's response was defined in the passage of the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936. The irony in this piece of legislation was that both central government and the Department of Native Affairs were affected by the needs of the expanding industrial economy. Hence betterment was implemented in a context where migration would continue to dislocate rural production. Moreover, it would continue to disrupt family structures to the disadvantage of African women.

The inability on the part of betterment to impose the lofty principle of a productive African male farmer in practice was further exacerbated by another reality: insufficient funding. In Roux's analysis of reconstruction, he argued that 'lack of funds' was a crucial hindrance to the betterment process.[70] The various departments in the Native Administration dealing with betterment had to rely on the Trust for financial support, as parliament did not vote directly for funds for use in agriculture. The Trust in turn was restricted to receiving income from African taxes which was inadequate. Roux stated that these funds amounted to 'a

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[70] Roux, 'The Native Reserves', p. 3.

little over a million pounds annually.'[71] This was further compounded by the different needs of the departments involved in African Administration which had to make use of these funds. This left a 'hopelessly inadequate' amount for agriculture.[72]

The financial insecurity of the Trust meant that its implementation of betterment went hand in hand with a number of strict conditions. For instance, because the Trust's work was mainly predicated on African taxation, taxation became the prerequisite for two important functions. One was the ability to vote for local Reserve Boards and the other was the capacity to acquire a plot of land. Hence the ability to acquire cash for tax purposes became an essential part of life in the reserves after 1939.

The Review of the Activities of the Department of Native Affairs for the year 1944-1945 touched on two other fundamental issues affecting the abilities of the Trust departments in the various betterment areas in the early forties.[73] The first was the 'shortage of staff' owing to the absence of many members of the department on military duty.[74] The loss of technical staff due to the war effort especially hampered development.[75] The second was shortages in materials and the replacement of materials, such as mechanical transport, tools and equipment.[76] Witzieshoek, like many other reserves, experienced the

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[71] Ibid., p. 2.

[72] Ibid., p. 3.

[73] Union of South Africa. Review of the Activities of the Department of Native Affairs for the year 1944-'45.

[74] Ibid., p. 30.

[75] Ibid., p. 11.

[76] Ibid.

impact of these handicaps in the early 1940s.[77] And these, too, served to exacerbate already difficult conditions for women. In 1942, for example, it was reported that a delay in equipment and fertilizer needed to improve crops had plunged the community into dire straits, as the former had arrived after the best planting season.[78]

In its report on 1944 and 1945, the Native Affairs Department admitted that such problems meant that the advantages offered by the co-operation of people could not materialize.[79] In Witzieshoek itself, Melle touched on this precise concern. He reported that 'the people were co-operative' for the first four years but that 'their acquiescence lessened when the expected over-optimistic benefits did not materialize.' He went on to say that they began to 'lose faith in the Department and its schemes' as a result of 'agitators' drawing on this point.[80] Members of the community, not necessarily agitators, had made their grievances with the Trust clear in a variety of ways right from its inception in 1939. This leads to the consideration of resistance in the years between 1930 and 1945.

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77 SAB: NTS, 7508, 655/327/19, Supply of seed, fertilizer and Equipment to natives: increased crop production scheme, 1942.

78 Ibid.

79 Review of the Activities of the Department of Native Affairs for the year 1944-'45, p. 11.

80 SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Melle to CNC, 28/9/1950.

Resistance

Shula Marks and Stanley Trapido argued that African resistance in general was dampened in the 1930s.[81] However, an 'undercurrent of rural resistance'[82] did continue throughout the decade. There were instances of opposition in Natal in the form of food riots, in the Northern Transvaal where men and women resisted government legislation and in the Eastern Cape where people protested against cattle culling.[83]

The early 1940s, conversely, saw the blooming of resistance.[84] Resistance up to 1945 was predominantly urban. Trade unions formed and expanded, demonstrating an increased awareness of class and worker consciousness. A record number of strikes were recorded between 1939 and 1945,[85] despite the fact that they were declared illegal in 1943.[86] The Council for Non-European Trade Union boasted 158,000 members in 1945, a threat the government could not ignore lightly.[87] According to Walker, 'women ... formed a significant part of the groundswell of discontent and resistance that rumbled through the townships'.[88] In contrast to the 1930s a 'wider range' of women were involved in resistance. Although they joined

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[81] S Marks and S Trapido, The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa, (London and New York, 1987), p. 44.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

[84] D Posel, The Making of Apartheid 1948-1961 Conflict and Compromise, (Oxford, 1991), p. 37.

[85] Ibid.

[86] T Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945, (Johannesburg; 1983), p. 18.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Walker, Women and Resistance, p. 75.

in the boycotts and squatter movements in the early 1940s, they were most active over the food crisis.[89]

The African National Congress's Women's League was formed in 1943[90] and although it articulated middle class beliefs, its formation indicated a tacit, if unconscious, acceptance on the part of African men, that women's roles had expanded into the public sphere. This acceptance was juxtaposed against efforts by the male African elite to control 'their' women. The role and identity of African women in this period were evidently in a state of flux. Both African men and women had to grapple with the challenges presented by women.

1945-1948

Rural Decline

The pattern of rural decline continued into the mid-1940s despite the implementation of betterment. Between 1946 and 1952 Africans were producing 'less than half their normal grain requirements'.[91] In Witzieshoek in March 1947, the Additional Native Commissioner, in a report to the Chief Native Commissioner of the Western Areas, noted that the reserve could not support its population. He pointed out that at that stage 'many families' were 'landless' and that the 'maximum carrying capacity of the area' could not maintain 'sufficient animals to meet the minimum requirements of the people.'[92]

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[89] Ibid., p. 77.

[90] Ibid., p. 89.

[91] M Horrel, The African Reserves of South Africa, (Johannesburg, 1969), p. 35.

[92] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, Part 1, report from the ANC to CNC, re: stock limitation, 29/3/1947.

The evident impotence of betterment strategies was exacerbated by women's actions and reactions within the framework of the reserves. Women left behind in the reserves had responded with initiative and ingenuity, devising coping strategies. In Witzieshoek, women in the absence of men began to attend pitsos ('traditionally', an all-male meeting to discuss the organization of the community) and khotlas ('traditionally', all-male court sessions). This meant that women no longer remained within the constructed customs and social definitions which had operated before the disruption in reserve life. In other words, in the context of economic deterioration and decay, African women were being forced into positions that were formerly exclusively male. Thus, not only were they directly challenging state forms of control, but they were also disrupting the white male notion of the position of African women in the reserves.

Migration continues

The second world war had a profound impact on industrialization and migration. It stimulated the growth of secondary industries and hence increased the job opportunities for those Africans flooding to the towns.[93] At the same time, the concentration of resources and effort on the war meant that restrictions on the movement to and from the towns of African men and women were difficult to enforce. In these circumstances, the towns became escape routes from the increasing hardship of reserve life.

The population census of 1946 claimed that in the urban areas, the African majority had increased by 57.2 per

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[93] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 24.

cent between 1936 and 1946.[94] Within this general trend, women were migrating at a greater rate than men. According to Posel, the numbers of women in the urban areas increased at the rate of 79.95 per cent in contrast to men whose numbers only increased by 46.80 per cent between 1936 and 1946.[95] The vast increase in the numbers of urbanized women ironically stemmed from the Native Affairs Department's attitude. Posel contends that the influx control of women was ineffectual because of the 'ambiguous' attitude of the Department which combined a strategy of control at source with a determination not to 'impose undue restrictions on the movement of women.'[96]

Resistance flourishes

Resistance in both the towns and countryside continued to flourish after 1945. The late 1940s saw the synthesis of a 'coherent nationalist struggle'.[97] Such resistance was born out of the crisis in the reserves and the expanding urban labour force which fed into African political organization and led to the emergence of more radical ideologies. African resistance itself cast a shadow over 'native' administration and control. Any overt manifestation of such resistance was a visual reminder of the state's and more particularly the central government's and Native Affairs Department's ineffectiveness.

Rural protest intensified in the post-war period. The government had decided to instigate a 'sweeping scheme of

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Ibid., p. 46.

[97] A Ashforth, The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth Century South Africa, (New York, 1990), p. 119.

large scale rehabilitation' in the reserves in 1945.[98] In the Transkei, stock-culling which was crucial to this new improved rehabilitation met with 'deep-rooted hostility'.[99] In 1947, the implementation of a betterment scheme in the district of Butterworth in the Transkei provoked 'spirited opposition' and in 1948, another Transkeian district, Mount Ayliff, mounted an attack on rehabilitation.[100] Although resistance in Witzieshoek had yet to become a full scale rebellion, the community's opposition to betterment was unmistakable in this period. Beinart asserted that rural opposition had the most decisive long term effect on rehabilitation.[101]

The establishment of the Youth League revived the African National Congress after the war. The Youth League infused Africanist ideologies into the A.N.C. According to Gail Gerhart, such ideologies projected 'a new and aggressive positive self image compounded of pride in the past, confident expectations for the future, and an emotional, burning love for the African's God-given blackness.'[102] The Congress began articulating a more radical nationalism as the voices of the Youth League became stronger.

The A.N.C. found an audience in the towns of the late 1940s which had been transformed into urban ghettos characterized by immense poverty and desolation and

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[98] C Bundy, 'Land and Liberation: Popular Rural Protest and the National Liberation Movements in South Africa, 1920-1960'in Marks and Trapido, The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism, p. 268.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Ibid., p. 274.

[101] Beinart, 'Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development', p. 80.

[102] G Gerhart, quoted in Marks and Trapido, The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism, p. 46.

exacerbated by inadequate facilities.[103] The general strike in 1946 was the first major conflict between the state and Africans in the second half of the decade. The state responded in a brutal fashion, striking a harsh blow to Trade Unionism. Despite this, African resistance continued to burgeon, bolstered by the Atlantic Charter calling for self determination.[104]

Women played an important role in these struggles between 1945 and 1948. In the urban areas, faced by poor facilities and poverty, women came together and resisted, organizing marches.[105] Women also fought to keep their new-found sense of economic autonomy, organizing boycotts of beer halls which threatened their influence in the sphere of brewing, and demonstrating against laws prohibiting their right to brew liquor.[106] In the squatter areas it was women who often took the lead, not only in administering the squatter areas, but also in the squatter movements of the decade.[107] Women's increased independence gave them the tools as well as the courage to tackle the problems facing them.

Segregation revisited

Influx of Africans and its control dominated the political agenda between 1945 and 1948. The influx of women in particular, and the threat this posed to the state, was one of the catalysts which catapulted the Nationalist Party into power and saw the implementation

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103 Ibid., p. 47.

104 A Ashforth, The Politics of Official Discourse, p. 117.

105 Walker, Women and Resistance, pp 69-145

106 Bonner, 'Desireable or Undesireable', p. 226.

107 Bonner, 'Family, Crime and Political Consciousness', p. 417.

of stringent restrictions on black people in general, but women in particular. The separate development theory of the Nationalist Party had 'crystallized' in the mid 1940s.[108] Its main aim was to contain the influx of African men and women into the towns as well as to restrict their political voice in the reserves. The state sought to control Africans through the mechanism of 'divide and rule' and the co-option of traditional authorities and members of the petite bourgeoisie.[109] Behind this ideology of separation was a desire to regain control over the African female, who had eluded control thus far.

Between 1945 and 1948, debates in the House of Assembly revolved around 'native' policy and administration and their effectiveness. The importance in these debates lies in what they reveal about the mood of the 1940s. Those debating in the House argued with a sense of urgency, evoking strong images of the crisis in both the urban and rural areas in order to substantiate views for and against total segregation.

Prior to 1948, the opposition in the House relentlessly condemned the 'native' policy of the United Party. The Nationalist Party chastised the Native Affairs Department for a policy which was 'lacking in council, lacking in force and lacking in determination.'[110] Central to the Nationalist Party's condemnation was the influx of Africans to the towns. 'If we look back on the history of the government we find that its impotence has prevented it from solving our greatest problems.'[111] It argued that

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[108] P Maylam, A History of the African People of South Africa: From the Early Iron Age to the 1970s, (Cape Town and Johannesburg, 1986), p. 170.

[109] Ibid., p. 171.

[110] HAD, (1945), vol. 54, col. 8241.

[111] HAD, (1948), vol. 62, col. 1354.

the government had been 'powerless' to stem the flow of Africans to the towns.[112] In its opinion the only answer was segregation, but segregation on Nationalist Party terms. Already in 1945 it had accused the United Party of tarnishing segregation. 'This is not a policy of segregation, it is a policy of absolute equality'.[113] The Nationalist Party essentially argued that the government's inability to properly control resistance and migration had led to the African becoming an 'an imitation Westerner',[114] one who sought equality on Western terms rather than in his own 'tribal' environment.

Nationalists instead argued for 'the grand principles of ... segregation' believing that the solution to African influx and resistance in the 1940s lay in their policy of national self determination.[115] Segregationist die-hards argued that 'they [the Africans] must develop their own national structure. They must have their own fatherland: there they must have their own schools ... churches ... [and] the seat of their government'.[116] The premise behind this argument was that if the Africans had their own fatherland they would have 'no right to expect its people, who form part of the population of another country to be given a say in the legislative bodies of that country.'[117] Clearly this policy was designed like the concept of migrant labour, so that Africans living in the towns would have no political rights and therefore pose no political threat. In other words those present in

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[112] Ibid.

[113] HAD, (1945), vol. 54, col. 8246

[114] Ibid., col. 8240

[115] Ibid., col. 8246.

[116] HAD, (1948), vol. 62, col. 98.

[117] Ibid., col. 118.

the towns would be 'dependent on and limited by the needs of the white population.'[118]

In this context, Nationalists argued that the urban areas were 'centres of white civilization'[119] which had to be exempted from 'the great influx of semi-barbarians'.[120] Thus, in order to preserve these centres of 'white civilization' they maintained that 'the natives' cultural and intellectual centre of gravity'[121] had to be as far away from the towns as possible.

The United Party also came under fire from the three Native Representatives in parliament. In 1945, Mr Hemming, the representative for the Transkei, argued that the reclamation scheme in the reserves was 'wrong because it refuses to take into account the important factor that the country itself is overpopulated ... trodden out by human feet as much as cattle.'[122] In 1948, Mrs Ballinger, the Native representative for the Eastern Cape, argued that 'the system of native policy which has been in operation since 1936 has come to a point where it can no longer work.'[123] They argued that the government had failed to take into account the conditions in the reserves and in the towns. In terms of the government's policy towards the towns, the housing policy of the United Party had evidently achieved little as it gave priority to the middle class Africans rather than poorer Africans. 'It is a condition which has led to a mounting

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118 Ibid., col. 128.

119 Ibid., col. 1356.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid., col. 210.

122 HAD, (1945), vol. 52, col. 2840.

123 HAD, (1948), vol. 62, col. 164.

tide of disease, of crime, of poverty, of wretchedness.'[124]

In the United Party's defence, the Minister for Native Affairs argued that 'no Native policy can be static, just as little as evolution can be static.'[125] He defended his policies, arguing that rehabilitation had failed thus far due to the 'shortage of men and material' rather than as a result of inadequate control or incongruent policies.[126] He accepted the influx of Africans into the towns, instead concentrating on the problem of housing; here he argued that in order to forge a 'greater South Africa', it would be necessary to eliminate the situation where 'the native, who is one of our greatest assets' had to 'work in the factories by day and live under a bush or in shacks miles from his work at night.'[127]

Between 1945 and 1948, the various interests within the government were on a collision course that hit home in 1948 when the Nationalist Party usurped the majority in parliament. The United Party realized that its brand of segregation had not worked. The Prime Minister argued before the election in 1948 that the Nationalist policy of segregation was a 'bogey'[128] and the Minister of Native Affairs contended that it was humiliating the black community and that 'sooner or later these people will show their resentment and show it unmistakably'.[129]

Clearly, the revitalization of African organisation on a national scale was adding to the panic evident in the

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[124] Ibid., vol. 62, col. 1341.

[125] HAD, (1945), vol. 54, col. 8268.

[126] HAD, (1948), vol. 62, col. 1461.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid., col. 302.

[129] Ibid., col. 104.

House of Assembly debates over the control of Africans. The spread of communism was a primary concern of all political parties, as the African menace was identified as the communist threat. By 1948, the danger of the 'red terror' had amplified and was used as a political football in the elections. Nationalist campaigners argued that the policies and principles proposed by the United Party would 'infinitely aggravate the danger of communism in South Africa',[130] whilst those crusading for the United Party declared that Nationalist policy would lead South Africa into the hands of the communists.[131]

The state and the African family

A further feature of parliamentary debate in this period was a general concern over the plight of the African family and women. This was symbolic of the dilemma that the influx of women and the decline in reserve production had produced for the state.

By 1945 a dissenting liberal voice in the House of Assembly was coming to grips with the realities of deterioration and decay in both the rural and urban areas and was opposed to complete segregation. Mrs Ballinger argued that South Africa had reached a crossroads and it needed to address its problems with change rather than 'old and outworn ideas.'[132] Instead of wanting to oust the Africans from the towns, the Minister of Native Affairs argued that 'one must realize that there are large sections of natives who for generations have been urban

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[130] Ibid., col. 62.

[131] Ibid., col. 89.

[132] HAD, (1945), vol. 52, col. 2839.

dwellers'[133] and who had 'in fact lost all tribal connections and sanctions.'[134]

The United Party, along with the Native Representatives, therefore sought to deal with the reality of the African as a permanent urban resident. 'It is no exaggeration that the question of native housing is one of the greatest problems that we have to cope with today.'[135] These arguments focused on homelessness, viewing it and not women as the cause of social decay.

Just as those pro-segregation made use of the family and African women as the basis of their argument, those against it conjured up concern over the family in their defence.

> The hostels have been built in the past on the assumption that the African lives in the reserves and only comes for a short time to live in the towns ... a policy ... we opposed. We oppose it as being immoral, we oppose it as it brings down family life and because it leads to inefficiency and waste.[136]

Male migrancy became the target in these arguments. 'The operation of laws which absolutely refuse to allow married men and women to live together lead to moral deterioration'.[137]

> The whole substance of rural life is being undermined by interference with family life.

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133 Ibid., col. 2863.

134 Ibid.

135 HAD, (1948), vol. 62, col. 1463.

136 Ibid., col. 1347.

137 Ibid., col. 170.

> ... This absence of family discipline with all its consequences is an evil that presents one of the most serious problems that the government has to face.[138]

The segregationists also evoked a concern for African families and women. The construction of the African urban subject as masculine is evident in such discourse. According to this view, the preservation of the African family lay in the strengthening of 'native kinmanship' and the patriarchal baggage that went with it.[139]

Ironically, segregationists made use of Smuts's 1929 speech to justify their points. They argued that in order for Africans to achieve national self-determination it was necessary that 'family life in the native home ... continue along traditional lines.'[140] This was a direct quote from Smuts. By the use of the word 'traditional' it is clear that what was being advocated was male dominated forms of organization and control. This is corroborated in the same argument where they continued to quote Smuts. 'The routine of the family and the tribe will not be altered in any material way. The male adults, fathers and sons will no doubt imbibe new ideas in their white employment, but their social system will not suffer on that account.' They believed that the influx of women should be prevented. 'It is the movement of the native family, of the women and children, which must be prevented'.[141] The 'desertion of the Native tribal home by the women and children' was perceived as the root of the problem of control.[142]

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[138] Ibid., col. 292.

[139] HAD, (1945), vol. 52, col. 2870.

[140] HAD, (1948), vol. 62, col. 171.

[141] Ibid.

[142] Ibid.

The use of Smuts in segregationists' arguments is significant as it illustrates the degree to which the United Party had digressed from the policies it had advocated and implemented from 1936 onwards. Such policies were perceived to have failed dismally by the time of the election of 1948.

The Nationalist Party was able to take advantage of the chaos of the 1940s in its bid to win the election. Drawing on a strong sense of Afrikaner nationalism, it convinced the majority of voters that its policy of segregation would end the crisis in the control of the Africans. A major part of its election campaign was the construction of emotive icons which presented African men as potential rapists, murderers and violent criminals. The Nationalists argued that the policies of the United Party government had led to the unprecedented influx of Africans into the towns, which had led to criminal attacks. Their election promise was to limit the influx of Africans and therefore put a stop to the 'swart gevaar'.

This revealed the inconsistencies within the Nationalist policies towards the control and administration of Africans even before they came to power. Despite wanting the segregate black and white, the Nationalists could not expel all Africans from the towns or the farms. The pre-requisite for development in the 'white man's'[143] country was the use of African labour power in white-owned industries and farms.

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[143] A N Pelzer, Verwoerd Speaks, (Johannesburg, 1966), p. 16.

1948-1951

Rural deterioration persists

Reserve production continued to dwindle during the first Nationalist Party administration. In January 1949, the Senior Field Research Officer at Witzieshoek bemoaned the extent of erosion and stressed the urgency of the need to reverse the damage.[144] The Agricultural Officer in a report in September 1949 mentioned the acute land problem.

> The reserve is overcrowded to a degree when the absolute maximum allotment of land and livestock per family permissible is well below the absolute minimum requirements of the family for the requirements of bare existence.[145]

In a detailed report on the reserve in 1950, Melle discussed in detail the underdeveloped state of the reserve. He argued that it was 'so over-populated, overstocked and denuded' that 'most of the adult males' were forced to 'seek a livelihood outside of the reserve.'[146] He reinforced the sense of urgency expressed in the two reports written in 1949 by pointing out that even in the event that the reserve were increased to double its size in 1950, a stage would be reached where there would not be 'sufficient land for the inhabitants.'[147] W G Ballinger, in his report on the reserve in 1951, summed up the situation. 'My impression

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[144] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, report to CNC from the Senior Field Research Officer, 31/1/1949.

[145] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Agricultural Officer (AO) to ANC, 27/9/1949.

[146] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Melle to CNC, 28/9/1950.

[147] Ibid.

is that the reserve is, at present, over-populated and underdeveloped.'[148]

Melle touched on one of the hindrances to development in the case of Witzieshoek. 'The women and children do practically all the agricultural work ... and under the Department's present organization there is no adequate means of teaching children and women modern methods of agriculture.'[149] Instead, the increasingly desperate conditions in the reserves led to the escalation of migration. Betterment therefore continued to fail to bring about effective development.

The state had continued to enforce betterment within the reserves, but in a new context. The demands of the industrial urban centres had been superseded by those of white farmers. Reserves continued to function as labour pools, but their labour was re-directed to the farms in the area.

Influx magnifies

In 1948 Mr Derbyshire, a member of the Dominion Party, stated in the House of Assembly that 'the greatest problem in South Africa ... is the influx of Natives to the towns'[150]. Women in the period between 1948 and 1950 continued to migrate at a greater rate then men. The rapid increase in the number of women migrating into the towns was illustrated in the masculinity ratios. In Johannesburg, for example, the ratio decreased from 276

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[148] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Court case, Rex vs Malau and 74 others, copy of a report by Senator Ballinger, September 1950.

[149] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Melle to CNC, 28/9/1950.

[150] HAD, (1948), vol. 62, col. 138.

in 1936, to 148 in 1951, and in the East Rand from 662 to 294.[151]

One of the results was that the transition from United Party rule to Nationalist Party rule saw the construction of the male urban subject further entrenched. Nationalist Party discourse thus continued to castigate women in the towns.

> The influx of the Native women into the urban areas is one of the most important factors breaking up the family. ... It is constantly being said that the Natives in the cities deteriorate. The undesirable conditions are largely caused by the presence of women, who in many cases leave their homes contrary to the wishes of their fathers or guardians and contrary to tribal custom.[152]

Resistance peaks

African Protest peaked in the early 1950s with the Defiance Campaign. In 1949 the A.N.C. had set down a Programme of Action which challenged segregation and called for militant and defiant resistance. The A.N.C. also developed and consolidated ties with the South African Communist Party. These movements advocated strategies of mass action such as boycotts, strikes and passive resistance such as civil disobedience and non-co-operation, and began implementing them in 1950.[153]

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[151] C Simkins, 'African Urbanization at the Time of the Last Smuts Government', Perspectives in Economic History, 2, (1983), p. 29.

[152] HAD, (1950), vol. 71, col. 3766.

[153] Lodge, Black Politics, p. 22.

Bonner argues that the 'most striking development of the 1940s and 1950s was 'the partial emancipation of women.'[154] According to Fatima Meer, the 'anger of women burst bounds' in this period.[155] In the urban areas between 1948 and 1951, faced by bad facilities and poverty, African women came together and resisted, organizing marches which often resulted in 'clashes with the police'.[156] The A.N.C. Women's League emerged as a 'real force' in 1949. Madie-Hall Xuma was replaced by Ida Mtwana, a member of the Youth League, as the president of the Women's League. The latter infused a 'more activist spirit' into the organization.[157]

Again, resistance was not confined to the urban areas. In his examination of rural resistance in The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism, Bundy cited the Native Affairs Department reports for the years 1948 to 1952. All spoke of 'considerable organised opposition', 'semi-secret organisation', alarming reverses ... serious retardation' of policy due to 'malicious agitators'.[158]

The Witzieshoek rebellion was one example of such resistance. What began as a 'voluntary'[159] acceptance of the Trust and its officials, in Melle's opinion, developed over the period from 1936 to 1950 into 'solid opposition to the Department, its officials and any Government scheme.'[160] A violent clash which occurred

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[154] Ibid.

[155] F Meer, 'Organizing under Apartheid', in M Davies (ed), Third World - Second Sex, vol. 2, (London and New Jersey, 1987), p. 25.

[156] Ibid.

[157] Ibid., p. 92.

[158] Bundy, 'Land and Liberation', p. 274.

[159] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Melle to CNC, 28/9/1950.

[160] Ibid.

between the rebels and the police during the rebellion pushed it into the national limelight. On the face of it, Witzieshoek was just another indication of the paralysis of Native Affairs administration. Yet beneath the surface, the explosion was caused by the interference of the state in gender organization within the community. It remains a brilliant expression of the intimate relationship between state and gender.

Conclusion

Between 1939 and 1950, the policies adopted by the state in general, the strategies adopted by the central government to enforce influx control, and the scheme adopted by the Native Affairs Department in the reserves, had a particular and profound effect on gender relations in Witzieshoek.

The Witzieshoek rebellion emerged out of a context characterized by state-enforced control over migration and reserves. The acknowledgement, on the part of the United Party by 1948, that segregation in this sense had failed was significant. The Witzieshoek rebellion was a product of a state-enforced Native Affairs policy and administration which had failed dismally 'on the ground' and which had instituted drastic changes in the lives of African men and women.

Hence the Witzieshoek rebellion occurred in a context of rapid change which in turn created a crisis in the reserves and in the control of African women. Both fed into and moulded the trends of increased migration, African militancy and white conservatism.

CHAPTER THREE

ORGANIZED PUBLIC LIFE IN WITZIESHOEK: A DECLINE IN MALE AUTHORITY RELATIONS, 1939-1950

Introduction

In the period 1939 to 1950, two main forces shaped the Witzieshoek community: the Department of Native Affairs in conjunction with the Native Trust, and the migration of men and women. The organization of the community underwent a metamorphosis which ultimately resulted in the erosion of male authority relations. Old patterns of patriarchal authority and control were severely undermined both by the Department and by migration, whilst new structures, introduced by the Department, hinging on male authority and control had lost legitimacy by 1950. In the Witzieshoek community a metaphor arose after 1939. It was expressed as a taunt by women: 'They tell the coward men, bring me a pair of trousers that I may put it on. You get the women's dress.'[1] It was used to symbolize a man's lack of 'courage' and was thus a direct threat to his masculinity.[2] The significance of this metaphor lies in its ability to encapsulate the transmutation of gender relations in Witzieshoek between 1939 and 1950.

Male authority relations: Witzieshoek, 1939

1939 heralded a turning point in the organization of the Witzieshoek community. The implementation of betterment in the community not only affected the 'traditional' male

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[1] UNISA: AAS219, Interview, Prof Kotze with G M Mohale.

[2] Ibid.

authority relations, but also modified Departmental structures of authority.

Prior to the direct interference in Witzieshoek systems of organization by the Department and Trust in 1939, the community had revolved around the authority of a male chief. His power had been checked up to 1939 by the presence of an Additional Native Commissioner. Yet the chief had, to a large extent, been allowed free reign and had retained much of his command over the community.[3] His ascendancy was backed up by male authority on a number of levels. Below the chief were headmen who, like the chief, had acquired this position through inheritance. Finally, each family unit was headed by a male who was in turn accountable to his headman and the chief.

By 1939, with the advent of the Trust, Chief Charles' role as collaborator with the Department of Native Affairs and Trust officials at Witzieshoek had become entrenched. The salient difference, however, was that the chief was more accountable to the Native Affairs Department and the Trust than he was to his own people. 1939 thus heralded a new dispensation for chiefly authority.

The relationship between the Department, the Trust and the Witzieshoek residents was complex. The Trust had been charged with ensuring the 'settlement, support, benefit and material and moral welfare of the natives of the Union'.[4] This translated into the need to supervise the acquisition and development of land in the reserves and to this end its primary focus was agriculture and

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[3] Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Disturbances in the Witzieshoek Native Reserve, UG 26/1951, p. 3.

[4] Official Year Book of the Union of South Africa and of Basotholand, Bechuanaland Protectorate and Swaziland, 24, 1948, p. 476.

engineering. The Trust was administered by the Minister of Native Affairs who had been delegated this function by the Governor General.[5] He in turn presided over the various departments of the Trust which were headed by directors. Each department was further divided on a regional and local level. The Agricultural Department, for example, was run by the Chief Agricultural Officers on a regional level and by agricultural officers assisted by overseers and demonstrators on a local level.[6]

Although the Trust was a separate body from the Department of Native Affairs, its administration depended on close collaboration with the Chief Native Commissioners and the Native Commissioners in the various regions. In Witzieshoek, the general administration of the reserve was controlled by the Department of Native Affairs through the Native Commissioner. The introduction of betterment meant that the latter's responsibility for the 'administration of regulations for the control of the location' encompassed the regulations introduced by the Trust.[7] Therefore the functions of the Trust fell under the jurisdiction of the Native Commissioner as well as that of the local agricultural officers.

The Department of Native Affairs had introduced two new bodies charged with administering the community into the reserve in the beginning of the century. These bodies transformed the nature of patriarchy within Witzieshoek by instituting another level of authority and power held exclusively by men. The Native Reserve Board consisted of six male Africans, three elected locally and three appointed by the government, a representative of the

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[5] Report of the Native Affairs Commission, 1939-1940, UG 42/1941, p. 3.

[6] Official Year Book of the Union of South Africa, 24, 1948, p. 461.

[7] Report of the Department of Native Affairs, 1950-1951, UG 30/1953, p. 10.

Dutch Reformed Church, and the Assistant Native Commissioner. The magistrates court was established to preside over criminal and serious civil disputes. The establishment of betterment in the community in 1939 changed the nature of these bodies. The Native Reserve Board's powers were curtailed while the magistrate's court was used to prosecute those who violated Trust laws.

Prior to 1939, the community had also been governed by two 'traditional' bodies: the pitso and the khotla. Although these had been effectively superseded by the Native Reserve Board and the magistrate's court, they had continued to function. The pitso was the meeting of all male members of the community over twenty one years of age (although younger boys did attend but had no speaking rights), which decided on all important issues, such as ploughing and harvesting of the chief's fields. The khotla, on the other hand, was a dispute-solving mechanism. Here, again, women's participation was prohibited.[8]

Despite women's exclusion from the pitso and khotla, a number of problem-solving mechanisms existed for them in 1939. On the most basic level, women could resolve grievances within the family or through discussion with other women. 'Women did not have a meeting place; they could meet anywhere when they had problems but they usually met at their home. You would just invite the others to sit down and discuss these problems.'[9] Otherwise, a woman would either tell her husband who in turn would tell the headman, who would then take it to the chief or pitso if he was unable to resolve it, or she

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[8] Interviews, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane, Shan Beerstecher with Mrs and Mr Moleka, Witzieshoek 14/4/1993, Shan Beerstecher with Mrs and Mr Mothibi, Witzieshoek, 15/4/1993.

[9] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mrs and Mr Moleka.

could go to the chief's wife who would either try to sort it out or refer it to the chief and pitso.[10]

The Witzieshoek Vigilance Association was set up in May 1939 with the formal adoption of a constitution. It represented an alternative form of male authority to the one instigated by the Department. It based itself in Johannesburg where a large group of Witzieshoek inhabitants resided and had a branch in Witzieshoek (Leihlo La Sechaba) and Harrismith. It opened its membership to both 'men and women over seventeen years of age.'[11] Though in theory its form represented a radical departure from the all-male pitso and khotla, its inclusion of women seems to have been largely superficial, as its discourse excluded women from the political realm.

The Department and the Trust, the Chief and the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association: 1939-1951

The Trust had a contradictory impact on chiefly authority and hence on male hegemony. By choosing to continue to collaborate with the government and especially the Trust and its officials from 1939, Chief Charles could no longer claim autonomy over the affairs of Witzieshoek. The government in the person of the Assistant Native Commissioner and the local magistrate stripped the chieftainship of its former authority because ultimate authority lay in their hands.

This became evident right from the implementation of Proclamation 39 in 1939. Chief Charles no longer had the authority to distribute land amongst his people, a vital

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[10] Ibid.

[11] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, Witzieshoek Vigilance Association (WVA) , Constitution and Rules, 30/5/1939.

element of his chiefly function in the eyes of the community. Furthermore, he did not have the power to enforce any decisions regarding production in the community. For example, he could not sanction the bringing of cattle into the community without the backing of the Trust and its officials.[12]

The erosion of chiefly authority therefore became a real concern which was shared by members of the community. As early as 1940, the chief had to point out specifically in a meeting of the Chiefs and people[13] that he did have the authority to decide cases connected with damage caused to arable allotments.

> I would like to point out that since the arable allotments have been taken over by the Board my people seem to be under the impression that I have no more authority to decide cases connected with any damage caused to an arable plot.[14]

What fuelled such a perception was the fact that the chief did not have authority over more important cases, such as cattle theft or breaking of Trust laws.

The introduction of the Trust provided the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association with a burst of energy. The Association concerned itself directly with Witzieshoek affairs right from its inception and its prime targets were the Department and Trust precisely because they had

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[12] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, SNA TO CNC, 23/3/1948.

[13] Meetings with the Chiefs and people were organized on behalf of the Department and were forums where the local Native Commissioner and police sergeant addressed the community and 'listened' to their grievances. They could be classified as Department and Trust pitsos.

[14] SAB: NTS, 6814, 29/318, part 2, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 24/6/1940.

drained the chieftainship of its former power and authority.

Its stand against both bodies made the Association unpopular amongst those members of the community who were adherents of the Department and its betterment programme. In 1941, the Reserve Board ignored a letter sent by A N Mopeli, the secretary of the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association, because the members of the community on the Board claimed that it 'did not represent the tribe'[15] and the Association was 'always up in arms against the Chief, Board and Administration in the Reserve.'[16]

Despite its prime targets being the Department and Trust, the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association unwittingly challenged the chief's tenuous hold over the community. This was because it represented an alternative form of male authority to the one sanctioned by the Department. This made it a formidable opponent of the Department *and* the chief from the outset.

The extent to which the Association presented an alternative form of male authority can be gauged from its discourse. In an article written by the Association for the African newspaper Bantu World in 1942, it appealed directly to a sense of masculine identity.

> I hereby announce for general information that as the affairs of the persecution of the people of Witzieshoek have reached a stage at which they can no longer be taken lightly, it is now each and every man's duty to do his rightful bit ... you are created as men as you all know

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[15] SAB: NTS, 8144, 4/341, part 2, Minutes NRB, 23/10/1941.

[16] Ibid.

> what the duty of a man is when things are like this. [17]

This article was calling on men, attempting to unite them through a common masculine identity. The inference that men had a specific duty in this context implied that women had one too, but one that was in the background. It was men whom the Association expected to take up the reins and lead the way.

An important feature of the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association was that it indicated the extent of interaction and communication between people in the towns and at home. Apart from temporary sojourns back to Witzieshoek, members of the Association would have gained information on the reserve from friends and relatives, such as wives or grandparents. Thus, neither area existed in a vacuum. The fact that the Association stressed male authority underlined the extent to which the latter was being openly thwarted in the towns and at home. The Association was trying to bolster patriarchy in this context.

The Association confirmed its allegiance to patriarchal authority in its desire to elevate Chief Charles to his 'rightful' position within the community. It argued in a memorandum to the Native Affairs Department in 1943 that 'the Chiefs have no power. The real Ruler is the Assistant Native Commissioner. The Chiefs are mere figureheads that must "dance to his fiddle" '.[18] The Association claimed to speak out on behalf of the community and later in the same document reiterated its dissatisfaction with the chiefs' lack of real power.

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[17] SAB: NTS, 10313, 1/426, Copy in letter, ANC to Magistrate (Mag), 23/4/1942.

[18] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, WVA to DNA, 26/8/1943.

> The people feel that until Chiefs are given their respectful status and not the position of a servant of the Assistant Native Commissioner; and until people are given the freedom to direct their grievances to the proper quarters as soon as they felt there was an attempt at their oppression; so long will the African in this Reserve remain 'eating the bread of tears'.[19]

The conflict between the Association on the one hand, and the Department, Trust and chief on the other went beyond the problem of chiefly authority. The Association also condemned various other features of Department rule. In its 1943 memorandum to the Department, it denounced the education system of the Dutch Reformed Church which the Department had co-opted. It felt that educationally, the reserve was 'the most backward of the Sister reserves in the province.'[20] It placed the blame squarely in the hands of the Dutch Reformed Church for this anomaly, which according to the Association 'gave little heed to the mental side of the people', due to its policy which was to 'educate the native not to be like the white man'.[21]

The Association displayed a strong Africanist ideology in its discourse, which was encapsulated in its desire for 'African liberty', its outcry against 'white supremacy' and the installation of whites rather than African employees of the Department and Trust. Its obvious distaste for the Church's education system stemmed from the latter's failure to place education of Africans on an equal footing with that of whites.

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Ibid.

The Association subscribed to a form of 'enlightened' or progressive chieftainship. By emphasizing the importance of the authority of the chief, while at the same time arguing that lack of education led to backwardness and ignorance, the Association was transformimg the chieftainship into one that sanctioned 'development'. The irony in this notion was that Chief Charles in his collaboration with the Trust and the Native Affairs Department perceived himself to be enlightened. According to an interview conducted by Prof Kotze with G M Mohale (the then Prime Minister of Qua Qua) in the 1970s, Chief Charles was an 'enlightened' chief determined to educate his people and ensure their economic development.[22] By proclaiming Chief Charles to be enlightened, Mohale was imposing his own values on the chief. In other words, as an educated member of the African elite in the seventies, Mohale would have perceived Chief Charles' collaboration with the Department as essential to the development of the reserve.

Despite the Association's efforts on his behalf, the chief disapproved of it. This was apparent in his letter to the Assistant Native Commissioner in 1944.

> I am totally in disagreement with the attitude adopted by the Leihlo le Sechaba and the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association ... These bodies are unauthorised and unrecognised by me ... as far as I'm aware these bodies have a tendency of taking things on their own and more often than not have trespassed into my sphere of activities and jurisdiction.[23]

The chief's response was predictable as he not only relied on the Department for his status, but was

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[22] UNISA: AAS219, Interview, Prof Kotze with G M Mohale.

[23] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, quoted by ANC to Mag, 27/3/1947.

essentially an organ of its authority. The Assistant Native Commissioner's response to the Association was even more vitriolic than that of the chief. The former demanded that it be banned to prevent it spreading its 'poisonous propaganda in exaggerated form' and undermining the authority and loyalty of the chief.[24]

The irony in the chief's and other African members of the Board's response to the Vigilance Association was that despite their loyalty to the Department and Trust, their support of it was not unequivocal. In 1943, the chief had petitioned the Department of Native Affairs, deploring certain features of betterment. In 1947, in a letter to the Chief Native Commissioner, the chief and members of the community listed grievances which mirrored some of the Association's complaints in the 1943 memorandum. They questioned the 'imposition of taxes without the consultation or advice through our chief, the virtual abolition of authority of chiefs and sub-chiefs whose existence is a tradition with us' (both emphasized by the Association) and the 'functioning of the Assistant Native Commissioner as both administrative and judicial officer'.[25] This directly echoed of the Association's disapproval of the Commissioner in 1943. 'He is not only a Magistrate of his own Court but also the Master of his own Police and the Chairman of his own Board.'[26]

Interestingly, despite a deepening of resistance towards the Department and Trust over the period 1939 to 1951, the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association did not continue to bloom. In 1944, The Chief Native Commissioner pointed out in a letter to the Additional Native Commissioner that 'the Department is of the opinion that not too much notice should be taken of the Vigilance Association which

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[24] Ibid.

[25] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, CC et al to CNC, 6/11/1947.

[26] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, WVA to DNA, 26/08/1943.

is now dying a natural death'.[27] This opinion was not the result of wishful thinking, for the Association had lost the energy it had displayed from 1939 to 1943. It reappeared briefly in 1948, when the Association sent a letter to the Department reacting against the 'recent rapid changes in the Reserve', such as the unequal distribution of land, unfair control over trees and the enforcement of stock limitation.[28] The Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry made much of the Association's involvement in the rebellion in 1950.[29] The Commission's assessment is debatable and will be discussed in the appropriate chapter.[30]

The demands of the Association fell on deaf ears, while the chief's power continued to weaken and concern over his position intensified by the late 1940s. In 1947, the Additional Native Commissioner himself stated that,

> Chief Charles Mopeli's position has been for some time not as secure as outward appearance would lead one to believe. There is a feeling amongst the tribe that the government has reduced the Chief to a mere figurehead and usurped or delegated inherited authority to others, thereby giving them [the people] no voice in the government.[31]

This impression of the chief's power was substantiated by perception of his character and attitude. In the same report, the Commissioner argued that the Chief was 'not

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27 SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, Secretary of Native Affairs (SNA) to Mag (Harrismith), 6/10/1944.

28 Ibid.

29 Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, pp. 12-13.

30 Refer to chapter 6.

31 SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, ANC to CNC, 29/3/1947.

pugnacious by nature' and that this was interpreted by many as a 'weakness'.[32] In 1948, the Commissioner reiterated his argument of the previous year. 'The Chief is deprived of administrative duties and because of this his prestige and position are undermined.'[33]

In 1951, in a meeting with the chief and the Witzieshoek people, Isak Tomale, a member of the Mopeli community, encapsulated the fundamental problem which the introduction of the Trust had created for Chief Charles.

> We are crying for the customs and respect of our Chief and Sub-chiefs. It is originally the white man that caused trouble amongst us. While we respected our Chief the white men pulled us away from him. Personally it is difficult for the Chief because he is not bigger than the Native Commissioner. It would be well if you could direct us, govern us, and hear us through our Chief. We always wanted to remain under the wings of our Chief. We would not like to be snatched from under his wings.[34]

The Native Reserve Board and chiefly authority: 1939-1949

Part of the perception that the chief was stripped of his powers, in addition to his actual loss of autonomy, was reflected in the functioning of the Native Reserve Board and magistrates court after 1939. This was because these institutions effectively usurped the role formerly played by the pitso and the khotla. The pitso, though still in existence, could no longer enforce its decisions onto the

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[32] Ibid.

[33] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, SNA to CNC, 23/3/1948.

[34] SAB: NTS, 6814, 29/318, part 2, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 5/9/1951.

community, while the khotla could only deal with civil disputes.

The Native Reserve Board was a controversial element of Witzieshoek government in a number of other ways, and this affected not only its popularity but its ability to entrench male authority. Firstly, it was a body whose majority of members were not elected either by the community or by the chief. It took direction not from the chief, but from the Assistant Native Commissioner, its chairperson. And it relied on the African members to properly represent the views of the Witzieshoek community. Notwithstanding the use of consultation, the forum was dominated by the Native Commissioner who in effect held the reins of power.[35]

In its 1943 memorandum, the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association bemoaned the fact that the Board was 'not for the convenience of the people but for the convenience of the Assistant Native Commissioner. People are never consulted. They are always dictated to and they thereafter do not question.' [36] In a meeting with the Chiefs and people in 1947, resistance to the Board was expressed unequivocally by one Michael Skosana: 'The Witzieshoek Native Reserve Board does not represent the people of Witzieshoek. It is an independent body and we cannot abide by what it decided in the past.' [37]

Secondly, the Board was problematic because the pre-requisite for election to it and voter status, was that one had to be a male tax paying member of the community. It is apparent that tax was a consistent difficulty for

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[35] This is clear from the minutes of the Reserve Board meetings, SAB: NTS, 8144, 4/341, part 1 and 2.

[36] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, WVA to DNA, 26/8/1943.

[37] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 12/6/1947.

the inhabitants of the reserve. In a meeting with the Chiefs and people in 1940, the Assistant Native Commissioner implored people to pay their taxes and warned them that they would be prosecuted if they failed to do so.[38] In 1946, he again referred to the 'unsatisfactory tax position.' [39] Those who paid taxes did so erratically. For example, in April 1948, 101 pounds were collected in taxes, in June only twenty pounds, ten shillings and in August as little as eleven pounds. Yet in November 1949, as much as 241 pounds was collected when four months previously only five pounds had been recorded.[40]

Apart from the problem that only male tax-paying members of the community could vote for elected representatives, which meant only those that could keep up with their taxes could vote, there was the logistical dilemma that a large part of the community resided outside the reserve and therefore was not able to be present in order to vote. In 1940, this was pointed out by the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association in relation to the election procedure. 'This procedure gave no opportunity to take part in either the nomination or the election to those residents ... who are temporarily absent in Johannesburg earning money to subsidize the inefficiency of the tribal lands.' [41] The fact that more than half of the community's taxes were paid outside of the reserve between 1945 and 1950 makes the elective process of the Reserve Board derisory.

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[38] SAB: NTS, 6814, 29/318, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 24/6/1940.

[39] SAB: NTS, 6814, 29/318, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 31/12/1946.

[40] SAB: KOG, 659, AOD969C/993C, NRB, Schedule of Revenue Collections April 1948 to August 1950.

[41] SAB: NTS, 8150, 13/341, part 2, WVA to ANC, 21/10/1940.

Ergo, the legitimacy of the Board rested on the eligibility of the male members of the Witzieshoek community to vote. In the face of widespread tax evasion, in addition to the physical absence of those qualified to vote, the Board elections became farcical. The extent to which the Board and its actions represented a farce to the community can be gauged by the number of people attending the meetings with the Chiefs and people, a forum the Board relied on to advertise decisions and for consultation. In a community numbering approximately eight thousand at any one time, the numbers of one hundred and one hundred and fifty recorded at these meetings constituted a tiny percentage of the population.[42] Through its non-attendance of these meetings, the community of Witzieshoek, was signaling its disapproval both of such a forum of consultation, and of the Native Reserve Board.

The extent to which the Reserve Board was a tool in the hands of the Native Commissioner, reiterating and enforcing Trust regulations and opinion, was underlined by the attitude of the Commissioner and the tone of the meetings. For example, in a meeting of the Board in January 1947, most of the Witzieshoek representatives voiced their disagreement with stock reduction. However, the Commissioner still concluded that he was pleased that 'the Board has entrenched that Livestock Limitation is necessary.'[43] This was a blatant discounting of what had emerged at the meeting. The rejection of this form of public organization by men in part symbolized the decline in male authority relations.

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[42] SAB: NTS, 6418, 29/318, Minutes, Chiefs and people, The minutes are also recorded in SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1 and 2.

[43] SAB: NTS, 8144, 4/341, Minutes, NRB, 9/1/1947.

Migration to the towns: a threat to male authority relations, 1939-1950

Witzieshoek vs the Towns

Witzieshoek was a community which depended on an intimate relationship with the towns Harrismith, Johannesburg and Durban, in order to survive.[44] Migration largely defined the relationship between Witzieshoek and these towns and was a major source of tension, one which highlighted the erosion of male authority relations. This was due to a number of factors.

Although the movement of men to and from the towns enjoyed the tacit support of both the members of the community and its chief, female migration was condemned. In order to supplement the rapidly diminishing resources in Witzieshoek, which had an impact on the economic well-being of the community as well as on the community's ability to sustain social relations, outside employment for men had become a necessity early in the century. In his account of the Rand in 1939, Mopeli-Paulus revealed how the inability to acquire cattle, which were essential in regulating marriage transactions, without outside funding forced men to migrate. He described how recruits would board the buses and cry out, 'I'll marry when I come back! I'm working for cattle for the wedding'.[45] Migration of men had been formalized in 1938 with the appointment of an attesting officer for recruitment in Witzieshoek.[46] In 1938, '90% of able bodied Natives' were migrating to the towns.[47]

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[44] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle.', pp. 48 and 101.

[45] Drum, December 1954, p. 68.

[46] SAB: NTS, 2325, 939/280, Recruiting in Witzieshoek.

[47] SAB: NTS, 2210, 372/280, AssNC to DNA, 27/7/1938.

In contrast, women migrants could not sojourn to the towns in order to build up an insurance policy for the future. Women migrants could not rely on returning to the rural areas, as their access to land was dependent on a husband or on his dependents. Furthermore, unlike men who could leave their stock and land in the hands of their wives, women could not. Their only hope of returning to the Hoek once they had migrated would be on the arm of their husbands. As Walker contends, for women, migration was 'far more likely to be permanent'.[48]

Migration was also problematic because it symbolized the movement of both women and men beyond the realm of chiefly control. In his article on life on the reef, Mopeli-Paulus made this clear: 'The chiefs at home have no power or influence over these people, or the lives they come to.'[49] This was exacerbated by the social relations which operated in the towns, which were distinguished by independent women.

Mopeli-Paulus managed to capture the spirit of the social relations operating in the towns in his story on the Rand. He described how 'his' Basotho women had shouted

> 'If you are a man, come let me tell you - keep away, my boy! Go to the Christians! Here is Benoni Twatwa. We rule ourselves.' Then throwing their skirts above their knees and crying. 'Take and eat.' [50]

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[48] Walker, 'Gender and the Development of Migrant Labour System', p. 188.

[49] Drum, December 1954, p. 66.

[50] Ibid., p. 68.

By shouting out, 'We rule ourselves', these women were taunting men with their power to do as they pleased. This was a power which seemed to stem from their sexuality: 'Take and eat'. The Basotho women were making use of their bodies on two levels. The first level was similar to that described by Caroline Ifeka-Moller in her study of the Women's War in Nigeria. Ifeka-Moller's study is particularly useful as it provides an insight into the use of the sexual insult. She argues that what men of the day viewed as 'obscene gestures' of 'nearly naked' women were in fact a mechanism of self identity and pride to the Igbo women.[51] They were intentionally exposing their genitalia to stress not to men but to themselves the important function they controlled: reproduction. Ifeka-Moller argued that women in that society had a 'cultural identity ('feminine') which placed more emphasis on women's biological functions than did men's identity ('masculine') on their biology.' [52] This was true of Witzieshoek society which revered motherhood above all and hence women's biological ability to reproduce.[53] By using their bodies, and therefore, a sexually explicit action, Igbo women were re-asserting their identity as reproducers. 'Hidden from sight behind the genitalia is the womb, which I suggest as the operator of female reproduction, was the source of the Igbo woman's pride in herself as a woman.'[54] Like the Igbo women, Witzieshoek women were stating their pride in their womanhood and through this re-asserting their self-identity as women.

The second level was as a means to taunt men. It is after all in the realm of sexuality that men can lose their

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[51] C Ifeka-Moller, 'Female Militancy and Colonial Revolt: The Women's War of 1929, Eastern Nigeria' in S Ardener (ed), Perceiving Women, (New York, 1975), p. 129.

[52] Ibid., p. 144.

[53] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The world and the Cattle', p. 8.

[54] Ifeka-Moller, 'Female Militancy', p. 127.

self control and hence their ability to exert power. By exposing the source of that lack of control and further by shouting 'take and eat!' women were exhibiting the fact that within the domain of sexuality they had a potential source of power. That source of power was accentuated by the ability to reproduce.

In Witzieshoek, reproduction was central to women's identity and a potential source of power, but it was regulated by bridewealth transactions. In the context of the towns, reproduction was something that women controlled. They did not have to involve themselves in the institutions governing marriage or to rely on the men who regulated these institutions. Thus, by exposing their independence, of these institutions and of men, women were flaunting the threat they presented to male control. The towns enabled them to import an important part of their self-identity from Witzieshoek, but at the same time enabled them to thwart men in the process.

The significance of Mopeli-Paulus' extract lies not only in the actions of the women, but in his response. In an attempt to condemn these women, Mopeli-Paulus constructed them through symbols and terms asserting their sexuality and 'immorality'. He did so by linking women to liquor and prostitution, both of which he condemned. An example of this can be found in the second chapter.[55] He reiterated his antipathy towards these women by decribing an incident where a friend visited prostitutes. 'Young women appeared and started hanging oround their necks encouraging them to buy more brandy'. Once Mopeli's friend was so drunk that he was 'scarcely conscious', he was taken to another room and the women 'told him to take his trousers off, took them, and walked out of the room with them.' It was only the next day that he realized that he had lost all the money that he had been carrying

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[55] Refer to chapter 2.

on his person.[56] Theft was thus added to these women's repertoire. The restlessness between town and countryside is marked by Mopeli-Paulus' association of town women with negative icons and an implicit assumption that rural women were free from such vices.

The increasing autonomy of women in the urban areas also affected the behaviour of men in these districts which in turn fed into the conflict between Witzieshoek and the towns. Men reaffirmed their masculinity through the taking of male wives. '"Father I am a contented man. For now I am married to a girl - a girl found for me in the compound" and the girl they sing of is no girl but a boy.'[57]

Patrick Harries argues that the taking of male 'wives' in the compounds of the early Witwatersrand gold mines was an attempt by men to reconstruct the gender differences they were familiar with in the rural areas and through this to perpetuate their masculine identity and domination over women in a context where the latter were not present.[58] The fact that the taking of male wives was still taking place in 1939 suggests that men continued to reinforce their masculine identity and domination over women, despite the increasing presence of women. In Mopeli-Paulus' story, he maintains that the 'immoral' actions of town women, their prostitution, brewing of liquor and theft, led men to conclude that 'it's safer to stick to boys'.[59]

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[56] Drum, December 1954, p. 67.

[57] Ibid., p. 68.

[58] P Harries, 'Symbols and Sexuality: Culture and Identity on the Early Witwatersrand Gold Mines', Gender and History, 2/3, (1990), p. 324.

[59] Drum, December 1954, p. 67.

According to Harries, the process which started off with the new young arrivals becoming 'wives' and ended when the same men took their own 'wives' was a type of rite of passage marking the transition from boyhood to manhood.[60] This reflected the ideologies in the rural areas where marriage and the accompanying full sexual relations between girls and boys 'marked the passage from childhood to adulthood' as well as locking them into their distinctive masculine and feminine gender roles.[61]

In the context of migrant labour, young boys in the rural areas were inclined to identify with their mothers who were left in charge of the homesteads.[62] Therefore, on reaching the urban areas, boys were weaned of these ties through their liaisons with men. These relationships incorporated them into the male world, teaching them through re-enactions of gender roles how to behave as men and how to interact with women.[63] Harries points out that these liaisons acted as a means to 'strengthen male identity at a time when men's extended absence from the rural areas was making women increasingly powerful at home.'[64]

The importance of this practice to Witzieshoek lies in the fact that men were establishing and defining new relations to entrench male authority because the latter was rapidly eroding on the home front and within the towns. Such actions on the part of men in the towns went beyond accepted custom, contributing to the stress between town and countryside. The parameters enforced by town life meant that femininity and masculinity were cast

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60 Harries, 'Symbols and Sexuality', p. 327.

61 Ibid., p. 326.

62 Ibid., p. 327.

63 Ibid., p. 328.

64 Ibid.

in a new mould. This created a conflict between the ideologies governing self-identity in Witzieshoek which were based on patriarchy and a particular sexual division of labour, and the ideologies directing self-identity within the towns.

Chief Charles' response to the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association must also be analyzed in this mould. His conclusions were dictated by his perceptions of the towns and their influence on his people and hence indicated the restlessness between the two. He stated that the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association consisted of 'Witzieshoek inhabitants who spend most of their lives in Johannesburg and who are filled with the spirit of Johannesburg life.'[65] One can see how Chief Charles' attitude reflected that of Mopeli-Paulus. In order to condemn the Association and its membership, it was enough for them to be linked to the towns.

Finally, the strain between the towns and the reserve was affected by the return of inhabitants with newly-formed ideas. According to Mr Modernwane, attitudes of the people migrating into the towns had altered on their return. 'The change was towards not listening, not conforming to the standards, and in some of the traditions and customs if one were to apply logic, they sounded illogical and there would be evolution like that [sic].'[66] Note the emphasis on the word 'not', for returning migrants were clearly no longer subscribing to the social relations and customs governing life in Witzieshoek.

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[65] SAB: 7459, 506/327, part 2, CC quoted in letter from SNA to MNA, 21/3/1950.

[66] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

A case in point was an appeal made by the local sergeant that those returning to Witzieshoek refrain from molesting young girls.

> He drew attention to young boys returning from Johannesburg swanking in public places in their Oxford bags. ... They had no respect for Europeans and did not support their parents. That they go about molesting young girls. That this sort of thing must be stopped.[67]

The perpetration of violent behaviour on the part of men, whether confined to migrants or not, was a further indication of the disruption in male authority structures. Such incidences of violence represent attempts by men to assert their domination over women. The employment of actions such as rape or assault against women have been shown to be a form of male control in black South African societies in this period by Janssen Jurriet.[68] Moreover, Lloyd Vogelman reveals a useful contemporary explanation of such behaviour which can be applied to Witzieshoek. 'Sometimes men rape women who appear to defy control of their own lives - women who seem to break the rules. Rape, or other forms of violence, is then inflicted so as to ensure the woman's respect for the man's authority and her renewed or continuing adherence to prevailing notions of feminine behaviour'.[69]

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[67] SAB: NTS, 6814, 29/318, part 1, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 22/9/1936. Please note that such presentations of returning migrants were bound up in the state discourse of the period seeking to caste the towns as places of evil. This particular statement, though illuminating, must be viewed within such a context. Those young boys who had not gone to the towns as yet were certainly not necessarily exempt from such behaviour.

[68] J Jurriet, Sexism, the Male Monopoly on History and Thought, (New York, 1982), pp. 224-226.

[69] L Vogelman, The Sexual face of Violence, Rapists on Rape, (Johannesburg, 1990), p. 29.

In Witzieshoek, in 1947 for instance, the majority of cases heard in the regional court were those of assault, perpetrated by men against women. Interestingly, in all such cases, the victim was the attacker's wife or a relative such as a mother, aunt or grandmother. One man claimed that he had burnt down a woman's hut because she had ended their affair. There were also three reported cases of rape. In the one incident the brother-in-law raped his sister-in-law, whose husband was in Johanesburg at the time.[70]

The notion that Smuts had alluded to in his speech in 1929, that male migrants would not imbibe new ideas in the town, proved to be unrealistic. This created a tension in the fabric of the community which was aggravated by the migration of women specifically, and by the movement of both men and women outside of the chief's control.

Migration: the pitso and the khotla, 1939-1950

The widespread migration of men from the Hoek (Witzieshoek) had a profound impact on the pitsos and therefore on political organization and male control. The absence of men disrupted a number of political processes which by 1950 had become radically transformed.

By 1950, according to G M Mohale, women still constituted the majority in Witzieshoek.[71] In the context of a minority of men, women chose the most direct route to air their views. They started attending pitsos and

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[70] VAB: LWI, 1/1/1/1, part 1, Court Records, Harrismith. The other two rapists were not related to their victims in any way.

[71] UNISA: AAS219, Interview, Prof Kotze with G M Mohale.

speaking out about their grievances.[72] In his life story, Mopeli-Paulus explained exactly which women attended pitsos in 1950. 'Some of these women were widows or the wives of men who were out working on the mines or the farms or the towns, who felt that they had responsibility for the lands and cattle.'[73]

Secondly, without a male family head to represent them, women were also attending khotlas and being given the opportunity to speak out about disputes.[74] Thus, the absence of men disrupted the flow of communication from the male family head to the chief. By 1950, pitsos and khotlas were no longer defined by their male membership but rather as broader, more inclusive community institutions. This, of course had a devastating effect on the pitso and khotla as mechanisms for male control. In the absence of any other all-male forum which was legitimate in the eyes of the community, the changed gender composition of the pitso and the khotla represented the erosion of male control.

The decay of masculine authority should be viewed within the framework of the social relations which governed Witzieshoek. The sexual division of labour was an important organizing construct in the community. In order to sustain production and reproduction, tasks were customarily divided into men's and women's responsibilities. Underlying this division was a complementary separation between masculine and feminine identities. Although both the sexual division of labour and gender identification were not static, they were

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[72] Interviews, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane, Shan Beerstecher with Mrs and Mr Moleka, Shan Beerstecher with Mrs and Mr Mothibi.

[73] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 119.

[74] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

reinforced from generation to generation through the socialization of children.

In his autobiography, Mopeli-Paulus illustrates the entrenchment of masculine and feminine identities and categories within Witzieshoek. He describes how as a boy he had been expected to herd cattle and sleep alongside the other boys in the community. The strict separation between the tasks expected of boys and girls was reinforced by an overt entrenchment of gender differences. Mopeli explained that the strongest of the herd boys would be given the title 'mampoli', once he had 'shown his strength by beating all the others in stick fights.' This young boy would then command respect and have the power to 'order any boy to bring food for him.'[75] The 'mampoli' was only revered once he had displayed the strength and aggression associated with masculinity. This was sharply contrasted with girls' and women's behaviour.

> We were afraid of being called 'women' and longed to be men. Our ways toughened us, and we also knew that the girls were forever asking, 'Who amongst the herd boys is the biggest and strongest fighter? A Basotho boy feels important when he goes wounded among the girls![76]

This strong sense of masculine identity was reinforced beyond the discourse of the herd boys.

> When the herd boys are herding in the fields, any man passing by on the road had the right to call them up and flog them. ... If, after a

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[75] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 8.

[76] Ibid.

> flogging, a boy should cry because of pain, the others will turn on him, and mock him thus:
> Are you a woman, to cry?
> Man is a Ram and does not cry.[77]

This absorption of gender identity was reinforced by custom. For example when Mopeli-Paulus was young, he was confused about the strict laws regulating food consumption. He described how he asked an old man at the khotla, 'Why girls should not be allowed to eat eggs?'[78]

By the time that women were attending pitsos and khotlas, which Mopeli-Paulus described as 'the place of the men', the generation of children that Mopeli-Paulus represented were in their early forties.[79] Their sense of masculinity or femininity that had been defined through their socialization from an early age would have been severely challenged by 'the place of men' becoming the place of women and men.

When asked about pitsos and khotlas, Mr Mothibi, of the same generation as Mopeli-Paulus, replied that at first women did not attend, but later they had been allowed to do so and that pitsos had 'lost their meaning' as a result.[80] Mr Modernwane addressed the issue in more detail and related it back to dissatisfaction with the Trust. He pointed out that there was 'resistance' on the part of men towards women's involvement in pitsos and khotlas.[81]

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid., p. 15.

[79] Ibid.

[80] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mrs and Mr Mothibi.

[81] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

> In fact there was a great dislike of the Trust because there was some recognition attached to women whose husbands had died. ... If the cattle of the women did something wrong she would be the person to be charged. You know, there were cases where they were all by themselves and that didn't quite sit with the people around here. Because as far as they were concerned, if a woman had a case she would have to be accompanied by a male member of the family.[82]

Although the subject of women attending pitsos and khotlas was not recorded at the meetings of the Chiefs and people, the consistent calls by men for a return to chiefly control screamed out a desire to return to systems of organization based on male control. 'As you can see we have a chief under whom we live in this Reserve. Without him we as a tribe can do nothing.'[83]

Mopeli-Paulus addressed the issue in a more roundabout way.

> I thought of the days of my grandfather, when the Chiefs had power over the land. ... The Basothos are loyal people because their Chiefs know that they must see to the needs and interests of their followers. Otherwise why should they follow them? In the old days no common man went hungry in a good year: men gathered round their chief at khotla and food was brought there and everyone ate and drank and then sat to discuss a case, or played maraba-maraba that betrays the herd boys, for

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[82] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

[83] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 8/7/1948.

gatherings held by other male members of the community from which the chief was excluded. [89]

Conclusion

The implementation of the Trust and its betterment programme in 1939 had a profound impact on male authority in Witzieshoek. The power and authority of the chief was severely eroded and this created frustration within the community, which was manifested in ambivalent attitudes towards the chief. Demands for the full restoration of chiefly authority were contradicted by alternative authority structures such as the Vigilance Association and by meetings which excluded the chief. Antipathy towards the Trust was exacerbated by the Native Reserve Board and the magistrate's court, both of which undermined the pitso and khotla.

Male authority was assaulted from another front, the towns. Migration to the towns by both men and women adversely affected the authority structures in the reserve between 1939 and 1950. Migrants were not only beyond the grasp of the chief and the Trust, but were also actively challenging accepted norms in the towns as well as on their return to Witzieshoek. Women migrants created specific problems due to their relative independence. The threat presented to the community and to male control by migration to the towns led to increasing independence for women in Witzieshoek. By 1950, the structures that were in place in Witzieshoek resembled those in place in 1939 in name only. Male authority relations had been severely undermined.

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[89] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Court case, Rex vs Malau and Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 119.

CHAPTER FOUR

OPPOSITION TO BETTERMENT: WITZIESHOEK, 1936-1950

'Witzieshoek is the tombstone of the betterment scheme in South Africa'[1]

In order to obtain a rounded view of the context informing and moulding the minds of Witzieshoek inhabitants, it is necessary to look at the underdevelopment of Witzieshoek in this period and the parallel implementation of a betterment strategy in the area. Betterment threatened the organization of the Witzieshoek community which was based on both the productive and reproductive capabilities of its women, as well as the authority of men over women. Furthermore, the effects of both decay and betterment were felt more keenly by women than by men between 1936 and 1950. Male migrant workers, though ultimately affected by the situation in Witzieshoek, did not have to deal with it on a daily basis.

In 1936, the Agricultural Department of the Department of Native Affairs appointed a technical committee 'to investigate and recommend measures for improving conditions in the reserve.'[2] The recommendations included measures to erect fences, control grazing, oversee the division and demarcation of lands and to reduce livestock.[3] In 1939, Proclamation 31 was implemented, and the reserve was officially declared a betterment area. 1936 thus marked the beginning of a period of so-called development in Witzieshoek, characterized by interference

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[1] HAD, (1951), vol. 76, col.8421.

[2] SAB: 7459, 506/327, part 2, Melle to CNC, 28/9/1950.

[2] Ibid.

on the part of the Department, and later the Trust, in the organization of production. This production was located within a community which had been based on the sexual division of labour between women and men, but which was now predominantly dependent on the labour of women. Members of the community began encountering the Trust officials on a daily basis.

Opposition to Betterment: a gender interpretation

'Cattle is our God': the system of bohali pre-1939

Betterment presented a threat to the custom of bohali[4], upon which the social organization of the Witzieshoek community was predicated. Bohali was a custom that essentially harnessed women's productive and reproductive functions.

Following Jeff Guy, the 'essential element' in southern African pre-capitalist societies was the 'union between a man and a woman that established the homestead' which in turn was the 'unit of production' that formed the basis of that society.[5] Guy argues that bridewealth was a 'social transaction which united two great male concerns: the control of women and cattle in a dynamic totality.'[6] In this process, men were able to control women's productive roles in both the domestic and agricultural arenas as well as women's fertility and their reproductive role by maintaining control over cattle, the essential ingredient in the marriage transaction.

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[4] A payment in the form of cattle.

[5] J Guy, 'Gender Oppression', p. 36.

[6] Ibid.

Women had been the backbone of Witzieshoek society before the intervention of the Trust. Production revolved around their role as producers and reproducers. In the first instance, the community relied on the food women harvested and cooked and in the second instance, its continued existence was based upon their fertility. As Jeff Guy argues, women's ability to produce offspring and hence create labour power enabled them to create a surplus, not in material goods but in the form of persons and their labour power. [7] Cattle were incorporated into Witzieshoek and other societies precisely because they could be amassed and surpluses, in the hands of men, could be used as bohali in order to gain control over productive and reproductive women.

Thus, Guy concludes that cattle were important to men in pre-capitalist societies in two respects: their pure value as agricultural products and their role in the perpetual reproductive cycle of women. In essence, cattle unleashed the labour power of women in the homestead which resulted not only in production, but through reproduction in increased labour power and hence increased production. Cattle directly empowered their male owners; the more cattle a man amassed, the greater his *social*, as well as economic and political power.

Mopeli-Paulus illustrated this phenomenon with regards to Witzieshoek.

> I had always admired my uncles, who had married many wives, and had thought how good it was to have a large family, with plenty of boys to look after the stock. When my cousins came out to the mines they formed a good and happy team of workers, who sent much money to their fathers, who, in turn, could easily afford to

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[7] Ibid., p. 40.

> buy cattle for bohali - the bride price - and marry them well.[8]

This process was cyclical. Each member of the community, whether male or female, was subject to different rules and differential access to social power depending on their age. This was because age was thought to determine fertility and potency.[9] Mopeli-Paulus explained how he was subject to his parents' and the community's authority from pre-adolescence. For example, at a young age, he was expected to help herd cattle; later he had to obtain his father's permission to leave the community to work in the city, and finally his father chose his prospective wife for him.[10] He wrote that 'the golden rule of the Basotho is that a child owes all he owns to his parents.'[11] The youngest members of the community, both male and female, were subject to the greatest control, especially once fertile. Once married, the husband could start amassing his own cattle and thus acquire the social power that older men had obtained.

Land was not only a crucial resource within the community, but it was also bound up with the gendered organization of the community. Plot allocation prior to Trust infiltration had been in the hands of the chief. Women's access to arable land was through a husband or a father. Unmarried women would be expected to help work their mothers' plots and could only 'own' a plot after marriage. Married men would be allocated a plot of land for each of their wives. Thus, the key to amassing land was amassing wives. Therefore, in order to gain land, both men and women depended on successful marriage

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[8] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 39.

[9] Guy, 'Gender Oppression', p. 42.

[10] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 59.

[11] Ibid., p. 58.

transactions. Hence the issues of cattle and women's productive and reproductive capacity were inextricably linked to the land.

Stock limitation: a threat to 'our God'

Men react, 1939-1950

On 14 June 1939, at a meeting of the Reserve Board and the Headmen in Witzieshoek, the provisions of a draft proclamation limiting stock were accepted and its application agreed upon.[12] This was the most controversial element of the Trust regulations. The issue of consultation was part of the battle against this proclamation, but the root of the resistance was a desperate bid to recreate systems of organization based on earlier gender relations.

In Witzieshoek between 1936 and 1950, the homestead still constituted the basic productive unit, despite the fact that its form had radically altered. Hence bohali continued to operate as a mechanism to establish homesteads and cement ties between homesteads.

Perhaps the single most controversial aspect of African culture, according to white conservationists in the period under examination, was the tendency for Africans to 'hoard' cattle.[13] The inability of conservationists and Trust officials in Witzieshoek and elsewhere to accept the centrality of cattle to the functioning of African society, economically, politically and socially, was to lay the foundations for conflict.

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[12] SAB:7335, 127/327, Meeting, NRB, Chiefs and headmen, 14/6/1938.

[13] Beinart, 'Soil Erosion, Conservation and Ideas about Development', p. 59.

Chief Charles Mopeli articulated this conflict in a letter to the Chief Native Commissioner:

> It is the declared policy of the Government that the African people must develop on their own lines. For such development, it will be conceded, the recognition and observance of traditions, as distinct from anything that can fairly be regarded as primitive or uncivilized practices, are first essentials. Directly or indirectly to force the abandonment of a tradition would amount to the very negation of the African developing along his own lines and can only create a feeling of frustration in the African mind. This is precisely what the application of Proclamation 31 of 1939 does for it runs counter to one of our most cherished traditions. We refer to our marriage system, one of the foundations of which is the payment of dowry in the form of stock.[14]

The statement by Chief Charles indicated that bohali still featured prominently in the community despite the fact that it had been disrupted by migration of men and women, severe shortages of land and sharp divisions between those who owned large herds and those who owned only a few cattle. Ironically enough, instead of weakening the practice of bohali, these conditions had more firmly embedded it in the community.

This is illustrated in Mopeli-Paulus' autobiography.

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[14] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, CC et al to CNC, 6/11/1947, and in SAB, NTS, 6814, 29/318.

> What among all things come first? The Masotho would say, 'cattle'. He will calculate on his fingers, and work out how many cows will calve next year, and then be able to say how many of his sons will marry. Cattle are his bank, and he says money is useless to him, for it does not give birth, as cows do every year, it cannot confirm a marriage; it cannot serve at any ceremonies. From cattle he gets meat, and hides to make blankets, but he would rather the beast died on its own than slaughter it. ... It is true he thinks of them as father, mother and God to him, ... calling it 'Molimo o nko e metsi'-his 'God with the watering nose'.[15]

In his evidence to the Tomlinson Commission, the Native Commissioner claimed that eighty per cent of marital unions in Witzieshoek were customary, in other words 'lobolo marriages'.[16] The importance of cattle was expressed by other male members of the community in petitions, in letters and in meetings between 1939 and 1950. For instance, in 1947 during a meeting of the Reserve Board, a male member elected to the board, E Mopeli, stated, 'Cattle is our God just the same as money is the whiteman's God.'[17] David Mopeli, another Witzieshoek resident, wrote to the Secretary of Native Affairs: 'stock is our bank'.[18] In 1948, at a meeting of the Chiefs and people, a certain Micheal Sekhosana directly linked the importance of cattle to community resistance to the Trust: 'This stock limitation kills

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[15] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 107.

[16] Tomlinson Commission, Vol. 23, Questionaire, Native Commissioner, District: Witzieshoek, p. 9.

[17] SAB: 8144, 4/341, part 3, Minutes of the meeting of the Native Reserve Board, 9/11/1947.

[18] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, letter from David Letsie Mopeli to the SNA, 17/8/1945.

us.'[19] These expressions of the centrality of cattle served to legitimize bohali and its function in controlling women and entrenching senior male authority.

Male migrants from Witzieshoek also endorsed the custom of bohali. The Principal Agricultural Officer stated that 'much money obtained from the sale of labour outside of the district' was invested in cattle within it.[20] Migrants were investing in cattle in order to secure social status. Once married, cattle guaranteed them legitimacy, a place in society and ultimately the social status they coveted, as well as the means to further control women's productive and reproductive capacities. The paradox was that as the 1930s and 1940s unfolded, the likelihood that male migrants and permanent residents could obtain such social power was diminishing. It is therefore necessary to explain why these men continued to defend and advocate bohali.

Part of the answer lies in the fact that male authority in Witzieshoek between 1939 and 1950 was continually challenged by the implementation of the Trust, the migration of men and women, and the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association. The concern over chiefly authority and the khotla and pitso were also bound up with the issue of cattle. This was because these institutions were closely linked to cattle in the discourse of the community. In the khotla or pitso, each man who spoke first greeted the chief in terms of cattle. 'Cattle, the son of Thesele' or 'We thank the cattle, son of Moshoeshoe'.[21] Therefore, respect towards the chief and his authority was

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[19] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 8/7/1948.

[20] Tomlinson Commission, vol: 23, Questionaire; Agricultural Officers, District: Witzieshoek, p. 3.

[21] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 14.

intimately linked to cattle and their position in the community. Mopeli-Paulus made this link more explicit:

> He had great respect for his cattle, and great love. He knows each beast by name, and the words to describe them are always on his lips. He greets his chief thus: '<u>Cattle, son of Thesele</u>!' or '<u>Cattle, Morena!</u>' and after food has been given him by his chief, he will speak thus: '<u>Likhomo ha li ate, Morena!</u>', '<u>Let the cattle increase, Chief!</u>' meaning, 'Let there be food again tomorrow. I shall not be hungry as long as I have my chief.[22]

The link between cattle and the chief fuelled the resistance on the part of men against stock limitation. In essence, stock limitation represented the single most important threat to male authority and control. James Ferguson investigated the centrality of cattle to Lesotho society after capitalist infiltration. His study relates directly to Witzieshoek, not only because of the close geographical association between Witzieshoek and Lesotho, but because Witzieshoek residents were Basothos and thus had similar beliefs and practices to the Basothos Ferguson studied. Furthermore, Ferguson's conclusions offer an insightful framework within which to study Witzieshoek residents.

According to Ferguson, in Basotho society in Lesotho, a man's social power was dependent on the number of his livestock. A man who was wealthy in this sense was one who had a large herd.[23] Such a man was called a '<u>morui</u>' in Basotho society and was respected not only because of his wealth in cattle but because these cattle effectively

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[22] Ibid., p. 107.

[23] J Ferguson, <u>The Anti-Politics Machine</u>, (Lesotho, 1992), p. 152.

belonged to the whole community. An informant explained this concept: 'Because with the cattle, he will hire me with them, so that he ploughs for me or does various things for me with these animals. Now I, too, am able to live.'[24]

This was equally true of Witzieshoek between 1939 and 1950. In interviews, men and women recalled this kind of social wealth. Cattle in the community would be shared out in order to assist with ploughing, or to provide milk. Mr Modernwane provided an example which indicated another form of this 'shared' wealth. 'And there was a system where if you didn't have a herd boy in your family, you would give somebody your cattle to look after and he would enjoy the use of the milk and also you would have to give him something'.[25] He then went on to say, 'Now those who didn't have the means that is how they worked out.'[26] Here we see the practical application of the statement, 'Now I, too am able to live.'

Of course, in this context, chiefs were the most respected 'morui'. Guy points out that chiefs should be seen as 'the richest and most powerful' males.[27] Their power ultimately rested on the ability to harness women's productive and reproductive potentials. Hence political power rested on the social and economic power afforded men by the flow of cattle and women. The chiefs' wealth represented the ultimate form of 'shared' wealth, that went beyond just cattle. This demonstrates that the reactions of men in Witzieshoek to stock limitation between 1930 and 1950 were not irrational. To them the only way to rehabilitate Witzieshoek was to continue to

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[24] Ibid., p. 153.

[25] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Guy, 'Gender Oppression', p. 42.

advocate bohali so that it could continue to represent productive and reproductive power of women as well as shared wealth.

Ferguson scrutinized 'traditional' uses of cattle within the Lesotho economy after capitalist infiltration and within the migrant labour system, providing a valuable explanation of men's continued reverence for cattle. He concluded that in the Lesotho context, characterized by largely absent men, livestock as a male possession assumed a new importance. It legitimized the husband as head of the household by providing tangible and visible support of dependents, even in his absence. It also functioned as a symbolic re-assertion of the husband's 'structural presence even in the face of his physical absence'.[28] Finally, despite men's absence, cattle enabled them to become involved in the community through 'relations of patronage and reciprocity'.[29] Such an analysis is easily applicable to Witzieshoek, a community similarly characterized by male migrancy, where bohali continued to dominate the agenda of men both inside and outside of reserve.

Women's perspective, 1939-1950

Resistance against stock limitation was not exclusively male. Women did have limited access to cattle and hence a form of power. Bohali also provided Witzieshoek women with access to marriage, children and the status associated with motherhood. Moreover, in the absence of men, as more and more women were becoming surrogate household heads, cattle became part of their domain, albeit temporarily.

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[28] Ferguson, The Anti-Politics Machine, p. 156.

[29] Ibid.

In order to evaluate women's reactions to stock limitation, it is necessary to examine in more detail what bohali meant to them. Prior to capitalist penetration, women had enjoyed increased privileges and rights with age. In her study of southern African women, Harriet Ngubane uses the example of the pre-capitalist marriage system to elucidate this point. She argues that throughout southern African societies, the newly married woman was the most vulnerable, needing to adapt to strict rules governing her code of conduct in the new enviroment of her in-laws.[30] The fact that this practice continued in Witzieshoek after contact with European capital was attested to by Mopeli-Paulus. He described the incorporation of his own mother into his father's household.

> When the wife of a chief is still a bride, she has to work like any other married women until she is accustomed to her new home, so my mother would get up early to cook the porridge for the herdboys to take with them; she went onto the lands to do the weeding; she brewed beer, and attended to all the requirements of the house, as does any ngoetsi of the village. ... The basotho saying goes: 'Home is where a man had enough to eat'. [31]

Once the 'ngoetsi' had given birth to her first child, her status improved as motherhood was revered above all else in women.

> According to our custom, a mother of a newly-born child stays inside her house for a period of about three months. She is spoon-fed, and not expected to do any work, and her people

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[30] H Ngubane, 'Southern Africa and the Women's Decade', (copy of draft chapter, 1991), p. 23.

[31] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 18.

> take great pride in hearing others speak of her as fat and nice-looking.[32]

As a newcomer, the wife would initially fall under the jurisdiction of the mother in law, but in time would set up her own kitchen and gain access to a field.[33] Once her children had grown up and in turn married, she would then earn the status of mother-in-law herself. This was a position which enjoyed respect within the society. Mopeli-Paulus recounted an incident where his grandmother, whom he described as 'a woman of strong character', summoned the father of a boy who had hit him and run away to avoid retribution 'to answer to her for his son.'[34] The father clearly had no choice but to respect the wishes of the old woman. In this position, a woman had the power to make decisions about the household and became an important part of the religious practices within it.[35] Ngubane asserts that at this stage women 'played a crucial part, not only in terms of procreation and socialization of children but in emphasizing and perpetuating social norms'[36]

Furthermore, Ngubane argues that women could own cattle. These acquisitions, though, were restricted there were only two avenues by which they could obtain cattle. On marriage, a woman was given a milch cow with its heifer by her father. This was to supply the new wife with access to milk, something she was denied in her husband's home.[37] Secondly, when her own daughters married, she was given a 'special mother's beast' which was usually a

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[32] Ibid., p. 8.

[33] Ngubane, 'Southern Africa', p. 23.

[34] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 13.

[35] Ngubane, 'Southern African', p. 25.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., p. 32.

young cow.[38] Finally, by virtue of her position within the homestead, a wife had access to the power and prestige associated with the cattle owned by her husband. Ngubane argues that wives had a form of 'economic power' as a result.[39] Such power was based, however, on forming a liaison with a man.

In Witzieshoek, between 1939 and 1950, motherhood and cattle continued to be a vital element contributing to women's social and economic security. The dilemma that land deterioration and male migration had created in their lives made such security a major priority. In order to establish some sort of collateral for the future, women had the option of subscribing to bohali or prioritizing cash as a resource.

Women's access to cash was determined by the extent of their dependence on wage-earning husbands and sons, or their direct involvement in the informal economy (beer brewing or making clay pots). Moreover, remittances from husbands and sons were not always regularly provided and cash earned through the informal economy could not always ensure economic security, especially with the increasing deterioration of the reserve. For women, the only realistic escape from the reciprocal and restrictive relations imposed by bridewealth, therefore, was migration to the towns beyond the limits of chiefly and familial control. Women in the towns could largely ignore bohali because a different system of organization operated there which was regulated by cash rather than by cattle.

In Witzieshoek right up to 1950, cattle still superseded cash. Not only did they dominate bohali transactions, but they were also used in rituals such as those celebrating

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[38] Ibid. p. 33.

[39] Ibid.

birth..[40] Chief Charles and a number of other people made the former apparent in a letter to the Chief Native Commissioner. 'Our people think in terms of stock and not in terms of cash unless circumstances force us to do so.'[41] The fact that eighty per cent of marriages in Witzieshoek were customary suggests that women in Witzieshoek continued to subscribe to bohali and therefore had a stake in resisting stock limitation.[42]

Generation vs generation?

By 1939, the institution of bohali was handicapped by migration from the Hoek and by challenges from within. Although the practice continued, problems associated with degeneration, such as lack of cattle and desertion by male inhabitants, combined with new ideas and beliefs absorbed from the towns, chipped away at its core. This was reflected in conflicting attitudes between the young and the old.

In Ferguson's analysis of Lesotho, not everyone subscribed to bohali. He argued that the interests of the younger generation diverged from those of the older. In order to retain power and prestige, older people had a stake in maintaining and upholding bridewealth as the means to harness the wealth of younger men and to control women. Young men, on the other hand, were torn between building up an investment for their old age and having to contend with external claims to their wealth in the form of bohali payments. In contrast, young women had no such conflicting feelings. According to Ferguson, they were

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[40] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

[41] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, CC et al to CNC, 6/11/1947, and in SAB, NTS, 6814, 29/318.

[42] Tomlinson Commission, vol.23, Questionnaire, Native Commissioner, District: Witzieshoek, p. 9.

'constant attackers' of the system.[43] Older women, though, tended to have contradictory views. They were staunch supporters of the system where they had access to the wealth of younger men, yet if they relied totally on cash as a resource, cattle no longer interested them.[44]

Yet, younger men and women would eventually become the older generation. Thus the cycle would continue and they would eventually have to subscribe to such traditions or abandon them and the accompanying power and prestige altogether.

For both men and women in Witzieshoek, stock limitation presented an overt threat to already disrupted systems of organization. In a meeting of the Chiefs and people, Mona Mopeli summed up the problem.

> Some of my people have six married sons. According to custom we have to pay dowry up to 10 head of cattle. If I have to pay 10 head of cattle in respect of one son, and I only have 10 cattle, then I will have to kill the rest of my sons. These children which are not married according to custom commit adultery and break the law.[45]

The issue of consultation

Both women and men in he community expressed a number of grievances against the Trust, which had escalated into demands by 1950. The implementation of betterment rested on the assumption that adequate consultation with male members of the community had taken place. One of the

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[43] Ferguson, The Anti-Politics Machine, p. 164.

[44] Ibid., p. 164.

[45] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 8/7/1948.

terms of the draft stated that the application of the proclamation could occur 'after consultation with the inhabitants thereof and with any District or Local Council having jurisdiction.'[46] In the case of Witzieshoek, a theme which permeates the resistance was a perception on the part of a large section of the community that insufficient consultation had taken place. Consultation in this sense was more than just permission to implement betterment. It also included the enforcement of Trust rules and regulations.

On the face of it, consultation was a male issue in 1939. This was because 'consultation with the inhabitants' actually meant consultation with the male inhabitants. As pointed out before, the Trust recognized and entrenched male participation in political structures and decision-making.[47] But this posed a serious problem for the men at Witzieshoek, because consultation occurred in a context in which the majority of them were away.

The fact that large numbers of men were absent from Witzieshoek when such 'consultation' took place, effectively eliminated their political voice. Furthermore, men who were away or who were forced to migrate subsequent to consultation were forced to rely on their wives or mothers. This immediately created a dilemma for the men. On the one hand, the only persons who could protect their interests were women. Yet women were politically silent as they were given no official opportunity to express their opinion within the existing decision making structures. On the other hand, women formed the majority of permanent residents and hence would have been the individuals implementing betterment. In this context, consultation and betterment became a

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[46] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Draft Proclamation for Stock Limitation, 14/2/1939.

[47] Refer to chapter 3

sham because there was a discrepancy between those consulted and those who in fact implemented the policy.

In fact, the whole issue of consultation over betterment was absurd. This was because the terms of consultation were not negotiable. The Trust and the Department of Native Affairs were simply looking for a rubber stamp rather than meaningful debate. They were not talking the same language as the Witzieshoek inhabitants. To the Trust and the Department, betterment was a purely technical solution to the crisis in production. Its implementation therefore was not contestable in their eyes. To the Witzieshoek community, betterment went far beyond the technical. As a programme of action, it infringed on the social organization of the community which regulated men's productive and women's productive and reproductive power.

The perception that insufficient consultation had taken and was taking place manifested itself in the community only from 1943. The previous year had seen the community willingly taking part in a culling operation. According to the Native Commissioner, lying behind the change in attitude was 'the manner in which it was introduced'[48]. He pointed out that the Witzieshoek inhabitants were claiming that they accepted and supported 'livestock improvement' and not 'limitation' thereof 'which they would never have voted for.'[49] Livestock improvement represented an entirely different concept to the community than it did to the Department and Trust.

The Trust believed that part of the process of improving stock in Witzieshoek was the limitation of numbers. To this end, it assessed the carrying capacity in February

[48] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Letter from ANC to CNC, 29/3/1947.

[44] Ibid.

1940 and determined that Witzieshoek should be limited to 12,500 cattle units.[50] The community, on the other hand, viewed livestock improvement as a means to upgrade their stock. The resentment generated by 'the manner in which it [culling] was introduced' was only a small part of the resistance to stock limitation. Opposition was rooted in the central importance of amassing cattle to the organization of the community.

Bound up with the initial consent on the part of both men and women to cull was the notion that improvement would bolster bohali, not eradicate it.[51] Those who argued that stock improvement did not mean limitation expressed this sentiment. In 1943, the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association argued in its memorandum to the Minister of Native Affairs,

> When the stock was culled last year, the plea was that the government wanted people to own better animals ... things do seem that the aim of the local authority was the limitation of stock rather than improvement.[52]

The Association's distress over the issue of stock limitation not only emphasized the significance of cattle to male migrants in the towns, but highlighted the link between the towns and the reserve. Furthermore, it displayed the universality of the opposition to stock limitation.

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[50] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Government Notice, 2/2/1940.

[51] In the absence of men, a large number of women had presented cattle for counting and culling in 1942. They had made the final decision to cull, even if they had consulted their husbands. The decision to oppose culling was made for all practical purposes, by women as it was up to them whether to submit cattle for culling.

[52] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, WVA to MNA, 26/8/1943.

The Association's grievance was a direct reflection of reserve residents' frustration over the issue. In a letter to the Chief Native Commissioner in 1947, the Additional Native Commissioner stated that residents of Witzieshoek claimed 'that they never agreed to stock limitation and that they were "sold" by the Reserve Board when it agreed that this area be declared a betterment area'.[53]

This view was reiterated in 1947 at a meeting of the Native Reserve Board. According to E Mopeli, a male resident of Witzieshoek and a member of the Board, 'It was not explained to us at the time that we had to accept livestock limitation. ... The tribe has been deceived and the tribe has never accepted the Proclamation as we now understand it.'[54]

These ideas were voiced repeatedly in meetings with the Chiefs and people, as well as in representations to the Native Commissioner. For example, in a meeting between the Additional and Chief Native Commissioner and committees representing the Mopeli and Batlokwa communities in January 1948, Joseph Kaba intimated that he had evidence to prove that no consultation had taken place in connection with stock limitation.[55] In the same month of that year, in a meeting of the Chiefs and people, it was stated that 'the people were not told everything about stock limitation. The people were under the impression that only inferior stock would be culled. This however is not the case as good stock is also culled

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[53] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Letter from ANC to CNC, 23/6/1947.

[54] SAB: NTS, 8144, 4/341, part 3, Minutes, NRB, 9/1/1947.

[55] SAB: NTS, 6814, 29/318, part 2, Minutes of a meeting between the CNC, ANC and committees representing the Mopeli and Batlokwa communities, 22/1/1948.

now.'[56] By 1949, frustration over the issue of consultation regarding stock limitation had reached a level that prompted Chief Charles Mopeli to appeal to the Minister of Native Affairs to suspend the enforcement of Proclamation 31 of 1939.[57]

Consultation was also a contentious issue in terms of other rules and regulations instigated by the Trust. Yet again the general perception arose that new rules were being enforced without any form of discussion or deliberation with the community. Tied to the discontent concerning insufficient consultation, was dissatisfaction with the Native Reserve Board. The Reserve Board was accused of misleading the Witzieshoek community with regard to stock limitation and other regulations.

The Witzieshoek Vigilance Association articulated this sentiment in its 1943 document. 'People never get to know what was discussed and concluded in the Board, until it came to them as 'Law from the Native Affairs Department.'[58] The situation was worsened by the system of fines which went hand in hand with failure to comply with rules and regulations. In the same document, the Association complained about heavy fines. In 1944, the Native Commissioner reinforced the Association's standpoint in a letter to the Director of Native Labour. 'The Assistant Native Commissioner is said to be unsympathetic. He is known to the natives by the name of 'Ponto Le Leshome' (Ten pounds) as he seldom imposes a fine of less than ten pounds.'[59] In 1946, the members of the community included this grievance in a petition (not

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[56] Ibid.

[57] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Telegram from Frank Smuts to MNA, 1949.

[58] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, WVA to MNA, 26/8/1943.

[59] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, Letter from NC to Director of Native Labour, 5/7/1944.

sanctioned by Chief Charles): 'New laws and regulations are at present being made for the Reserve about which we know nothing and we are prosecuted as soon as we break them.'[60] John Mabaso succinctly put forward the case of the Witzieshoek community: 'The Trust has in the last fourteen years only got fines out of us.'[61] A telegram to the Minister of Native Affairs in 1949 described the mood of Witzieshoek inhabitants as 'bordering on unrest'.[62] This unrest was characterized by both male and female participation.

Opposition to betterment: daily resistance

Cattle culling

Men's and women's reactions to stock limitation were additionally affected by the culling process itself. The purpose of the cull was to brand any animal that was considered inferior with a cull mark. These animals would then have to be produced for a stock sale. This procedure inevitably disadvataged the owner of such an animal. 'Cattle with a "cull" brand do not get good prices at the sales.'[63]

The culling process was itself dubious. According to an interview with a local white trader, culling was done in a 'haphazard manner'[64] and in an assessment of the culls of 1942 and 1946, the Agricultural officer at Witzieshoek

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60 SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, Petition, 1946.

61 SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Minutes, NRB, 1/5/1950.

62 SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Telegram, Frank Smuts to MNA, 1949.

63 SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Minutes, NRB, 1/5/1950.

64 UNISA: AAS219, Interview Prof Kotze with Mr M A Brandt and wife.

admitted that the effects of culling were 'nullified by the inability of the local officers to maintain control of the livestock.'[65] This was due to the tactic on the part of many members of the community to 'dodge' the culling by evacuating 'large numbers of their animals immediately prior to a count or cull and to recall these immediately after the cull had been completed'.[66] This process made it impossible to prove, in the absence of any identifying marks on the cattle, that any 'animal was not produced for counting or culling.'[67]

The tendency in Witzieshoek to dodge the cull was more than just a means of avoiding the ramifications of having to sell an animal with a cull brand. Ferguson argues that the Basotho in his case study were reluctant to sell their cattle because they represented something greater than mere cash. Because their function went beyond an ordinary agricultural product, people would be willing to buy cattle but not to sell. In other words, there was a 'one way barrier: cash can always be converted to cattle through purchase; cattle, however, cannot be converted to cash through sale, except under certain conditions'.[68] Cattle represented more than simply stored wealth, or a kind of a bank for both men and women, and thus reluctance to accept a cull mark was part of a reluctance to sell cattle at all.

To a large extent, it was women who had to contend with haphazard culling. Stock had to be brought to the culling by adult members of the community and in the absence of sons or fathers, this task was the responsibility of

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65 SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Letter from Agricultural Officer (AO) to CNC, 27/9/1949.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ferguson, The Anti-Politics Machine, p. 147.

women. It was women who had to deal directly with culling officers.

In addition to the inefficient culling methods of the Trust, the 'light-hearted legislation' and the 'haphazard fashion' in which Proclamation 31 'had been conceived and drafted' meant that the few who were prosecuted for failing to produce cattle at culling had good grounds for defence.[69] In 1946, the Trust unsuccesfully prosecuted four male members of the community for failure to present stock at the cull. In the judgement on appeal at the Supreme Court, Mr Justice F P van den Heever pointed out that 'the proclamation was silent on how the time and place fixed by the Culling Officer were to be brought to the notice of those who were subjected to its upliftment.' [70] The Justice stated 'we are dealing with a Native Reserve. Why not publication in the Paris Soir?'[71]

Similarly, in 1949, male members of the community, who had been convicted of driving stock into closed camps, successfully appealed to the Supreme Court.[72] In a letter to the Secretary for Native Affairs in March 1950, the Attorney General stated unequivocally that he was 'not anxious to direct criminal proceedings for either failing to produce stock for culling or obstructing the culling officers' precisely because of the difficulties associated with successful prosecution.[73]

Successful evasion of culling encouraged defiance on the part of the community towards both stock limitation and

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[69] SAB: NTS, 506/327, part 1, Farmers Weekly, 19/3/1947.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Telegram to DNA, 16/2/1950.

[73] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Attorney General (AG) to SNA, 7/3/1950.

the Trust. The fact that the members of the community had 'won so many of the legal proceedings' boosted the 'open defiance of the law' according to the Agricultural Officer in 1949.[74]

More importantly, it was within this set of circumstances that Paulus Howell Mopeli[75] assumed a prominent role in the community which was to thrust him into a leadership position during the unrest of 1950. Mopelyana (as he was more commonly known) had been one of the successful applicants in the appeal against conviction in 1947. This, coupled with his provocative attitude towards the Trust and the Department, earned him 'a full measure of awe and admiration'.[76]

Mr and Mrs Mothibi explained this 'awe and admiration':

> The first year [1942] they agreed [to cull their stock], but Mopelyana refused and the second year [1946] they agreed and Mopelyana still refused. So they decided to join him because they could see that their cattle were, the number, getting smaller while Mopelyana was still retaining his.[77]

Mopelyana's esteem within the community was also due to the status and prestige he had achieved as the owner of cattle. He was a '<u>morui</u>', a man who was due reverence. Furthermore as a part of the Chief Charles' family, he had status associated with the ruling class and this would have also given him a measure of respect.

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74 Ibid.

75 Paulus Howell Mopeli and Atwell Mopeli-Paulus are two different people.

76 SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, ANC to CNC, 29/3/1947.

77 Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr and Mrs Mothibi.

Grazing camps

Linked to the limitation of stock was the implementation of a comprehensive grazing system in the reserve in 1936. This radically affected the day-to-day existence of the members of the community. In 1936, the Trust divided part of Witzieshoek into five grazing camps, each approximately 4,500 morgen in size which were fenced in and monitored by rangers employed by the Trust.[78] The rangers were expected to maintain the camps and ensure that the required permits were acquired by persons seeking to move their cattle to and from the enclosures.

Ironically, it was women who had to contend with the daily irritants of the grazing system. As a large majority of men were away and boys who usually herded cattle were in school or only around on certain days, taking care of the stock became yet another priority on a long list of women's responsibilities.

Not only did women have to contend with demands relating to stock care, including registering and producing it for sale, but they also had to deal with the permit system. 'The tribe are experiencing great difficulty with the permit system, as many men are away from the reserve and women and children are put to the trouble of going to the Stock Committee to get a recommendation and then to the office for the necessary permit.'[79] In September 1946, in a letter to the Department, two members of the community lamented that women had been arrested whilst driving stock in the camps and had been fined.[80] Widows were considered to be particularly vulnerable. 'The tribe

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78 SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Melle to CNC, 28/9/1950.

79 Ibid.

80 SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, Letter to DNA from E Peete and E Mabasa, 2/9/1946.

desires that widows be allowed to graze their stock in the same grazing camps as their guardians so that they can keep an eye on the stock.'[81] Apart from having to obtain permits for cattle, women also needed to get permits for collecting water, smearing the floors and for cutting down trees.[82]

The whole system of grazing control was a pressure point between the community and the Trust. Oral evidence suggests a strong animosity towards the grazing camps. Both men and women were frustrated by official closure of grazing camps, wether for resting the soil or for culling purposes. This further restricted the grazing areas which were oversubscribed anyway. In the 1946 petition, this difficulty received specific attention. 'The closing of the four former grazing camps ... had caused great dissatisfaction among all the people, as there are no signs of soil erosion in any of these camps, and the other grazing provided this year is very poor, and limited.'[83] Albert Mopeli, a Witzieshoek resident, complained in a letter to the Secretary of Native Affairs in 1947 that the closure of certain grazing camps in winter would result in inadequate land for grazing.[84]

Rangers were also contentious, as they were Africans from outside the reserve who were in effect given control over the stock of the Witzieshoek residents. Male opposition to the rangers stemmed from two sources. Men who were living in the reserve resented their interference and this was exacerbated by daily contact. Such anger was

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[81] SAB: NTS, 8144, 4/341, part 3, Minutes NRB, 9/1/1947. Note the use of the word 'guardians'. Widows have a childlike status, another indication of male authority.

[82] SAB: NTS, 8144, 4/341, part 3, Minutes NRB, 1942 and Interviews, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane, Mr and Mrs Moleka, Mr Molaba and Mr and Mrs Mothibi.

[83] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, Petition, 1946.

[84] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, Albert Mopeli to SNA, 12/1/1947.

made clear when in 1949 a male member of the community pointed out that the driving of cattle by Trust employees was 'causing a lot of resentment among the tribe.'[85] Futhermore, wether men lived within or outside the reserve they resented restrictions placed on what they considered to be their domain. Rangers also angered women in the reserve. As the persons primary responsible for stock care on a daily basis, women had to contend directly with the rangers and with any problems associated with them.

In 1939, in an article in Bantu World, a Trust spokesperson described the rangers as men responsible for patrolling and caring for the grazing camps.[86] According to members of the community, the rangers were not fulfilling this function. In 1945 they were blamed for the theft of stock from the camps.[87] The petition of 1946 pointed out that 'the gate to the grazing camp number 2' was in a state of disrepair and that the gate was not 'properly closed'.[88] Also in 1946, Chief Charles complained at a general meeting that the people were experiencing difficulties getting their stock out of the grazing camps because rangers were not always available.[89]

The rangers' role in giving evidence which could lead to prosecution further antagonized community members. In a letter to the Chief Native Commissioner, the magistrate stated that he could not always rely on the evidence of the rangers; they 'may be untruthful in giving

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[85] SAB: NTS, 8144, 4/341, part 3, Minutes, NRB, 17/2/1949.

[86] Bantu World, 20 June 1939.

[87] SAB: NTS, 6814, 318, part 2, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 28/9/1945.

[88] Ibid.

[89] SAB: NTS, 6814, 29/318, part 2, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 31/12/1946.

information to the Additional Native Commissioner'.[90] Unjustified prosecution angered the members of the community further.

Forced Relocation

In order to accommodate the five grazing camps, some members of the community had been forcibly relocated elsewhere. This affected both men and women in Witzieshoek. A case in point was the removal of Howell Mopeli and 'his small following' in 1941.[91] Howell Mopeli, Mopelyana's father, had resided in grazing camp number one and, according to the Commissioner, 'only after much unpleasantness (and) repeated warnings' had been compelled to move.[92] When he finally did move, Mopeli made the following comment: 'We wish to state that we do this with the deepest feeling of the wrong done to us.'[93] The frustration felt by the community in the face of forced removals generated frustration. This was expressed by Howell Mopeli: 'my residences have been shifted so many times I do not think I'll be safe anywhere.'[94]

Related to this was the forced re-allocation of arable allotments which also caused much resentment between the community and the Trust. In the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association's memorandum, mention was made of this. 'This season a number of residents, including helpless widows, were made to pay heavy fines ranging from two pounds to

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[90] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Letter to CNC from Mag, 18/8/1950.

[91] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, ANC to CNC, 29/3/1947.

[92] Ibid.

[93] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, Howell Mopeli to SNA, 28/11/1943.

[94] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, Howell Mopeli to SNA, 2/3/1941.

three pounds for cultivating under stress of want lands they used to cultivate.'[95] The Association argued that in the light of the scarcity of food, such a response was 'particularly unfair'.[96] The Board minutes recorded an incident in 1944 when a woman was relocated to a new plot of land 'but persisted in asking to be allowed to cultivate her original land' and was subsequently fined five pounds when 'she stubbornly went and ploughed the prohibited land.'[97]

Women, who had to take on responsibilities formerly allocated to men in addition to their own tasks, were strongly affected. Not only were women forced to cling to institutions such as bohali which offered them some sort of security in a context of shrinking resources, but they were also having to come to terms with encountering Trust and Department officials on a daily basis.

Land Administration

Land was a crucial resource and the severe lack of it placed betterment, as a development programme, in an awkward position. In the first place, it was unable to accommodate the approximately seven hundred landless families in the area, who either relied totally on a meagre number of stock or were at the mercy of family members working outside Witzieshoek.[98] Secondly, those who occupied land, in this case mainly women, were finding it increasingly difficult to produce enough to support their own families, let alone any surplus for the market.

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[95] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, WVA to MNA, 26/8/1943.

[96] Ibid.

[97] SAB: NTS, 8144, 4/341, part 2, Minutes NRB, 1944..

[98] SAB: NTS, 8150, 506/327, part 1, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 8/7/1948.

The Trust had to establish a betterment programme of land administration within the constraints imposed by the dearth of land in Witzieshoek. In an attempt to cater for as many inhabitants as possible, the Trust divided the arable lands into three-morgen plots in 1939, which it allocated to men.[99] In the case of widows, however, the Trust further divided the plots into units of one and a half morgen. This caused resentment amongst the locals. In 1943, in a petition to the Native Affairs Department, Chief Charles pointed out that it was 'very hard to eke a living even on 5 morgen' and that on three morgen it was even more difficult.[100] In the same year, the Vigilance Association argued that plots allotted were 'far too small'.[101] In 1945, mention was made in a meeting of the Chiefs and people of the 'shortage of land'.[102] In 1946, another petition to the Department argued that three morgen were not enough to 'support a family.'[103] As the primary producers, women were the most deeply affected by the severe lack of land. Not only did they have to contend with dwindling resources, but they did not benefit directly from the Trust's agricultural expertise because it blindly ignored their role.

Those widows who had to produce on one and a half morgen of land struggled most. This is borne out by the fact that they were a constant concern within the community. In order to protect widows' interests and create some sort of security, the community had set up a system

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[99] SAB: URU, 1983, 2726, Proclamation re: Regulations for the administration and control of land in Witzieshoek, 23/9/1941.

[100] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Petition submitted by CC, 3/9/1943.

[101] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, WVA to MNA, 26/8/1943.

[102] SAB: NTS, 6814, 29/318, part 2, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 28/9/1945.

[103] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, Petition, 1946.

whereby the widows' brothers-in-law would maintain them and their children.[104] In the context of underdevelopment and increasing competition for resources between 1939 and 1950, such brothers-in-law found it increasingly difficult to fulfil this role. As a result, widows were increasingly deprived. In a meeting of the Native Reserve Board, Chief Charles pleaded with the government to 'sympathize with the taxing of widows on account of the hard living' they were experiencing.[105] Unattached women and widows faced a particular problem: 'These people are left with minor children who are unable to work and they also cannot obtain employment anywhere.'[106]

Alongside stock limitation, rules and regulations relating to land and its agricultural production were also contentious in the period following the implementation of betterment. As pointed out above, land was the other major reason for resistance against the Trust.

The Trust regulations accorded the Native Commissioner the role of allocating plots. He could 'allot to any local tax-payer or married Native or Kraalhead an arable allotment'.[107] Women who were widowed or 'unattached with family obligations' were entitled to land as the term 'kraalhead' included them, though more in theory than in practice.[108] Nevertheless the land allocated to men was generally handed over to the care of women, as had been the practice in the past. This was especially so for the majority of male migrants who left women in charge of

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[104] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr and Mrs Moleka.

[105] SAB: NTS, 8144, 4/341, part 2, Minutes, NRB, 23/10/1941.

[106] SAB: NTS, 7849, 46/336, part 1, Letter from CC to ANC, 10/8/1936.

[107] SAB: URU, 1983, 2726, Proclamation, Land Administration, 23/9/1941.

[108] Ibid.

their plots.[109] As a result, women continued to fulfil their 'traditional' role as producers but under increasingly adverse circumstances.

The fact that the Native Commissioner could cancel any allotment 'if the allotment holder was more than two years in arrears with any payment of local tax' only served to exacerbate the situation.[110] As women were by and large the persons responsible for plots, they relied on procuring cash in some form or other. Those who were married depended on their wage-earning husbands or sons to fulfil the tax obligation.[111] However, such dependence made them vulnerable.

Such vulnerability could deteriorate into a predicament if the husband or son decided to cut off all ties with the reserve, a not unusual decision. Mopeli-Paulus writes of how he asked an old man why he had not returned to the reserve. The latter had replied that people were 'eaten by the reef', and were content with life there and had nothing to return to.[112]

> How can you expect us to go home when there is not enough land for us there? We must pay our poll-tax, we must pay the levy to the chief, we must maintain our families. How can we do all these things when there is nowhere to plough?[113]

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[109] This is confirmed by oral evidence. Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane and Mr Molaba and interview, Prof Kotze with Mr Mohali.

[110] SAB: URU, 1983, 2726, Proclamation, Land Administration, 23/9/1941.

[111] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

[112] Drum, December 1954, p. 67.

[113] Ibid.

The fact that women in the period of examination were aware of their susceptible state and the potential for disaster, is attested to by the steps they took to overcome cash flow needs. Interviews with Witzieshoek residents indicate that women were acquiring cash through a type of informal economy in the reserve. They drew on skills they already had at their disposal, making clay pots, 'kerries'or calabashes, by weaving mats or selling homebrew.[114]

Ironically, despite serious money difficulties, the Trust did nothing to encourage this informal economy. It even went so far as to act against it by instituting another condition for the cancellation of an allotment, if the allotment holder was 'convicted of any contravention of the liquor laws or if any person permitted by the allotment holder to be on the allotment [was] guilty of an offence against the liquor laws while upon such allotment or if any intoxicating or spirituous liquor [was] found at the time on the allotment.'[115] By restricting the brewing of liquor, the Trust was cutting off a potential resource for women. Women, though, whether as a result of economic need or a desire to maintain their customary status as brewers of beer, continued to brew and sell liquor in Witzieshoek. This was illustrated in 1945 when, at a meeting of the Chiefs and people, the Police Sergeant informed the meeting that 'the trafficking in liquor must stop.'[116]

A further condition that the Trust placed on retaining arable allotments was in terms of the cultivation method used. An allotment could be cancelled if it was used in a

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[114] Interviews, Shan Beerstecher with Mr and Mrs Moleka, Mr Modernwane, Mr Molaba and Mrs and Mr Mothibi.

[115] SAB: URU, 1983, 2726, Proclamation, Land Administration, 23/9/1941.

[116] SAB: NTS, 6814, 29/318, part 2, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 31/12/1945.

manner which caused or was 'calculated to cause erosion of the soil ... or impairment to that allotment or the neighbouring allotment.'[117] This was bound up with the perception common to conservationists and the Trust that African methods and soil erosion went hand in hand. In an official survey of Witzieshoek in the 1950s, the deterioration of the land was directly linked to African methods of farming: 'overgrazing, overstocking, annual veld burning, indiscriminate cultivation of steep slopes, primitive agricultural methods [and] uncontrolled establishment of residential kraals high up in the mountains' were seen to cause 'the virtual total disappearance of sponges which formed sources of many rivers' and hence soil erosion.[118]

Yet, again, members of the community and women in particular were not falling into line. The repeated insistence by the Trust that people stop ploughing up and down the fields, indicates that some women were using this method. The petition of 1946 addressed this problem. 'At present we feel that the Agricultural Officer is too strict in having us prosecuted, and fined if he finds that we have ploughed too deep'[119]

In the period after betterment the introduction of betterment and the rebellion, women in Witzieshoek had to come to terms with the variety of conditions, rules and regulations applied to them. Their daily routine was disrupted by having to acquire permits, register stock, procure cash and take on increasing agricultural and political responsibilities. A good case in point is the impact on women of the enclosure of fountains in 1940. Wommen were expected to climb up and down steps in order

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[117] SAB: URU, 1983, 2726, Proclamation, Land Administration, 23/9/1941.

[118] Ibid.

[119] SAB: NTS, 8150, 15/341, part 2, Petition, 1946.

to collect water and this caused concern in the community. Chief Charles verbalized this concern. 'It is found out that great difficulty is being experienced by elderly women' in ascending and descending the steps; 'furthermore the people regard it as very difficult for their womenfolk to always climb up and down steps like this as water is life.'[120]

White versus black: the Farmers and the Traders

The lack of any real development in the 1930s and 1940s in addition to the increased deterioration of the reserve certainly did not endear the Trust to the community. The resultant emergence of a culture of resistance, which gained in intensity as the 1940s came to a close, was also affected by the traders and farmers in the area.

The three white traders in the region ran six stores. They supplied the community with all their basic necessities and essentially monopolized trade. These traders sparked controversy, because on the one hand, they were exempted from the rules, regulations and conditions governing the lives of the people in Witzieshoek, and on the other hand were perceived to be taking advantage of the community. Unlike their customers, the traders were allowed to keep up to seventy large and small animals on their properties which were not subject to culling; moreover they owned enough land to graze these animals.[121] The traders were in fact entitled to twenty morgen of land which was then fenced in.[122] The sheer impact of the visual difference between three and twenty morgen must have antagonized the community. Here again was a grievance which became a

[120] SAB: NTS, 8013, 370/337, part 1, CC complaint, 1940.

[121] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Stock owned by traders.

[122] SAB: 8150, 15/341, part 2, ANC to CNC, 9/9/1946.

constant source of tension between the community and the Trust.

An important component of the community's response to the traders was bound up with racial attitudes. The community's lack of faith in the Trust was compounded by the perception that the traders were giving them a raw deal. Thus, antipathy was moulded into an anti-white sentiment, one which was expanded to include white farmers in the area. These attitudes were embedded in the black nationalism and Africanism which was sweeping the country as a whole.

In 1943, the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association's memorandum mentioned the traders, complaining of their 'large farms' and 'large herds'.[123] Further sources of contention were the prices charged by the traders and the constant trade between them and the Basotholanders. The community's objection to the latter stemmed from a fiery relationship over a long period. In the context of deterioration, the Witzieshoek community resented the competition over resources in the area presented by the Basotholanders. This resentment was fuelled by the constant threat of thievery. Already mentioned was the community's objection of the Trust's rangers' inability to protect their stock from thieves; the community's animosity towards the Basotholanders who actually stole their animals must have been tenfold.

Women who were trying to run households and balance budgets lost out in the face of high prices and competition . In 1944, in a letter to the Additional Native Commissioner, Chief Charles criticized the storekeepers for selling maize to the Basotholanders and for overcharging those inhabitants of the Hoek buying

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[123] Ibid.

maize .[124] The subject was also broached In the 1946 petition.

The white farmers did not present a direct problem to the residents of Witzieshoek in this period. Yet the community's perceptions of them was influenced by an anti-white sentiment. The farmers indirectly afflicted the community in two ways. According to the stock limitation report by the Additional Native Commissioner in 1947, the severe shortage of land was 'accentuated by the knowledge that adjoining the reserve [were] huge tracts of fertile country, owned by single Europeans and which [lay] virtually idle.'[125] The obvious contrast was made worse by the fact that some of the farmers who owned the land were willing to sell it to the Trust. The Trusts hands were tied, though, because it had already bought its full quota in the Free State which had been given to the Thaba Nchu reserve and because it could not afford the inflated prices of the farms.[126]

Conclusion

Throughout the period of Trust administration, the people of Witzieshoek voiced their grievances with the system in a number of ways. For men, the two most common were their vocal reminders in meetings and the various petitions drafted. According to Melle, the community had been petitioning the Trust for a period of fourteen years.[127] These petitions indicate the highly organized nature of resistance in this period. Women's resistance is more difficult to gauge, especially for the period prior to the rebellion. In the official record, biased attitudes

[124] SAB: NTS, 7849, 46/336, CC to ANC, 30/5/1944.

[125] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, ANC to CNC, 29/3/1947.

[126] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, copy of letter from W G Ballinger, 7/10/1950.

[127] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Melle to CNC, 28/9/1950.

towards men meant that they were predominantly the spokesmen of the community, while biased attitudes towards women meant the opposite. However, women were playing an increased role in the community and there is evidence that they defied Trust regulations, as when they insisted on ploughing up and down instead of across the fields.

A further gauge of the extent of organization is the community's use of lawyers through whom they articulated their grievances. In 1947 the Additional Native Commissioner noted that the chiefs were collecting an amount of 2/6 from each male resident in order 'to accumulate funds for litigation purposes'.[128] Organization was also taking place in the urban areas. For example, the development of the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association represented the broad base within which the culture of resistance had rooted itself.

The community's rejection of the Trust was based on practices which formed the core of Witzieshoek society. In a meeting with the Chiefs and people in July 1948, Chief Charles stated that the most important matters in the community were 'land and stock'.[129] He had encapsulated in one sentence the root cause of the development of a culture of resistance in Witzieshoek. Land and stock were the chief issues over which conflict arose between those advocating and implementing betterment on the one hand, and the community as a whole, on the other.

Land and stock were vital elements in the organization of the community along patriarchal lines. In a context in which such organization was being challenged and male

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[128] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, ANC to CNC, 23/6/1947.

[129] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 8/7/1948.

authority eroded, these mechanisms of control over women - land and stock - became the heart of the men's struggle against the Trust. Women also defended this system of organization, but in their case, security was a main objective.

From 1939 to 1950, the Witzieshoek community of men and women, residing both inside the reserve and in the urban areas, resisted the Trust's control, be it on an individual level by refusing to relocate or by ploughing up and down, or on a communal level by forming an association or by getting together and drafting petitions and consulting lawyers. Such resistance led to the materialization of an anti-Trust sentiment. According to Mr Modernwane, by 1950 the Trust was a 'sort of a swear word' which was synonymous with oppression in the eyes of most of the community.[130]

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[130] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE WITZIESHOEK REBELLION

> Lingangele, come to help us-
> The Trust government has taken away the chieftainship
> Our land has been eaten up;
> They have burned our cattle
> And we and our children starve.
> Lingangele, come to help us-
> The Land of Mopeli is gone.[1]

The Witzieshoek Rebellion: a short chronology of events

The inhabitants of Witzieshoek had objected to Trust rule since 1939. By 1949, these objections had developed into openly, defiant rebellion. The community took to the streets of Witzieshoek voicing their grievances in both new and old ways, which were characterized by an intensity and urgency which had not been seen before. September 1949 saw the start of the fierce resistance which swept through Witzieshoek. According to the judgement in the case Rex vs Paulus Malau and 74 others, it was at this point that 'acts of vandalism and unauthorized pitsos were held which the chief couldn't prevent.'[2] According to Mopeli-Paulus, the 'rebellious majority section' called itself '"Lingangele" - "Those who stand firm" '.[3]

It was the Trust's decision to initiate a cull in 1949 which effectively sparked the rebellion. The government

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[1] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 120.

[2] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Court Case: Rex vs Malau.

[3] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 120.

had slashed the maximum number of cattle from 12,500 to 10,000.[4] On 4 January 1950, a notice was issued to the community demanding the presentation of cattle for the purposes of a cull to ensure the reduction of stock to the newly established limit. Culling was supposed to take place at five different centres from 6 to 18 January. Each centre was linked to one of the five designated grazing camps.[4]

In response to the call for a cull, a number of members of the community, both men and women, decided to defy the notice by refusing to cull. On 13 January 1950, a group of approximately three hundred residents marched to the offices of the Trust where they delivered a letter to the Commissioner. The letter demanded that the police be kept away from the cull. The anger and resentment felt by those writing the letter was palpable: 'there shall be bloodshed which shall have been provoked by you. We warn you for the last time about our stock. We have respected you long enough.'[5] Another letter was given to the magistrate by a Mr Albert Mopeli, who claimed to be the secretary of the 'tribe'and stated that 'we are unable to accept the notice in connection with the culling of stock.'[6] Even at this early stage of the year, the resisters patently had no intention to continue to accept the Trust's implementation of betterment.

As a result, culling was a dismal failure. In an assessment of the culling between 8 and 11 January, the Principal Agricultural Officer pointed out that of the 967 stock owners with cattle in grazing camps 1 and 2,

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[4] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Government Notice, 23/9/1949.

[5] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, J R Motleheng to ANC, 13/2/1950 and SAB, NTS: 7459, 506/327, part 1.

[6] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, copy letter Albert Mopeli to ANC, 13/1/1950.

only seventy one had produced their cattle for culling. Out of the approximately nine hundred stock owners who had failed to bring their stock for culling, only ten were prosecuted.[7]

Those who did present their cattle for culling purposes on 13 January were forced to halt the process by a 'large number of mounted' African men and women who removed the stock and drove it away.[8] As a result of these actions, the culling operation was stopped. Mopeli-Paulus story recalled that at this time 'crowds of women rode about the Reserve, showing their defiance of the Trust by chasing employees from the work they were doing on the plantations and the roads.'[9]

Despite this open resistance to the Trust, it continued in its efforts to enforce the compulsory reduction of stock. On 18 January, the Under Secretary for Native Affairs addressed a meeting of the community, stating unequivocally that culling would continue and so would the removal of huts from the mountain slopes.[10] Yet the community continued to defy the Trust. On 16 February as many as one thousand Africans seized the chief's cattle at the auction sale pens. The next day, four hundred men and women protested in front of the Trust office. On the 18th one thousand members of the community assembled at the Show Grounds in defiance of the magistrate who had convened a meeting at his office. By the time the magistrate reached the meeting at the Show Grounds, the people had dispersed, and according to the chiefs he then

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[7] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Principal Agricultural Officer (PAO) to CNC, 25/2/1950.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 120.

[10] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau.Part of the relocation process had been to force inhabitants living on the mountain slopes to move to other areas.

consulted, the people had taken the decision to continue obstructing the culling.[11]

According to the judgement of the court case[12], from February onwards 'unauthorized' pitsos were regularly held at Mopelyana's kraal.[13] Mopeli-Paulus reflected on these gatherings. 'All over the reserve, horsemen in large numbers could be seen riding towards the showgrounds or Namoha ... These gatherings were even attended by women.'[14] On 14 March, all stock cards and land allotment certificates were returned to the Trust officials by a group of three hundred African men and women. A letter accompanied the cards and certificates demanding that the Trust evacuate the reserve immediately. 'It will be better for us if you take all that is yours, then the noise will come to an end.'[15] On the same day, the Chief Native Commissioner met with the chiefs and headmen and in a letter to the Secretary of Native Affairs argued that a 'commission consisting of agricultural experts, should be appointed to enquire into the position at Witzieshoek.'[16]

Despite community resistance, both the Trust and the Department decided to continue with culling in April 1950. In August, the Department decided to take overt action by bringing in a force of stand-by policemen armed with sten guns, tear gas and rifles. Letsie Mopeli and Paulus Mpheteng were arrested under the Riotous Assemblies Act, inspiring a protest march to the police

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[11] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, telegram from mag, 18/2/1950.

[12] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 119.

[15] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau, copy letter, Letsie Mopeli to ANC, 14/3/1950.

[16] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, CNC to SNA, 5/4/1950.

station by 250 community members. Although both were later acquitted of the charges brought against them, resistance continued.[17] On 26 August 1950, the rebels resorted to threatening letters. About forty were delivered to officials of the Trust such as the agricultural demonstrators and the rangers. The letters read as follows:

> Take notice that as you are a criminal and a trouble maker amongst the peaceful tribe of Mopeli, we warn you to leave the Trust work and sit down or quit and go and cause confusion and trouble where the Trust has bought land for you, Witzieshoek is no Trust land. A sympathetic warning, Mopeli Tribe.[18]

The tactics adopted by the rebels evoked a response from the state; at the end of August a Commission of Enquiry was appointed. It was ordered to 'enquire into and report on the causes of the recent unrest and disturbances in the Witzieshoek native reserve'. It was also expected to assess what steps should be taken to 'put an end to the said unrest and disturbances' as well as whether the reserve was 'overpopulated and overstocked' and if so, what steps should be undertaken to remedy this.[19] On 12 October the appointment of the Commission was formally announced to the community residents. Having voiced their dissatisfaction with the composition of the Commission, the rebels declared their intention to provide it with separate evidence.[20]

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[17] Argus, 2/8/1950.

[18] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Mopeli Tribe to rangers and demonstrators, 26/8/1950.

[19] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 1.

[20] SAB: NTS, 9779, 961/400, H Mopeli and P Moteka to Commission of Enquiry.

On 10 November 1950, a group under the leadership of Mopelyana was scheduled to give evidence. Before doing so, they demanded that the Commission sit in the open to enable the community to hear their testimony. When this request was denied, the approximately one thousand African men and women gathered in front of the court demonstrated until evening. Mr W G Ballinger and Mr Basner, the rebels-appointed attorneys, gave evidence on their behalf. The four witnesses, Paulus Howell Mopeli (Mopelyana), Scotland Koloi, Paulus Mpheteng and Letsie Mopeli, were sworn in at the Commission only at the end of the day when they decided to testify despite most of the community's exclusion from the proceedings.

On 23 November, the government issued a notice banning a gathering of more than five members of the community for any purpose other than those officially sanctioned, as well as prohibiting the carrying of all weapons. The definition of weapons included sticks and sickles.[21] On 24 November, another force of policemen arrived in order to maintain law and order. Despite all these measures, a violent clash occurred on 28 November between the police and the community at Namoha, Mopelyana's kraal. Mopeli-Paulus recounted a version of that day given by a female friend of his, Machake Mabote. He described her as 'an ordinary Christian tribeswoman of middle age.'[22]

On that day a large gathering of women and men had converged at Namoha in order to accompany their representatives to the Court house. Mopeli-Paulus claimed that they never had the opportunity to do so, as the hearing had been postponed. According to Machake Mabote, the police arrived at Namoha just as the meeting was ending and 'the people were singing and hearing the

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[21] SAB: URU, 2817, 3368, 21/11/1950.

[22] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 129.

prayer before they went.'[23] She then described how more than thirty armed policemen, all white except one, stopped approximately a hundred yards from the crowd who continued to sing.

> They did not stop when the police came, and I don't know why it was. They just went on singing. A woman sitting on the ground next to me who had a baby on her lap, put her head close to mine, and said softly - today our lives are finished. ... The singing was strong and beautiful, and I suddenly felt as if my hair was raise up [sic]. Though I pretended I had not heard her, inside I was afraid of death and prayed. ...
> From the chief's stoep where we sat, I saw two men from the gathering walk out towards the lined up horsemen, who held their strange guns like hoe handles on their arms. ... The two men reached them, and I could hear shouted conversation above the singing of the women, who sang now as if to drive their own fears, with an excited sound in their voices. An old women leaning on a stick, beside me, seemed quite overcome and even danced. ...
> The very air was moving, and we all seemed to know that something was going to happen soon, yet still everyone sat in his place- the women on the stoep, in the front of the chief's huts, and the men on the rocks and the grass. The two messengers came back and spoke among the men, and not long after went back to the police again. We remained singing. The police drew nearer. ...
> We were told to stop singing, and did so. I heard the white policeman speak, and our men

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[23] Ibid.

> answering, but understood nothing save that we were to disperse. Then the first shot was fired, in the direction of the men sitting on the rocks. The whole crowd stirred, and I saw horses dashing in to the gatherings, and in a moment the cruel police were among us, swinging their batons, and I heard fast firing of guns, our men were mixed up with the police, fighting back at them with sticks and stones, and we also, the women threw stones, trying to keep back the horses, which overwhelmed us where we sat. Down below us was the great fight, the real fight of sticks against bullets, and I saw many men shot down.
>
> From where I was, among the women the only direction was to fly up the mountainside, and some did so, but I, with a few others tried to take refuge in one of the chief's huts ... but one of the police saw us ... and turning fired into the hut. We ran out unhurt, and I made off for a flat-roofed house down the slope.
>
> I was tired, and deadly frightened by the shots that had missed me. Running for safety this time another policeman pulled me back by the end of my blanket I wore, and I struggled to free myself, struck me on the head with his baton. I fell but pulled him with me, forced him to the ground and sat on him, but then another appeared, held up his gun and shot me in the stomach.[24]

This particular account of the clash was examined by Hannah Jones in her assessment of Mopeli-Paulus' autobiography. She questions whether Machake Mabote's version was her own or an 'amalgamation of versions heard

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[24] Ibid., pp. 129-130-131.

by Mopeli-Paulus and Basner [ne-Gordon] at the trial'.[25] The importance of this particular narrative lies more in the fact that Mopeli-Paulus, a member of the African male elite, enabled a woman to narrate such a prominent part of the history of Witzieshoek. The version presented may well have been clouded by his own perceptions or the perceptions of his co-author or may even represent a synthesis of all the versions presented at the trial. What stands out, though, is that Mopeli-Paulus was unwittingly empowering women in a way that contradicted his status as part of the African male elite.

Police immediately began arresting people (Machake Mabote among them) and on 29 November a special government notice was issued declaring a state of unrest in the area and demanding the summary arrest of fourteen members of the community. Included in this list were the four witnesses who had encountered the Commission of Enquiry on the tenth.[26]

Those who had taken part in the clash at Namoha, and who had been caught and arrested, were brought to trial and charged on two different counts. The first was attending an illegal meeting and the second was the intention to commit public violence. The case was heard in Harrismith and the judgement was given on 5 November 1951.[27] The rebellion had 'officially' come to an end.

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[25] H Jones, ' "Basner and Mopeli-Paulus" The World and the Cattle in the written historiography of the 1950 Witzieshoek rebellion, riot, revolt, unrest, disturbance, tragedy, trouble, turbulence, terrible occurance, outbreak of passions, startling expolosion, stain on our reputation, friction, fight, affray, unhappy affair' (paper presented to conference on 'Democracy, Popular Precedents, Practise, Culture', University of the Witwatersrand, 1994), p. 11.

[26] SAB: URU. 2824, 3462, 29/11/1950.

[27] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau.

Tactics adopted by the Lingangele

The various official reports and telegrams posted out of Witzieshoek during the rebellion tended to single out women rebels in particular incidents. It is necessary to analyze these portrayals of women before discussing the tactics adopted by the rebels in general.

The voices interpreting women's actions depicted them in the same manner time and time again: 'a large amount of natives ... encouraged by women giving their war cry'[28], '400 armed Natives ... incited by women'[29], 'executed war dances in the road under the goading of women'[30]. 'There is evidence that whilst passing the police station women shouted insults at the police and gave voice to that shrill molilietsane'.[31] The local officials of the Trust and the Department of Native Affairs restricted women's involvement to two specific related tasks or tactics. The one was to goad or encourage their male counterparts, while the other was to insult officers of the Trust.

In the eyes of these officials, the molilietsane, sung by the women, was not only intended to provoke a response from their husbands, fathers, or sons but was a deliberate attempt to irritate and disturb the officials. According to everyone interviewed for the present study, the molilietsane was a means for women to inspire their men and to give them courage. Yet, the fact that they also resorted to singing the molilietsane when in groups on their own, would appear to substantiate the officials' view.

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[28] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, PAO to CNC, 25/2/1950.

[29] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 8.

[30] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, ANC to CNC, 17/2/1950.

[31] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau.

According to Mopeli-Paulus, women had sung the molilietsane to announce his birth, the birth of a chief's son. 'The women sang the molilietsane to draw the attention of the villages across the streams, and the high pitch of their voices in this cry, which sounds like the neighing of horses, rose and was echoed back by the mountains.'[32] Clearly the use of this cry was a customary form of communication within the community; it heralded events. By resorting to this particular tactic during the rebellion, women were subscribing to their 'traditional' role within the community. They were making use of a familiar custom to reaffirm that role.

Yet women's actions went beyond this standard depiction. Along with the men, they resorted to active intimidation and non-co-operation, as well as attending unauthorised pitsos. By limiting the function of women to encouraging their men and to insulting the Trust, the officials misunderstood women's actions. Consistent with Departmental and state discourse which constructed women in the towns as being responsible for social decay, the officials were constructing women as responsible for the actions of the rebels. The rebellion in this sense symbolized the downfall of the community and reflected the sense of social decay and degeneration which had permeated state discourse from the early 1930s.

Women joined the male rebels in their tactics to communicate their aims and grievances in 1949 and 1950. The men and women rebels drew on the kinds of methods they had used in the past, such as letter writing and the use of attorneys, but they also made use of new methods. Some of these reflected the kinds of actions being advocated and enforced by organizations such as the African National Congress, the South Arican Communist Party and Trade Unions on a national scale.

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[32] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon,'The World and the Cattle', p. 8.

The first tactic used by the rebels which represented a continuation of earlier struggles was the writing of letters on behalf of the community. The first class of letters were mainly addressed to the Additional Native Commissioner and contained the demands of the rebels as well as threats to the Trust. For example, the letter given to the Commissioner on 14 March demanded that the Trust evacuate the reserve, 'take your bulls together with your fence, collect all that belongs to the Trust. Tell your servants to hold their hands in connection with ploughing the land that is not theirs, and to plant trees in a land that is not theirs' and ended off with a direct threat: 'We give you fourteen days to collect all that belongs to the Trust, because if we collect these things, of yours, we shall collect them with great carelessness.'[33]

The second class of letters were those sent to individual members of the Trust warning them to abandon the betterment process. The irony of these letters was that they branded members of the Trust as criminals and trouble-makers. Such were the terms which members of the Trust were eagerly applying to the rebels. The final type of letters were the two sent to the United Nations in May and August of 1950. These letters reveal the adoption of sophisticated tactics. In the first instance, they display an awareness on the part of community members to global developments after World War Two. As some members of the community had served in the war, this was not suprising.

Secondly, the rebels demonstrate an awareness of the function of the United Nations organization.

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[33] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau, Letsie Mopeli to ANC, 14/3/1950.

> As your Organization is founded on the four freedoms, and is set up to secure justice and happiness for all, can you not order your representatives to take this cruel injustice up with the Union Government.[34]

A consciousness of ethnic identity and self determination, was also evident:

> The culling of cattle is a measure calculated to bring about the extermination of our people ... this is carrying in to effect the same policy which was applied on the Tasmanians in Australia when they were exterminated by the European Colonists in that Colony.[35]

The rebels depicted the Witzieshoek community as a homogenous autonomous group and these letters hence displayed a strong nationalist sentiment. This indicated the extent to which Africanist ideologies had filtered into the reserve. By placing themselves on the same level as the Tasmanians, the rebels implied that the Witzieshoek community were part of an exploited group which needed the United Nation's immediate attention. This marked sense of community identity was paradoxical. This was because the community, in subscribing to a 'tribal' identity, was endorsing the tribalism advocated by the state and enacted through its policy of segregation.

The protesters also continued to make use of lawyers to promote their cause. The community banded together in order to fund the various court cases and provide an adequate defence for those accused. Prior to the <u>Rex vs</u>

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[34] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, P H Mopeli and P Moteka to Secretary General of the United Nations, 1/8/1950.

[35] Ibid.

Malau case in 1951, the community was generally on the winning side, albeit through appeal, because of the unwillingness of the Attorney General to prosecute, or through case dismissal. In August 1950, the magistrate at Witzieshoek pointed out the 'dissatisfaction' generated within the community after 'considerable expense' had been incurred conducting defences only to have the cases dimissed.[36]

During the Rex vs Malau trial, members of the community yet again sent money to fund the defence. According to Mr Moleka, members of the community would send money for a specific relative.[37] In other words, each accused had his or her own support group in the reserve. Another indication of this funding was the government's demand in 1951 to the Native Commissioner to cease dispensing pensions as pensioners were allegedly being 'forced' to give their money for the rebels' defence.[38]

The use of Mr Basner, not only in the trial, but prior to that as a spokesperson at the Commission, as well as a confidant as early as 1948, shows the community's determination to get legal support and advice. By choosing a lawyer to represent them outside the court room, the rebels were attempting to legitimize their grievances as well as to make their case known beyond the narrow borders of Witzieshoek.

The rebels, both men and women, also adopted new methods of resistance. Part of this process was the adoption of tactics similar to those being tried and tested on a national scale. The use of mass action in the form of marches, meetings and strikes was not uncommon in 1949 and 1950. The protest march on 14 January heralded the

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[36] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Mag to CNC, 18/8/1950

[37] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Moleka.

[38] SAB: NTS, 9779, 961/400, DNA to ANC and Argus, 17/11/1950.

start of this strategy in Witzieshoek and the mass meeting on 28 November signalled its end. Such protest is reminiscent of the Programme of Action formulated by the A.N.C. in 1949, calling for the use of more militant defiance, non-co-operation, civil disobedience and strikes.

The refusal to take part in culling operations, effectively a tactic of non-co-operation, was extended into all spheres of Trust activities. Already in 1949, the community made no effort to respond to the stock sales conducted by the Trust.[39] In 1950, many refused to make use of the bulls, stallions or rams provided by the Trust.[40] The firing of a teacher in 1950 was met with agitation for a boycott and even a general strike.[41] Such a demand indicates the extent to which tactics advocated by organizations like the A.N.C. in the towns had infiltrated into the reserves.[42]

The Witzieshoek rebels also chose to utilize more militant tactics. These included sabotage and intimidation. The extent to which people adopted these types of strategies was made clear in August 1950 where the Deputy Director of Native Agriculture described the situation in Witzieshoek. '15 years of effort by the South African Native Trust has been nullified by a) cutting (beyond repair) about ten miles of seven strand fencing, ... b) burning of all grass velt [sic] c) burning of six plantations [and] d) grazing of Native

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[39] SAB: NTS, 7237, 163/326, Stock Sales, 1949.

[40] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau.

[41] SAB: NTS, 9779, 961/400, part 1, conversation between Ross and Verwoerd.

[42] This is yet another indication of the intimate relationship between the town and countryside.

stock on Trust oats.'[43] The judgement in the 1951 court case refers to an 'organized campaign of sabotage' which also included destroying contours, division banks and furrows.[44] The saboteurs apparently confined their actions largely to the night in order to conceal their identity and to be more effective.[45]

Parallel to this was a concerted effort to intimidate Trust employees. That process included the sending of letters sent to individual members of the Trust and the general threats made to the Trust discussed above. But, some members of the community also resorted to active intimidation, such as 'molesting surveyors and road parties' and preventing employees of the Trust from carrying out their duties.[46] According to the judgement in the court case, the 'reign of terror that existed in the Hoek was successful in preventing anybody from planting anything.'[47] Even stripped of their emotive language, these quotations indicate the strong presence of intimidation and fear. The actions of the members of the community who disrupted the culling of the chief's and others stock further underline this atmosphere.

The involvement of women in the demonstrations, acts of intimidation, marches and financial support cannot be disputed.[48] Their participation in the sabotage is less clear. Mr and Mrs Mothibi claimed that those responsible

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[43] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Deputy Director of Native Agriculture to Director Native Affairs, 31/8/1950.

[44] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau.

[45] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

[46] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Deputy Director of Native Affairs to DNA, 31/8/1950.

[47] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex va Malau.

[48] Their presence was recorded by Mopeli-Paulus, by Mr Modernwane, Mr and Mrs Mothibi, Mr amd Mrs Moleka, Mr Molaba and by members of the Trust.

were never revealed to the community.[49] Mopeli-Paulus made the following assertion: 'It was hard to find out who was responsible for the damage that was done, for everyone who knew anything was kept silent.'[50]

The tactics adopted by men and women were a reflection of tactics used in the past as well as a reflection of the new tactics being used on a national level. They entailed more militant and defiant as well as illegal action on the part of men and women. Women in particular made use of tactics familiar to them, but also broke out of their traditional mould in order to join the men in a variety of other strategies. Although there is evidence that women acted autonomously, there is no indication of exclusively male strategies.

The support base

A fundamental aspect of any rebellion is its support base. Taking into account the context within which the Witzieshoek rebellion occurred, it is necessary to examine this. Migrant labour had emptied the reserve of many of its able-bodied men, and to a lesser degree, women. It is important to analyze the extent to which this affected the age composition of the rebels. Age grades or sects were customary in Witzieshoek.[51] As reported in the previous chapter, age brought with it an increase in status and power for men and women in the community. Bohali was a process whereby older men gained

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[49] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr and Mrs Mothibi.

[50] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 120.

[51] Mopeli-Paulus revealed this in his auto biography. For instance, he explained how a strict law of precedence was followed in the khotla and that decisions had to be made according to 'the seniority in age and rank of those present', 'The World and the Cattle', p. 13. Later he also talks about his 'age-mates', p. 60.

access to the wealth of younger men and harnessed the reproductive and productive capacities of young women. Bohali and marriage provided older women with access to motherhood, vital to their status in the community, in addition to direct and indirect to the power and wealth associated with the exchange of cattle and younger women.

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which age determined participation in the rebellion. Clues to the ages of those involved can be found in the 1951 court case as well as scattered about other primary material. In the court case, of ninety four accused, fifteen were over the age of sixty, eleven were over the age of fifty, thirty three were over the age of forty, twenty five were over the age of thirty and eleven were over the age of twenty. Thus more than half of the accused were in the over forty bracket. Machake Mabote's account of the clash mentions an old woman and a woman with a baby.[52] In the interviews conducted for this study, the participants were described as being both young and old.[53]

Although the court case shows that the majority of participants were mature, older members of the community, this may not reflect the composition of the support group. One has to take into account that on that particular day approximately eight hundred people gathered and therefore the ninety four arrested constituted a small segment of the whole group. Notwithstanding this, the rebellion needs to be viewed in its context. According to many sources, women were in the majority on the land. The extent of that majority is unclear. However, in the context of rapid deterioration and high rates of migration, it would be safe to assume that at any moment most able-bodied men would be outside the reserve. The same cannot be said for able-bodied

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[52] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', p. 129.

[53] Interviews, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Molaba and Mr Modernwane.

women. If one had to assume that 'able bodied' included all those under forty, one starts to get a clearer indication of possible participation by age.

The reaction of the older members of the community was not unexpected. By resisting the Trust, both men and women were defending the system of organization which had existed prior to Trust interference. This was a system that older men and women had entrenched in their minds. They had been taught their roles in the productive and reproductive cycle from their parents, and were teaching it to their own children.

However, one cannot ignore that younger men were also participants. Again their exact involvement is difficult to ascertain. The court case indicates that about a quarter were below the age of thirty. There was no indication whether younger women were amongst the female protestors. According to Harry Mothibi and his wife, the women involved were mostly 'matured women.'[54] Yet, those younger men and women who were still in the reserve were also out of necessity and desperation laying claim to systems of organization that they had been taught by their parents and grandparents.[55] The apparent lack of younger blood in the ranks of the rebels was arguably largely due to their absence from the reserve. The fact that those people who had made the choice to remain permanently in the towns were on the increase necessarily affected the age ratios in the rebellion.

As a result of their age composition, the rebels reflected the rural social hierarchy of the community. Important decisions in the community had been made by older male members of the community who outranked younger

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[54] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr and Mrs Mothibi.

[55] The number of customary unions (eighty per cent) attests to this.

members through their age related status.[56] Although migration and the Trust had severely undermined that authority, the absence of younger men meant that the older men retained the ability to dominate decisions. As the forum within which the rebellion occurred was outside of the control of the Trust and its bodies of authority, these older men had the space to exert their authority, just as the erosion of male control enabled older women to act on the status they enjoyed within the community.

The distinction between rich and poor in the community and the frustration this had generated within the community makes an evaluation of the class base of the rebels pertinent. As pointed out earlier, there were some members of the reserve who were without stock or land. At the other end of the scale there were members of the community who had large herds of cattle, in some cases as many as two hundred.[57]

However, the rebellion did not alienate either class. Rather, each had its own gains to make by rejecting the Trust. The rich would guarantee their access to continued wealth and power, whereas the poor would have the perceived opportunity to amass that wealth and power. Again, it must be stressed that in the face of dwindling resources, such ideals were governed by a desire to institute a way of life that was recognizable and safe.

Evidence that support for the rebellion crossed class lines is provided by the fact that men such as Mopelyana and Mr Mothibi, both of whom owned large numbers of cattle, took part and were joined by younger men who had yet to acquire much cattle. Another clear example is the presence of women, who would have had ambiguous affiliations. As wives of the rich, some of the older

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[56] Mopeli-Paulus and Gordon, 'The World and the Cattle', pp. 13-14.

[57] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 8/7/1948.

women had a stake in supporting the wealth of their husbands to which they had indirect access. On the other hand, they were literally 'poor' as their access to cattle was limited. In addition, there were wives of 'poorer' men (by far the majority) who had some cattle or land, but had been forced into outside employment. As often the most militant and defiant of rebels, women had an unmistakable interest in rebelling.

A further distinction should be made between active and passive resistance. This is because, despite the fact that only about one thousand people actively rebelled, the support for the resistance ran deeply through the community. Passive advocates of the rebellion showed their support in a number of ways. The first was through their financial contribution to trial expenses. An example here is the Molekas, who did not themselves actively rebel and were not present at the skirmish, but who contributed to funding the defence of family members.[58] Another example is the pensioners who were contributing to the defence of the rebels.[59]

Perhaps the best indicator of the broadly-based support for resistance lay in the lack of support of the chief. Prior to the Commission of Enquiry, there was no overt manifestation of chiefly support, bar the word of the chief himself. In a report on Witzieshoek in March 1950, the Additional Native Commissioner pointed out that Mopelyana had a 'very large following' and was 'undermining the authority of the chief'.[60] Furthermore he argued that it was possible that 'the agitators merely reflect the general feeling.'[61] Moreover, attendance was

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[58] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr and Mrs Moleka, 14/4/1993.

[59] SAB: NTS, 9779, 961/400, DNA to ANC and Argus, 17/11/1950.

[60] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, ANC to SNA, 21/3/1950.

[61] Ibid.

very low at meetings officially sanctioned by the Trust in 1950. In fact in one particular meeting on 20 February intended for the whole community, Chief Charles was the only representative of the Mopeli side.[62]

Despite forms of intimidation, the non co-operation of the majority of the community regarding attempts to cull and other activities of the Trust is another indication of the extent to which the community supported the foes of the Trust. An example of this can be found in a newspaper report which announced on 21 February 1950 that there had been 'no response' to appeals by the magistrate for the voluntary culling of cattle and in fact 'not one of the 11,000 head of cattle had been brought into Witzieshoek by noon.'[63] In all of the interviews conducted for this study, everyone asserted that most of the community backed the rebellion. In an interview conducted by Prof Kotze in the 1970s, Mr Mohali argued that the 'majority of the people' were opposed to the 'state' and stock improvement.[64] Moreover, the anti-Trust sentiment which permeated the community throughout the 1940s cannot be ignored. The vast majority of Witzieshoek inhabitants, both men and women, were voicing their dissatisfaction with Trust rule in both passive and active ways in 1949 and 1950.

Aims and Organization

The aims of the Witzieshoek rebels in 1949 and 1950 can be summed up in three main demands: the removal of the Trust, a return to forms of organization which had existed prior to Trust interference and finally, self-

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[62] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, Minutes, Chiefs and people, 20/2/1950.

[63] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 1, The Star, 21/2/1950.

[64] UNISA: AAS219, Interview, Prof D A Kotze with Mr Mohali.

determination. For the Witzieshoek community, the last demand was bound up with the first two.

The desire to evict the Trust was emblazoned on every petition and letter delivered by the rebels. The yearning to return to the old ways of organizing implicit in this first demand was made equally clear in a notice in August 1950. 'We want the regime of the Late Paulus Mopeli that is, 'The Tribal System!' We want the 'tribal System!' 'We love the Tribal System'.[65] The predominance of the word 'tribe' in the rebels' discourse is fundamental to understanding the force behind the rebellion. The productive and reproductive capacity of women, central to the organization of the community and its 'tribal' identity, had been disrupted. By asserting their 'tribal' identity and demanding an end to Trust rule, the rebels were re-asserting 'tribal' customs, such as <u>bohali</u>. The fact that the rebellion was sparked by cattle culling indicates that cattle, and hence <u>bohali</u>, was a major issue at stake.

A pre-requisite of 'tribal' rule was some form of self determination. The rebels argued that the original treaty between President Brand and the Chief of Witzieshoek in 1866 gave them undisputed rights to the land. In his report in 1950, Melle made the following assertion: 'Agitators made them believe that during Republican days President Brand gave them the Reserve with freehold rights. The innovations brought in by the department ... merely restricted the people from their rightful lands which were already hopelessly inadequate' [66]

These aims, articulated as they were in the form of letters, demonstrations, intimidation and sabotage, emerged out of a highly organized programme of

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[65] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Notice Witzieshoek, 26/8/1950.

[66] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, Melle to DNA, 28/9/1950.

resistance. The Witzieshoek rebellion was not an unco-ordinated uprising. It occurred in a context in which resistance had been a planned affair for a number of years. The various forms it took indicate a strategy and a level of communication which required leadership and organization.

An example of the level of organization of resistance can be found in the various meetings and marches held. As pointed out by the judge in the 1951 trial, members of the community did not just miraculously converge at specific venues. 'The accused is another adherent of the Witzieshoek telepathy cult: He wanted the Trust removed but he did nothing to achieve this.'[67] Although the judge's comments were part of a broader state conspiracy discourse, and must be viewed in that light, they do reveal an important component of organization. In order for demonstrations to be successful, it was necessary that people be informed of the time and place of meetings. Mr and Mrs Moleka recalled that a man would go from village to village telling people about the meetings.[68]

Furthermore, these meetings, structured as they were as informal <u>pitsos</u>, provided an opportunity for members of the community to discuss grievances, plan strategies and work out demands. The Mothibis recollected that they used to call <u>pitsos</u> to discuss the Trust at a 'common place where they met: Namoha'.[69] The many letters presented to the Trust were clearly worked out and sanctioned, certainly by those accompanying their delivery. For instance, the letter which was delivered in connection with evidence to the Commission of Enquiry started with

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[67] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau.

[68] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr and Mrs Moleka.

[69] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr and Mrs Mothibi.

the following assertion, 'We have decided, as a Tribe'.[70] Meetings, of course, also developed into or were planned as demonstrations. Examples include the protest against the arrests of Letsie Mopeli and Paulus Mpheteng and the meeting outside the office of the Commission of Enquiry on 10 November.

A significant aspect of such organization was its leadership. The most prominent leader in the rebellion was Paulus Howell Mopeli (Mopelyana). This is borne out by all the evidence. Mopelyana was perceived to be at the head of what was described as the Lingangele (We stand firm) or Lehoha Le Sechaba by Chief Charles Mopeli and the various interests within the state. He was also classified as the ringleader by all the people interviewed for the purposes of this study. Most of the illicit pitsos were held at his kraal at Namoha. His leadership, though, was backed up by a group of ringleaders.

Chief Charles argued that Philip Moteka, Nehemiah Motleleng and Letsie Jack Mopeli were the main figures in Mopelyana's inner circle.[71] The Crown argued in the 1951 court case that Paulus Mopeli, Letsie Mopeli and Mopelyana were pulling the strings, while the government in November of 1950 ordered the arrest of fourteen persons who allegedly 'organized or instigated' the 'armed gatherings and assemblies'.[72] The strong leadership of the Witzieshoek rebellion attests to the extent of its organization.

An intriguing part of the leadership of the rebellion was the role played by the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association. According to Mr Dirk Molaba, the Witzieshoek Vigilance

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[70] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau.

[71] SAB: NTS, 7459, 506/327, part 2, CC to ANC, 18/2/1950.

[72] Ibid.

Association was a main organizer, but other residents, the Molekas, reported that they knew nothing about the organization at all. This is interesting as the Molekas actually took part in the rebellion whereas Mr Molaba was only seventeen at the time and was not actively involved. Mr Modernwane argued that the Association was influential, yet he characterized its dealings as 'bad' and he called them 'skelms'.[73] He argued that they took advantage of Mopelyana's goodwill for their own monetary gains. Mr Moderwane's perceptions reveal the rural-urban tensions which were characteristic of Witzieshoek right up to the start of the rebellion.

The evidence indicates that the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association had ceased to play a prominent role in Witzieshoek by the time of the rebellion. Bar the petition it had submitted in 1948, it had literally faded from the Witzieshoek scene after 1944. In its letters to the Trust and in its petitions it had always made its identity clear. All the letters submitted by the rebels were signed on behalf of the 'Mopeli tribe', not the Association. Prior to the skirmish in November of 1950, a few delegates including Mopelyana did travel to Johanesburg and consulted with Mofutsyana and James Mojoro, members of the Association·[74] However, neither Mofutsyana nor Mojoro were identified by the state or Chief Charles as prominent leaders. The extent to which they could have influenced and directed the rebels from Johanesburg is debatable. Tom Lodge argued that the Association may have influenced the actions of the leadership and the organization, but that the fact that the revolt displayed 'traditional forms of organization

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[73] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

[74] B Hirson, 'Rural Revolt In South Africa: 1937-1951', in collected seminars, Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, 8/22, (University of London, 1976), p. 124.

and concepts of political behaviour' was indicative of its localized nature.[75]

This argument can be taken a step further. The kinds of tactics adopted by the the rebels displayed an admixture of the old and the new. The new tactics which followed the line being adopted on a national scale were arguably a reflection of the influence of the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association. Yet, the use of old, more familiar tactics as well as the nature of the aims of the rebellion accentuate the localized nature of the conflict. One cannot deny the influence of the town on the countryside, but at the same time one cannot dispute the very distinct nature of rural revolt.

The Trial

The trial record itself includes accounts of the skirmish between the police and rebels at the end of November 1950. Its proceedings were important because it presented a particular description of the rebellion and signalled the end of the resistance of the so-called '<u>lingangele</u>' which had dominated 1949 and 1950.

The Crown accused 94 members of the community on two counts. The first was the more serious accusation of unrest.

> In that upon the 27 of November, 1950 ... the accused did all ... unlawfully and riotously assemble ... armed with sticks, kieries, assegaais ... and other weapons ... with intent by force and violence to disturb the public peace and security ... and by these means

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[75] Lodge, <u>Black Politics</u>, p. 273.

> assail and set at defiance the authority of the Police ... and then and there make a riot,[76]

The second charge was the contravention of the proclamation prohibiting gatherings of five or more people.

Essentially, the Crown argued that the people who had assembled at Namoha attacked the police 'acting in accordance with a preconceived plan'.[77] The defence, on the other hand, denied their having planned the attack, and even denied any kind of organized resistance at all.[78] It argued that the accused were acting in self defence and were provoked by the police to 'attack without self control and without realizing the probable consequences of their act.'[79] In delivering his judgement, the Judge made it plain that his sympathies lay with the prosecution. He based his arguments on his opinion that in general the accused failed to tell the truth: 'One wonders sometimes why not one of these people come out with the truth' and his finding that a common purpose existed.[80] He felt that the evidence pointed to the probability that an attack was planned after Mr Basner had left Namoha on the day of the attack.

The events of that day were, and still are highly disputed. However, a consensus existed among the people interviewed for this study, a consensus that would have been unlikely to have existed forty years after the event unless it had some sort of realistic grounding. All the people interviewed had their own versions of the clash

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[76] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau.

[77] VAB: HG.4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau, Sentencing, p. 24.

[78] Ibid., p. 23

[79] Ibid., p. 24.

[80] Ibid., p. 205.

and each was based on the same principles. Those assembled at Namoha did not have a pre-conceived plan to attack and had acted in retaliation to the police. This is an argument quite similar to the one advanced by the defence in the trial, except that the interviewees did not attempt to cover up the leadership and organization of resistance before that day.

Mr Modernwane, who was evidently informed of the incident after it had happened, gave the following description:

> On this very day of the fight, Basner was in Witzieshoek, ... at the Commissioner's office with the purpose of meeting his clients and trying to explain a few things. When he got there he found some tents, there were some army people, police and things around there and they were preparing to go and shoot at the people who had gathered at the place called Namoha. ... Somebody was sent out to go and warn these people to disperse because he believed there would be problems. Now this person who was sent there with a letter which was to be read to the people telling them to disperse. Unfortunately this man did not read the letter and when they came on horseback they were led by one policeman. ... And when they got there lined up and asked these people: 'who is the leader?' The response was 'there is no leader it is the complaint of the tribe as a whole'. This man who was leading this group of army and police just got fed up and said 'I am tired of this nonsense, it is the people , it is the people all the time. I give you ten minutes within which to disperse.' Somebody stood up and said let us pray first before we can disperse. But the horses were restive a little and then this policeman, a black policeman, pointed at

> somebody, that somebody happened to be an uncle of mine. In stature he was the same height and thin like this Mopelyana, the leader who at that time was already removed from the crowd. ... The first man that they shot was this man in the belief that they were shooting this Mopelyana chap. Then there was commotion. ... I would imagine that they were not intending to fight as such.[81]

Mr and Mrs Mothibi also described the incident. They were actually present at the clash.

> Then while they were gathered there at Namoha the policemen came. All of them were white except for one ... they all came on horseback. These horses were positioned in a half circle, positioned in such a way that there was no way out. They couldn't just go anywhere, they were locked inside. One of the policemen told them they should disperse in ten minutes. And the other one said, 'not ten minutes, five minutes.' They did not even give them those five minutes they just went into them. The horses were wild. They didn't even have weapons with them, they only had sticks which were little. These policemen with sten guns started shooting. He says that many of them were killed.[82]

In these accounts, the clash which symbolized the tension between the community and the Trust was presented as being more a result of aggression on the part of the police than of the community.

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[81] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwane.

[82] Ibid.

The most contentious factor in the crown case was the fact that an entire armed patrol was required to deliver subpoenas. In Mr Basner's petition of appeal, he pointed out what the court had ignored: firstly that the police could not serve subpoenas and therefore must have had an ulterior motive. This was probably to break up the gathering. Secondly, he questioned the necessary to serve the subpoenas heavily armed when just one person would have been sufficient.[83] Furthermore, he felt that the composition of the crowd: women, children, pregnant women and old men, made the accusation of intent inconceivable.[84]

Yet, despite evidence to the contrary, the majority of people accused were convicted and sentenced to imprisonment and hard labour of varying lengths dependent on the severity of their alleged actions. The four women accused were all convicted and sentenced to between six months and two years of hard labour, while the men's sentences ran from six months to five years. [85] The imprisonment of members of the community brought to an end a period of rebellion which was dubbed the Witzieshoek rebellion, but it did not quell the resistance which had characterized the actions of the community since the imposition of betterment.

The impact of the rebellion upon the state

In order to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the Witzieshoek rebellion, it is necessary to look at the response of the state.

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[83] VAB: HG 4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau, Petition of Appeal, pp. 32-43.

[84] Ibid., p. 35.

[85] VAB: HG.4/1/2/1/487/488, Rex vs Malau, Sentencing

Witzieshoek was thrust into the foreground only after the clash on 28 November 1950. Thus, most of the reactions expressed in the House of Parliament were concerned with this event. This was problematic as it tended to focus attention on the violent climax to the rebellion, and therefore glossed over the resistance which had preceded it. Furthermore, it accentuated the violent response on the part of the community, one which had not been pervasive throughout the rebellion at all.

Most of the responses were reported in Hansard during and after the Commission had undertaken its analysis of the community. The Native representatives reacted in outrage to the clash. Mrs Ballinger blamed the Nationalists directly for the incident. She argued that 'a pretty difficult situation had developed' in Witzieshoek over a number of years, but that 'crucial developments' only occurred after the National Party's ascent to power.[86] 'Since this Minister came into office he has dealt with them in a way which I think must cause a very considerable amount of alarm to anyone who feels concerned about the future peace in this country.'[87] Her main concern was with the way the government had handled the clash, both before and after. She condemned the government for ruling with 'sten guns and arbitrary imprisonment', bemoaning the fact that it had imprisoned fourteen of the rebels for three months without trial.[88]

Mrs Ballinger placed the Witzieshoek rebellion into a national context. 'The government has been in office for just on three years, and there is already a long trail of conflict between police and natives and between natives

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[86] HAD, (1951), vol. 74, col.2861.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Ibid., col. 2862.

and other people.'[89] Mr Kahn, another Native Representative backed up Ballinger's argument. He queried just how the Nationalist government could proclaim to fight a 'weaponless struggle to preserve its own civilization' when it 'collaborated to send large bodies of armed police with sten guns and rifles and fixed bayonets to Witzieshoek.'[90]

The response by members of the Nationalist Party was predictable. Colonel Dohn argued that the clash was 'not because of apartheid.'[91] He took an extreme stance, asserting that the only way to 'restore the right relationship at Witzieshoek' was to 'take those agitators and hang them.'[92] Dr Van Rhyn also condemned the clash, but in this case from a opposite perspective to the Native Representatives. 'After one hundred years in which they tried to bring civilization to the natives, you find revolt, murder, manslaughter, you might even say revolution.'[93] Ironically enough, Mr Barlow, a United Party member, took the Nationalists' side in this debate. 'I do not see how this government can be blamed for taking action at Witzieshoek'.[94] His main concern was for the white women and children on the farms outside of reserve. Here is a incontestable demonstration of the result of accentuating the clash over and above the other actions of the rebels.

What is interesting in this debate is that African women were completely ignored. Even those Members of Parliament expressing outrage failed to account for the fact that

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[89] Ibid., col. 2864.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid., col. 7824.

[92] Ibid.

[93] Ibid. col. 7861.

[94] Ibid., col. 3099.

women and children were present at the clash. Instead, the only mention women received was paternalistic protectiveness for white women. Obviously, the role women had played had been seriously overlooked in this context. Witzieshoek women were being relegated to the background.

Women and resistance

In a paper delivered at the Conference on Women and Gender in Natal in 1991, Julia Wells endeavoured to explain why women rebel. She focussed specifically on the anti-pass campaigns of women in Bloemfontein in 1913 and in Johannesburg in the 1950s. Her argument revolved around the concept of 'motherism',[95] a term coined by Temma Kaplan and developed from the observation that, in Wells' terms, 'women's most effective calls to action centred on their roles as mothers and defenders of their children'.[96] Drawing on international studies of women's resistance movements, Wells explained that anti-pass campaigns were 'motherist movements'. This was because the protests against passes were 'linked to the responsibilities of motherhood'.[97]

Walker argues that the concept of 'motherhood' requires analysis; its meaning in particular contexts needs to be examined. She points out that in pre-capitalist societies, the status and importance of female fertility 'suggests that historically motherhood in African society cannot be equated with submission and passivity.'[98] She argues that gender historians should avoid assuming that

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[95] J Wells, 'The Rise and Fall of Motherism as a Force in Black Women's Resistance Movements', (paper presented to the conference on 'Women and Gender in South Africa', p. 1.

[96] Ibid., p. 2.

[97] Ibid., p. 12.

[98] Walker, Women and Resistance, p. xx.

'women's defence of their maternal roles constituted a negation of their rights as women - that women's rights are somewhat at odds with the maternal role - and that organisation around the latter is evidence of an unproblematic conservatism and defence of patriarchy.'[99]

In terms of resistance struggles in the 1950s, she asserts that the extent to which these older meanings of motherhood prevailed needs to be assessed, as well as whether new circumstances, such as female headed households and economic imperatives, shaped women's perceptions of motherhood.

While the concept of 'motherism' could be applied to some of the female rebels at Witzieshoek, as bohali ensured security and an ability to continue to operate as mothers, it provides too narrow a view of why Witzieshoek women rebelled. The evidence suggests that mothers, grandmothers and daughters were reacting against the decline in their material well-being and their ability to produce. Betterment had severely disrupted women's economic security and status in addition to their role in the productive cycle of the community. For example, married women or single mothers could no longer continue to meet their families' nutritional needs[100], a function that was integral to their role as producers and hence their status in the community. Women's reaction to the enforcement of culling in 1950 therefore was a reaction against the erosion of their security as producers.

The predominance of female headed households, as well as the fundamental importance of women's productive and reproductive capacities in Witzieshoek, suggests that women's involvement in the Witzieshoek rebellion was

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[99] Ibid., pp. *xix* and *xx*.

[100] Those women who were squatting in the community were the most deprived as they had no access to land in order to produce.

neither conservative nor an endorsement of patriarchy. The rebellion occurred in a context in which women had been challenging male authority and control for two decades. Women's active participation and support was therefore not 'unusual' but rather symbolised their militancy as a group. By defending bohali women were not defending the patriarchal ideologies that controlled it, but their own experience of power and authority within it.

Conclusion

The Witzieshoek rebellion was a well coordinated confrontation with the Trust and the Department of Native Affairs. It was distinguished by its support base which lacked the cleavages often characteristic of other uprisings. It deviated from other resistance struggles in the rural periphery of South Africa, between the 1940s and 1950s, in that it articulated a nationalist ideology and hence was not entirely parochial in nature. The involvement of both men and women in the rebellion, though a departure from the past, was consistent with the context within which the rebellion occurred. The state managed to crush the rebellion, but its impact reverberated through the corridors of power and continued to influence the Nationalist government after 1950.

CHAPTER SIX

THE WITZIESHOEK COMMISSION OF ENQUIRY: CONFLICTING REFLECTIONS OF A 'NATIVE POLICY' THAT IGNORED THE WOMEN 'WHO CAUSED ALL THE TROUBLE'

Introduction

The Commission of Enquiry into the Witzieshoek 'disturbances' sat from 1 November 1950 to 26 January 1951 with a short break in-between. The Commission consisted of four white people appointed by the state: Mr C J Van Heerden, Mr J H J Van Rensburg, Mr G E N Ross and Mr A Eyles who was the chairperson.[1] The Department of Native Affairs also appointed an African, Mr S S Tema, to the panel in an advisory capacity, after pressure from the Witzieshoek community. The Commission's function was to explain the rebellion in Witzieshoek and to make recommendations on how to solve the conflict as well as to address the problem of over-population of stock and people.

Adam Ashforth argues that by setting up commissions, the state could view people as 'problems' and therefore make them the 'subject of a power which assumes to be able to resolve their status.'[2] In this process a Commission of Enquiry becomes a 'theatre of power'.[3] This is because 'the central truth of state power is ritually played out before a public audience.'[4] In the Witzieshoek case, the Commission of Enquiry was a necessary mechanism to

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[1] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 1.

[2] A Ashforth, The Politics of Official Discourse in Twentieth century South Africa, (New York, 1990), p. 5.

[3] Ibid., p. 7.

[4] Ibid.

control the rebellion. It enabled the state, and more specifically the Native Affairs Department, to contain the problem in a forum in which they had the control and the rebels did not.

However, the Witzieshoek Commission also represented the various interests constructing policies and ideologies regarding 'native' affairs. Consequently, the inconsistencies and contradictions evident in its discourse diminished its status as a theatre of power. The discourse of the Commission and the way in which it mirrored the debates over 'native' policy between 1948 and 1950, as well as its influence on 'native' policy in the 1950s will constitute this chapter.

Women and the Witzieshoek Commission

In the discussion thus far, the central importance of women to the Witzieshoek community between 1930 and 1950 has been stressed. This is not only because of their function as reproducers and producers in the community, but because of their increasing autonomy and their overarching presence in the actual rebellion. In comparison, the Witzieshoek Commission almost completely ignored women.

When analyzing and interpreting language and meaning, it is necessary to ask questions concerning power. 'Who takes the floor, who controls, who chooses, who defines what is good or bad behaviour?'[5] In the case of the Commission of Enquiry, the panel consisted of three white males who took the floor and controlled, chose and defined good and bad behaviour. Nevertheless, the

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[5] R Wodak, Language, Power and Ideology, Studies in Political Discourse, (Amsterdam and Philadephia, 1989), p. xiv.

androcentric bias evident in the report went beyond the sex of the panel.

The Commission sat at a time when the government was taking its support of African patriarchy a step further. In addition to its desire to entrench tribal and hence male authority in the reserves, the Department of Native Affairs had begun to discuss the possibility of controlling women directly through the requirement of a pass.[6] The Commission was also influenced by the males it interviewed. In the course of its investigation, it interrogated sixteen white males and twenty five African males, each with his own stake in male-supremacist authority systems. These attitudes were reflected in the report.

Furthermore, the Commission focused primarily on the political and economic conditions in the reserve. Its recommendations were couched in economic and technical terms. This is apparent in its second chapter which it divided into the following sections:

> situation and extent of the reserve, population, extent and productive capacity of arable land, water supply and possibility of irrigation schemes, extent and nature of grazing area, possibility of the establishment of local industries and the availability of labour and accommodation of such labour, the right of ownership or occupation of individual Natives in the Reserve, the success or otherwise of the rehabilitation measures which have up to now been applied to Witzieshoek by the South African Native Trust.[7]

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[6] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 204.

[7] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 16.

It steered completely clear of the social and domestic relations which were commonly associated with African women by both the state and the male African elite at that time. By largely excluding women from their report, the Commission was re-casting the political, economic and technical domains as masculine. The irony in this assumption is that it directly echoed the attitude of the Trust officials right from the inception of the betterment process in 1939 and had become integral to the problem of development.

The 'Native Problem' Debate

When the Nationalist Party came to power in 1948, three main schools of thought advocated policies and programmes which promised to affect Africans in Witzieshoek directly. The United Party, a formidable opponent to the Nationalists prior to the 1953 elections, championed a programme of legislation which fell mid-way between segregation and integration.[8] It believed that the Africans in the urban areas should become part of a permanent urban population whilst further migration from the reserves and urbanization should not be unrestricted.[9]

According to Posel, the Nationalists were influenced on the one hand by adherents of a policy of 'total segregation'[10] who desired complete economic, social and political separation (pure apartheid).[11] On the other hand, there were proponents of what Posel dubbed 'practical apartheid', who maintained that white

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[8] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 47.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid., p. 50.

[11] Ibid., p. 53.

supremacy would not be jeopardized by economic dependence on the Africans in the urban areas.[12] In their opinion, the problem of 'the urbanized African' could be resolved through strict control measures rather than by absolute segregation.[13] In its representation of the rebellion and in its recommendations, the Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry contained components of each philosophy. It vacillated between embracing the principles of total apartheid, of practical apartheid and those of the United Party.

The Recommendations of the Witzieshoek Commission

The Witzieshoek Commission's recommendations are the most important aspect of its report as they directly illustrate the debate prevalent within government circles concerning the question of 'native' policy after 1948. The Commission stated that it hoped that its recommendations would contribute to 'a possible solution to the Native problem in South Africa.'[14] Notwithstanding this bold declaration, the capacity of the report to influence the policies of the Department of Native Affairs was questionable.

Written at a time when the National Party was accused of speaking 'with many voices on the question of their Native policy'[15], its authors tended to draw on ideologies and policies advocated before 1948, which were still being debated in 1950. Some of these ideologies were ultimately rejected by the government as they were contrary to Nationalist ideology in the 1950s.

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12 Ibid.

13 Ibid., p. 55.

14 Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 29.

15 HAD, (1950), vol. 71, quoted in Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 63.

Moreover, the Commission had to compete with a variety of other forces acting on the Nationalist Party and its 'native' policies at this time. Its recommendations were challenged by the proposals made by those representing the interests of the mining and farming industries. Posel argues that between 1948 and 1961, Nationalist policies were more concerned with dealing with conflict and compromise than with following a pre-planned blueprint.[16] The Witzieshoek Commission was a part of that conflict and compromise.

Finally, the Commission's influence was diminished by its framework. Its primary concern was Witzieshoek and its development, whereas the Department of Native Affairs, during the early 1950s, gave priority to the position of urban Africans over those in the reserves, concentrating on influx control.[17]

Nevertheless, as a public document, the report gained the power and authority associated with publication. Uta M Quastoff's distinction between 'public' and 'published' opinion is useful here. She argues that public opinion becomes influential only once knowledge is shared. Published opinion is the medium through which knowledge becomes authenticated and part of a collective belief and hence empowers public knowledge.[18] The Commission of Enquiry influenced and was in turn influenced by shared public opinions. This is why its discourse as a part of wider public discourses requires examination.

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[16] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, pp. 6 and 60.

[17] Ibid., p. 71.

[18] U M Quastoff, 'Social Prejudice as a Resource of Power: Towards the Functional Ambivalence of Stereotypes', in Wodak (ed), Language, Power and Ideology: Studies in Political Discourse, p. 193.

Urbanization

Ironically, the most important recommendation of the Commission of Enquiry dealt with the status of the urban African's relationship to Witzieshoek. It proposed that Witzieshoek was faced with two alternative futures. On the one hand, it could continue to consist of migrant labourers, who were absent but had rights to reside there, and of permanent residents whom the Commission dubbed the 'purely farming population'.[19]

On the other hand, it could 'develop in the direction of becoming a self supporting unit as soon as possible' which would consist of people who 'by means of agriculture, business and local industries' could supply their own needs. In turn, this would require the limitation of migrant labour to 'a minimum' so that 'industrialised Natives would no longer have the right, taken for granted, to regard Witzieshoek as a place to which they can return at will when after years of absence they retire from industrial life to spend their old age there.'[20] The Commission supported the latter recommendation.

This problem was something the Department of Native Affairs had attempted to tackle in 1949. Their proposed solution had been set out in the Native Laws Amendment and Urban Areas Amendment bills of 1949. The Native Laws Bill proposed the setting up of 'nation-wide labour bureaux',[21] and the Urban Areas Bill had set out restrictions on urbanization, limiting Africans in the urban areas to those who were either born there and were permanent residents or those given permission to reside

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[19] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 16.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 92.

there by the local authorities.[22] Both these pieces of Legislation were withdrawn by Dr E G Jansen, the Native Affairs Minister at that time.

The Commission of Enquiry ignored the defunct Urban Areas Bill. Instead, it recommended that 'a Native who has been absent from the Reserve for two years or more should be regarded as having left the Reserve permanently'.[23] This was a far more radical proposal then the requirement proposed in the 1949 legislation.

In fact this recommendation was even more liberal than that proposed by the United Party in 1951 when Verwoerd re-introduced the Native Laws Amendment Bill to parliament. The United Party argued that the restriction of permanent residence in the town to those born there, was 'unduly harsh' and that a time scale of three to five years was a more appropriate measure for permanent urban residence.[24] The discrepancy between the United Party's recommendation and that of the Witzieshoek Commission, both of which were part of the political debate of 1951, was clarified by Major Van Der Byl, the former Minister of Native Affairs under United Party rule, in his discussion of the Commission's proposal.

> If the Native Reserve is to be the fatherland of the Native and if he goes out of it because economic circumstances force him to go and seek a living somewhere else, should the government - because he is away for two years - deny him entry to his own fatherland?[25]

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[22] Ibid., p. 95.

[23] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 18.

[24] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 99.

[25] HAD, (1951), vol. 76, col. 8296.

By making use of the key word 'fatherland', Van Der Byl was appropriating the Nationalist Party discourse. He revealed the inconsistency between the notion of a fatherland and the economic reality of urbanization.

The final draft of the Native Laws Amendment Bill was passed in 1951. It represented the politics of compromise identified by Posel. Instead of demanding that permanent residence be limited to those born in the towns, the amendment stated that those who had been employed continually for ten years by one employer, or more than fifteen years by several, were eligible for the status of the permanently urbanized.[26]

Linked to the Commission's recommendation on curtailing re-entry into the reserve was the notion of a permanent urban population, one which had its source in the United Party's Fagan Commission. This is illustrated in the Witzieshoek Commission's commentary on the urban areas.

> In order to stabilise the population in the reserves, and in this case Witzieshoek, and to limit it in the main to the farming population, the Commission considers it essential that in the urban areas, especially in the large industrial centres such as the Witwatersrand, certain areas be proclaimed Native areas in terms of the Group Areas Act for the permanent segregation of natives in their residential areas where provision will be made for three groups of Natives, namely the sub-economic lessee, the economic lessee and the economic landowner. Where the permanently industrialised Native may live and where he may be granted a certain amount of say in his own affairs and

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[26] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, pp. 101-102.

> where the native who had saved up capital may invest it safely in property or in business.[27]

Like the Fagan Report, the Witzieshoek Commission recognised the need for a permanent urban African population with encumbent responsibilities and rights. The Witzieshoek Commission's response to urbanization predictably flew in the face of Nationalist adherents of puritan apartheid. These puritans desired to halt most African urbanization, restricting it to temporary male migration.[28] In their discourse which closely followed the Stallard Commission, the concept of a permanent urban African population was unacceptable.[29] Major van Der Byl reflected this in parliament.

> According to the recommendation contained in this report, the permanent industrial worker is to live in the town and have a say in his own affairs. ... This recommendation cuts right across the Government policy - the policy that in the towns the native shall merely be a temporary worker. This recommendation is similar to that of the Fagan Commission and I would like to know what the Government thinks of it.[30]

Van der Byl, indisputably aimed to challenge the Nationalists with this assertion. He believed that the Witzieshoek Commission's report was 'going to have a very important bearing on all future Native policy' and therefore was enthusiastic to hear the Nationalist

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[27] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 18.

[28] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 53.

[29] Ibid. p. 47.

[30] HAD, (1951), vol. 76, col. 7854 and 8296.

response.[31] It is here that the conflict within the Nationalist Party becomes apparent and that the historical forces moulding 'practical' apartheid emerge. Neither Jansen nor Verwoerd could escape the urban African subject and proposed to deal with it through control rather than through eradication. They sought to create 'order out of the present chaos'.[32]

Posel maintains that 'the NAD's determination to halt the urbanization process placed a particular premium on controlling the movements, marriage patterns, and economic activities of African women'.[33] African women were an important feature of the Nationalist concept of creating order out of chaos. As argued at various points in this thesis, African women were held responsible for the social decay of the towns. In order to eradicate their negative influence, the Nationalists aimed at 'buttressing and restoring African men's control over women', both in the rural and urban areas.[34] To this end, Verwoerd ensured that the 1952 amendments to the Native Laws Amendment Act applied to women as well as men. During the 1940s, the Native Affairs Department had been reluctant to interfere directly in the control of African women as reaction to any form of legislation had been vehemently opposed. By the 1950s, the Nationalists altered course and decided to impose legislative controls on the movement of women. Although the 1952 amendments did not have an immediate affect on women, as Verwoerd promised an 'administratively lax approach', they signalled the beginning of a more direct approach to the control of women.[35]

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[31] Ibid., col. 7854.

[32] quoted in Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 68.

[33] Ibid., p. 80.

[34] Ibid., p. 81.

[35] Ibid., p. 207.

The Witzieshoek Commission made no distinction between men and women in its proposals concerning urbanization. It is interesting that the Commission ignored women, when they were an important component of the urbanization debate. Perhaps the 'almost fanatical opposition' to the introduction of passes led the Commission to steer clear of the controversial issue or perhaps the implicit assumption was that what the Commission applied to men should be applied to women too.[36]

Whereas the Witzieshoek Commission proposed that African urbanization was a permanent solution, Verwoerd argued that his version of 'practical' apartheid was merely the first step towards puritan apartheid. Permanently urbanized Africans were presented as expedient for the time being by Verwoerd, yet as Posel points out, 'the 'practical' policies of the first stage would take the country along a different route from that leading towards the purported ideal of total segregation.'[37]

In contrast to its proposals which challenged Nationalist policies on urbanization, the Witzieshoek Commission's concept of Witzieshoek as 'a self supporting unit' brought it closer to the ideals of the puritans. Total segregation embraced the notion of the development of the reserves into miniature 'states' with the ability to support and control their own resources. The fact that the Witzieshoek Commission explored the 'possibility of the establishment of local industries'[38] and recommended that the government 'expropriate the trading rights of the European traders ... and that in future no trading

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[36] Ibid., p. 204.

[37] Ibid., p. 68.

[38] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 16.

rights be granted to Europeans in Witzieshoek'[39] indicated its commitment to the total economic, political and social segregation of the Reserves.

Tribalism

The development of the reserves into self-supporting units and the introduction of rigid influx control were bound up with Nationalist discourse, both puritan and practical, on the concept of tribalism. The towns were viewed as breeding grounds for the 'detribalized' African. Posel points out that Verwoerd and his predecessor 'bemoaned the loss of tribal discipline and identity amongst urbanised Africans'.[40] The loss of tribal discipline cannot be dissociated from the social decay that Verwoerd and Jansen blamed on African women. Male authority and control were intimately linked with tribal discipline and thus constituted part of the Nationalist's attempts to control women.

There was a rigid separation between so-called tribalized Africans living in the reserves and in the towns on a temporary basis, and so-called 'detribalised' Africans. Jansen argued in 1950 that 'the number of detribalised Natives in the urban areas should be frozen ... to prevent further detribalisation of families'.[41] The Witzieshoek report mirrored this distinction:

> The Commission is of the opinion that it is of the utmost importance for the solution to the native problem in South Africa that a definite policy should be laid down and followed in respect of natives who initially left the

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[39] Ibid., p. 34.

[40] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 203.

[41] HAD, (1950), vol. 71, quoted in Posel, The Making of Apartheid, pp. 79/80.

> Reserves as migrant labourers and who by force of circumstances remain outside for so long a period that for practical purposes they lose all contact with the reserve, take their families to the urban areas, become totally dissociated from their tribe, and may be regarded as urbanised Africans.[42]

It essentially accused the 'detribalized and industrialized Native'[43] of being the villains in the case of the Witzieshoek rebellion and hinted that their exclusion would prevent further disturbances.

> It will also prevent him [the detribalized Native] from trying, like the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association, to exert influence from outside upon the Administration of the Reserve, sometimes with extremely detrimental results, as was apparent in the case of the recent disturbances in Witzieshoek.[44]

The belief that towns were inappropriate areas for African residence lay behind the scapegoating of urban African subjects. Towns continued to be cast as havens for the immoral, undisciplined and criminal and this influenced public opinion and the Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry. The Commission insisted on locating the source of the rebellion outside Witzieshoek.

> This evidence, taken as a whole, leads the Commission to the conclusion that the 'Vigilance Association' of Johanesburg and the 'Agitators' in Witzieshoek were very closely associated with sinister aims, the true nature

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42 Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 17.

43 Ibid., p. 23.

44 Ibid., p. 18.

> and object of which are not very clear. ... Alternately, the Commission comes to the conclusion ... that Paulus Howell Mopeli's actions were inspired by a source outside the Reserve, of which he was merely the instrument for the obstruction of the authorities in the Reserve.[45]

The Commission reinforced its conspiracy theory by linking the outside source with organized resistance in the towns, specifically in the form of communism.

> Extremely reliable evidence was made available to the Commission that one of the persons who withdrew, was a person 'named' in terms of the provisions of the Unlawful Organization Act. It also transpired that during the week before the 27 November, 1950, Paulus Howell Mopeli and some of his followers were in Johannesburg and that they had consultations with other named persons as well as Dr. Dadoo [a member of the Communist Party].[46]

This conspiracy theory was directed by the prominence of communism in the political debates. The Suppression of Communism Act had been passed in 1950 and there was a widely held belief that the towns were 'breeding grounds of "communistic" onslaughts on white economic and political supremacy'.[47] The sheer political force of organizations such as the ANC, the SACP and Trade Unions in the towns had inflamed public opinion regarding the 'undesirable conditions' in the towns.[48]

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[45] Ibid., pp. 13-14.

[46] Ibid., p. 13.

[47] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 76.

[48] Ibid., p. 203.

Interestingly, in its enthusiasm to generate semi-skilled labour, the Commission's report later contradicted its recommendation to separate the urban detribalized African from the rural tribalized African:

> One takes into account ... that many of the migrant labourers from Witzieshoek are at this moment working in factories in the industrial areas of the country and, therefore, supply a source of semi-skilled labourers.[49]

The undesirable persons generated by the towns could be of use to Witzieshoek, after all.

The Witzieshoek Commission's report entrenched the concept of tribalism in a number of other ways. The members of the Commission approached Witzieshoek with the preconception that they were dealing with a tribe with its own specific brand of tribal identity and organization:

> Apart from being subject to the laws of the country ... the Native residents in Witzieshoek live to a great extent in their tribal setting and according to tribal customs and laws with the Chief as their leader, legislator and administrator.[50]

This approach was not inconsistent with the approach of the Nationalist party and the Department of Native Affairs. The Department's aims throughout the 1950s in the reserves continued to prioritize tribal authority and to entrench chiefs as tribal heads. As Fred Hendricks argues in his case study of the Transkei reserve between

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[49] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 23.

[50] Ibid., p. 3.

1950 and 1970, 'propping up "tribal unity" or re-tribalization was given precedence'.[51]

Part of the process of 'propping up' tribal authority was that of entrenching chiefly, and hence male, authority in the reserves. The Commission subscribed to this tactic. It urged that

> the powers which the Chief exercised formerly and which were later entrusted to the Native Commissioner be restored ... The Commission is of the opinion that if these powers are restored and the Chiefs assume greater administrative duties, the stipend paid to them ... should be considerably increased so that they can maintain their position amongst the tribe with dignity and without any financial embarrassment.[52]

The Commission itself and the Nationalists came under fire in 1951 from one of the Native Representatives in parliament, for upholding the concept of tribalism. Mr Kahn's speech demonstrated the inconsistency of this ideology.

> Now the whole system of tribalism in Witzieshoek, as it has been exposed by the Commission, has broken down and they are making a desperate attempt to mend the holes in the tottering system of tribalism. Therefore the Commission makes wholly illogical and contradictory recommendations.[53]

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[51] F Hendricks, 'Loose Planning and Rapid Resettlement: The Politics of Conservation and Control in the Transkei, South Africa, 1950-1970', Journal of Southern African Studies, 15/2, (1989), p. 312.

[52] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 30.

[53] HAD, (1951), vol. 76, col. 8420/8421.

The Under-Secretary for Development also criticized this particular recommendation albeit from a different perspective.

> It is the neglect or the inability of those Chiefs who have hitherto controlled the Native areas that the present chaotic and dreadful state of some of the Reserves can be attributed.[54]

The Secretary of Native Affairs, to whom the Under-Secretary was addressing this comment, asserted his unequivocal support in 1952 for the recommendation, illustrating that the conflict stretched beyond parliamentary debate.[55]

The Witzieshoek Commission's panel, like the Nationalists, clung to the whole system of tribalism as it authenticated the development of the reserves into self-contained units and because it acted as a vessel of control. By propping up tribalism and the chief, the Commission satisfied the immediate need within Witzieshoek to castigate the rebels and to reinstate control. In the discourse of both the Commission and the Nationalists (practical and puritan adherents), tribalism was constructed as the central tenet of the reserve societies. It was this entrenchment of tribalism that Kahn condemned.

> Now, the crux of the matter is that this very ill-equipped and partisan commission has failed to draw the very obvious conclusion on the Witzieshoek disturbances. ... These occurrences are proof of the fact that the whole of the so-

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[54] SAB: NTS, 9779, 961/400, US to SNA, 2/5/1951.

[55] SAB: NTS, 9779, 961/400, SNA to CNCs, 19/9/1952.

> called native administration with its reserves, its synthetic tribalism, its puppet chiefs, has suffered a complete collapse. Instead of recognising this historic process, the Government is still pottering around with the trivialities of outmoded tribalism and a hopeless effort to entrench the present system. ... The solution of the Native problem is not to be found in the cramped over-crowded reserves, but in the urban areas with their developing industries.[56]

This criticism revealed the contradiction between the development of reserves and the freezing of urbanization. In Kahn's opinion, Native policy could only succeed if the concepts of 'reserves' and 'tribalism' were abandoned altogether. The Commission of Enquiry hung onto reserves and tribalism in its recommendations, but at the same time envisaged the urban areas as appropriate dumping grounds for the detribalized African. In other words, development within the boundaries of Witzieshoek was contingent on separating the supposedly pure tribal members of the community from those contaminated in the towns. The contradiction in this philosophy was that it failed to account for the dependence of Witzieshoek inhabitants on the town's inhabitants.

Posel maintains that during the 1950s a characteristic of reserve life was reliance on the wages of migrants.[57] In 1951 the Under-Secretary for Development expressed concern for the relatives of town inhabitants in his report on the Witzieshoek Commission. He stated that the recommendation to restrict entry to the reserve after a two year absence was 'impracticable', arguing that 'it would probably cause untold hardship to the families of

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[56] HAD, (1951), vol. 76, col. 8421.

[57] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 127.

labourers who in fact regard the reserves as their homes.'[58]

By distinguishing between tribalized and detribalized Africans and entrenching the concept of tribalism, the Witzieshoek Commission was able to justify its notion of Witzieshoek as a self-contained unit as well as to propagate the notion that the rebellion was caused by 'outsiders'. The Nationalists, however, weakened their concept of segregation when subscribing to these notions. This was because total segregation entailed the expulsion of all women and children from the towns and only temporary migration for all the men.[59] By differentiating between tribal and detribalized Africans and by entrenching the tribal system, the Nationalists were creating tribal enclaves with which detribalised Africans could not identify and therefore to which they would not return. The Witzieshoek Commission, ironically enough, tried to deal with this problem.

> Natives whose applications to return to the reserve are refused or who for some reason are removed from the industrial area or a prohibited area in terms of section 10 of the Natives (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, should be removed to a special reserve as for example Hamanskraal, and should not automatically be sent back to the reserve of their birth.[60]

The inconsistency between advocating tribalism and suggesting that detribalised Africans be left to wander in the no man's land of 'special reserves' was articulated by the Under-Secretary, again in his communication about the Commission. He argued that the

[58] SAB: NTS, 9779, 961/400, US to SNA, 2/5/1951.

[59] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 53.

[60] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 32.

recommendation would 'bring about a most embarrassing situation' which would stem from the fact that 'a variety of tribes some with families and some without, would be hurled together in a strange place far from kith and kin'.[61]

Contradicting tribalism

The way in which the Commission dealt with the issue of bohali is illuminating. The fact that it had been charged with finding the causes of the rebellion gave it the opportunity to explore the role of cattle within the community, yet, despite stressing the 'tribal' way of life, the Commission barely touched on the issue.

In the section dealing with the state of 'unrest' within the community, the Commission claimed that in addition to bringing about radical and unpopular changes in the tribal life of the community, 'the full implications of these especially in respect to the limitation of stock was not properly understood.'[62]

This was the first and last time it reflected on cattle, except for a brief reference near the end of its report. By arguing that the limitation of stock was 'especially' problematic, the Commission came to an unescapable conclusion: cattle were of central importance to the 'tribal' life of the community. Yet it took the issue no further. It did not articulate that stock limitation was the most 'radical and unpopular' change because of the threat it constituted to bohali and the relations of reciprocity and security that went with it.[63]

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[61] SAB: NTS, 9779, 961/400, US to SNA, 2/5/1951.

[62] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 12.

[63] Ibid.

The Commission could not have failed to grasp the link between cattle and women. Mr H P Smit, the Additional Native Commissioner for Witzieshoek at the time, was reported as having made the following declaration to the Commission:

> All the natives wanted large numbers of cattle because of the lobolo system. The only solution was that they should be allowed to pay lobolo in money instead of cattle.[64]

The Commission excluded a lengthly examination of bohali because it was in conflict with its recommendations. Its proposals were based on the viability of stock as commercial products, not as a form of social control.

Paternalism is again evident in this attitude. Both the white members of the panel and the white men they interviewed tended to equate 'the native' with the 'small child in need of constant guidance and reassurance'. This was explicit in the way the Commission dealt with the impact of the Trust.

> It is easy to understand that such a change would cause a natural dissatisfaction in the mind of the ordinary native especially those who are unable to understand the weighty and logical arguments (from the point of view of the Europeans) which formed the basis of the introduction of these new measures.[65]

This reinforced the notion that labour reorganization on European terms was logical, whereas organization based on the productive and reproductive capacities of women was illogical and irrational.

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[64] Cape Times, 14/11/1950.

[65] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 10.

In contrast to the Witzieshoek Commission, newspapers reporting on its proceedings and recommendations reflected on lobolo in more detail. This indicated that the whole system of lobolo was important within the political and public arena, as newspapers were one front on which political debates were fought. Interestingly, there seemed to be some sort of consensus among the major white newspapers over the issue.

In an editorial written in The Argus (the English liberal mouthpiece of the Cape), the inhabitants of Witzieshoek were berated for such practices.

> If the natives persist in clinging to the ancient ways and ideas the problem of raising their standards of life in their own territories cannot be resolved.[66]

The Volksblad (The mouthpiece of the conservative Afrikaans community) brought up the subject in its editorial only a week later.

> It had been a struggle of many years within the native reserves against the traditional notion that the number of cattle determine a man's wealth.[67]

These opinions emerged out of a white, male prejudice which sought to impose its own values on the community, but they were directed by conservationist principles. They blamed 'excessive hoarding of cattle' for the deterioration of the reserves. The Commission saw the solution to 'cattle hoarding' in technical terms and in this way managed to divorce cattle from tribalism and

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[66] The Argus, 4/8/1950.

[67] Volksblad, 11/8/1950.

bohali. In essence, the Commission was creating its own brand of 'tribalism'.

The contradictions of selecting only certain features of 'tribalism' were revealed by The Argus in another editorial on 28 November 1950:

> It is a popular theme in some political quarters to insist that the native must develop his own way of life, spiritually and tribally. He must, these advocates say, be preserved from the contaminating influences of European civilization. Yet the lobolo system is the greatest encouragement to overstocking. Can culling ever be successfully taught to the native if he is left to believe at the same time that cattle should remain the coin of his matrimonial realm?[68]

In Witzieshoek, in 1950, women, cattle and rebellion were unmistakably connected. Newspapers had the prerogative to expose that connection while the Witzieshoek Commission had a stake in underplaying it as it exposed the contradictions in its report.

Conservationist Discourse

A remnant of pre-1948 discourse inherited by the Commission was a concern for conservation and the parallel development of the reserve. The Commission report makes use of key words such as 'improved methods', 'conservation farming', 'scientific control', 'unscientific control', 'rotation of grazing' and 'harmful to the soil', all of which were used in the pre-

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[68] The Argus, 28/11/1950.

apartheid era.[69] The main thrust of its argument was to implement a system of conservation farming where the methods utilized would be 'under the guidance of experts' and where 'demonstration farms' would provide examples.[70] In short, the Commission sought to create conditions within which a stable peasantry or group of farmers could emerge. Its lack of differentation between men and women in its discourse makes it difficult to determine whether conservation farming would be the responsibilty of men, women or both. The fact that the Commission largely ignored women and tended to discuss what it perceived to be within the masculine domain suggests that its concept of a conservation farmer was a male one.

The Commission's recommendations with regard to conservation and agricultural methods could have been the blueprint (riddled with the same male-orientated prejudices) for the betterment measures introduced in Witzieshoek in 1936 and 1939. The salient difference, however, was that the Commission sought to implement such strategies under new conditions. Not only was its conservationist discourse incongruous with current Departmental policies and ideologies in 1950, but its desire to introduce a whole new set of conditions clashed with Nationalist thinking as well as the ideas of a lobby critical to the Nationalists: the white farmers.

Hendricks maintains that although the Nationalists and the United Party both desired the development of the reserves as units which could support their population of migrant and permanent residents, 'the idea of creating a stable peasantry ... was incongruous with broader

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[69] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, pp. 19, 20, 22, 26 and 27.

[70] Ibid., p. 32.

political priorities.'[71] According to Posel, in the first part of the 1950s the Department earmarked inadequate funds to the reserves in order to satisfy development needs.[72] At the end of the decade, the SAIRR report on the 'economic development of the reserves' indicated that conservation work 'was still patchy, much depending on the interest and attitude of local officials'.[73]

In fact, the Government in the mid-1950s embarked on a new strategy in the reserves. It planned to implement a three stage plan: 'stabilisation, reclamation and rehabilitation'.[74] The aim of the first stage was to 'check the general spread of erosion, stabilise the present condition of the soil and minimise the possibility of further deterioration'.[75] To this end, the government introduced a system of 'loose' planning to replace the comprehensive system of planning that had preceded it.[76] This conflicted with the recommendations and proposals of the Witzieshoek Commission which entailed detailed management of conservation strategies and focused on reclamation rather than stabilization.

The Commission's conservation proposals were ultimately rejected by the Nationalists and the Department of Native Affairs. Instead of creating stable peasantries or indeed making the reserves self-supporting, government policies by 1960 had failed to change the status quo in the reserves. This was not suprising, due to the strong

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[71] Hendricks, 'Loose Planning and Rapid Resettlement',

p. 309.

[72] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 71.

[73] Ibid., , p. 127.

[74] Hendricks, 'Loose Planning and Rapid Resettlement', p. 318.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

influence on Nationalist policy of white farmers who would lose much needed labour with the development of a stable peasantry in the reserves. Posel quotes P Ntantala's impression of the reserves in the 1950s: 'One monotonous song of droning flies, sick babies, dying stock, hunger, starvation and death'.[77] As Hendricks rightly points out, the policies of the Nationalist Party from the 1950s made conservation the 'casualty' in the reserves.[78]

The friction between the Witzieshoek report and Nationalist and white farmers went beyond broad conservation. It is in the fine print that the contradiction is most apparent. The first major recommendation that the Commission made in order to ensure the development of the area was that 'the agricultural land should at least be doubled'.[79] This particular recommendation generated an immediate response from the local farming community in and around Witzieshoek.

Colonel Dahn, a member of the Nationalist Party, informed parliament of the following in 1951:

> I have been instructed by the agricultural societies, by the farmers living on the borders of Witzieshoek, to protest strongly against the recommendation of the Commission that more land should be given to the Natives.[80]

Dr Rhyn, another Nationalist Party member, also registered the farmers' objections in his speech in

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[77] Posel, <u>The Making of Apartheid</u>, p. 127.

[78] Hendricks, 'Loose Planning and Rapid Resettlement', p. 325.

[79] <u>Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry</u>, p. 22.

[80] HAD, (1951), Vol. 76, col. 7824.

parliament. He quoted from a telegram he had received from the Bethlehem Farmers Circle which apparently represented fourteen farmers' associations. The telegram stated their strong objection and demanded that their parliamentary representative take up the matter on their behalf and oppose the recommendation.[81]

Jansen's and Verwoerd's approach to the reserves in the 1950s was 'deeply affected by white farmers' opposition, both to the prospect of competition from peasant farmers in the reserves and the possible extension of reserve land.'[82]

However, the Witzieshoek Commission did not come under fire from the farmers only; it was also criticised for failing to recommend the extension of the reserve even further. In the first place, Kahn illustrated the Commission's dilemma:

> [It was] Caught between the human desire of the Commissioners to modify the stark conditions of hunger and land starvation which had produced such bitter discontent on the one hand, and the desire to satisfy the demand for cheap labour on the part of the adjoining farms and the mines which necessitated the perpetuation of that land hunger [on the other].[83]

He then went on to present the inadequacy of the Commission's solution:

> [T]he miserable and, in the circumstances, trivial increase of land recommended makes the position ludicrous and farcical, because,

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[81] Ibid., col. 7860.

[82] Posel, The Making of Apartheid, p. 71.

[83] HAD, (1951), Vol. 76, col. 8420.

> according to the Commission, the average production of grain on this size of allotment is only three bags of grain per year, which is barely enough to maintain a family of four for two or three months.[84]

The Commission had indeed 'fallen between two stools' as Kahn had intimated. Written as it was in a context where Native policy was still being defined and hotly debated and where differing interests caused contradictions and conflict, it reflected those contradictions and conflicts instead of resolving them.

In the section entitled, 'The Right of Ownership or Occupation of the Industrial Native in the Reserve', the Commission explored the communal tenure of land ownership in Witzieshoek.[85] It concluded that

> [a]lthough the Native in the Reserve lives in his tribal setting and subjects himself to tribal customs and tribal laws under the control of the Chief, he has developed to such an extent that he finds the communal possession of land, which subjects him to the arbitrary will of the Chief and/or the official, irksome.[86]

Its solution to the problem was to propose that

> a system should be applied whereby the individual native in the Reserve would be placed in a position to buy his residential lot and his land which would give him freehold of the land with the right to communal grazing for

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[84] Ibid.

[85] <u>Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry</u>, p. 24.

[86] Ibid.

> a definite and limited number of large and small stock.[87]

The whole concept of private ownership was rejected by the Nationalist government. This was apparent in a report from the Secretary of Native Affairs to the Chief Native Commissioners in 1952. The Secretary for Native Affairs stated that recommendations Number sixteen and twenty three, of the Witzieshoek Commission, which dealt with the purchasing of individual tenure were rejected as they were 'contrary to policy'.[88]

In order to satisfy the demands of the white farming community, farming in the reserves had to be kept to a subsistence level, albeit unofficially. Therefore communal tenure, the bastion of unproductive farming according to the Witzieshoek Commission,[89] endured into the 1950s.[90] Hendricks asserts that communal land tenure was in fact bolstered by the introduction of 'new administrative powers of the chiefs'.[91] The eradication of communal tenure would have left the Nationalist Party and the Department bereft of their one mechanism of control in the reserves: the chiefs, and, as Hendricks claims, would have 'created a group of people independent of chiefly control'.[92]

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87 Ibid.

88 SAB: NTS, 9779, 961/400, SNA to CNCs, 19/9/1952.

89 They argued that the farmer is 'not so appalled as the private owner to see his land deteriorating and the carrying capacity decreasing year by year. He becomes fatalistic and places full responsibility for his future on the shoulders of the Authorities'. Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 24.

90 Hendricks, 'Loose Planning and Rapid Resettlement', p. 309.

91 Ibid.

92 Ibid., p. 310.

The Witzieshoek Commission, though, was at pains to deny the contradiction between private ownership and the system of tribalism at Witzieshoek.

> It is of the opinion that such a change need not interfere with tribal ties and tribal solidarity of the Natives of the Reserve ... It is obvious that such individual tenure should be within the framework of communal tenure of the Reserve, the tribe and the tribal customs and the laws and within the jurisdiction of the Chief and the State.[93]

The ability of the Commission to reconcile private ownership with tribalism was severely censured in parliament, again by Kahn.

> It makes, in the circumstances, the startling recommendation, that the Africans must be permitted ownership of land on the basis of individual tenure and ownership, and that at the same time they must be put under the jurisdiction of the chief and maintain tribal associations subject to traditional tribal customs and laws. As if it is at all possible to have within the primitive, tribal communistic system, land owned in a form of individual capitalist ownership. It is frankly contradictory and utterly impossible. ... You cannot have the maintenance of a tribal system, on the basis of the individual ownership of land.[94]

The ambivalence in the report between tribalism on the one hand and a system of individual tenure on the other

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[93] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, p. 24.

[94] HAD, (1951), Vol. 76, col. 8421.

was discussed by the Under-Secretary for Development as well. He maintained that the granting of land to Witzieshoek inhabitants on the basis of individual tenure was 'incompatible with the augmenting of the powers of chiefs in their present state of tribal development.'[95]

The Witzieshoek Commission fell into the same trap as that of the Nationalists and the Department in the 1950s, which was to elevate tribalism as a system of control above all else in the reserves. The victims were again conservation and the development of a stable peasantry.

Loyal vs disloyal, unrest vs disturbances: The Commission's rebellion.

The Commission's discussion of Witzieshoek prior to and during the disturbances has particular notable characteristics which are worth noting. In the first instance, it presented Witzieshoek women in a particular way. Secondly, it established the concept of tribalism and male chiefly authority and reinforced them both throughout its discussions. To entrench these two concepts it distinguished between two groups and two rebellions. It also used its license to moralize about the state of affairs in Witzieshoek, and to criticize specific actions of the Department of Native Affairs, revealing its relative autonomy from the Department.

Representations of women

The Witzieshoek Commission mentioned women specifically three times in its report. The fact that it ignored women completely in the rest of the report underlines the importance of these three instances.

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[95] SAB: NTS, 9779, 961/400, US to SNA, 2/5/1951.

In all three cases, it linked women to the rebels.

> These animals were removed from this camp by force by a large number of mounted natives who were armed and accompanied by native women ... about 400 armed natives had appeared in front of the office where, incited by women, they executed a war dance ... a large number of the natives were armed, some with knobkerries, other with axes and assegais, while the native women carried sickles under their blankets.[96]

The Commission was associating the African women of Witzieshoek with negative stereotypes. Women enjoyed the same status as rebels in the report. Moreover, they were made responsible for the actions of the rebels by being the persons who 'incited' the latter to 'execute war dances'. This kind of construction of women was not inconsistent with Nationalist Party discourse in the 1950s. By linking the women to the rebels, the Commission associated them with the 'sinister aims' of the persons responsible for the 'disturbances', who, they maintained, had their source outside Witzieshoek.

Unlike the men in Witzieshoek who were divided into 'loyal' and 'disloyal' camps, women only occupied the ranks of the disloyal in the Witzieshoek Commission's report. This indictment of African women can be viewed as part of a broader public discourse castigating them in particular contexts, such as the towns.

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[96] Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry, pp. 7-8-9.

Tribal Authority

In order to authenticate the tribal system, the Commission romanticized it. When examining the causes of unrest in Witzieshoek, the Commission maintained that

> [i]n order to fully understand the position, it is necessary to realise that before the Native Trust and Land Act came in to operation in 1936, The Natives of Witzieshoek had for generations been living according to their old tribal customs, with little interference from the Department.[97]

In other words, the 'new and drastic change' which was brought about by the Department was presented as having wrecked the perfect harmony of tribal existence.[98] The Commission presented this as one of the main causes of a state of unrest in the minds of the inhabitants of Witzieshoek. 'It is easy to understand that such a change would cause a natural dissatisfaction in the mind of the ordinary Native.'[99]

Chief Charles Mopeli was an important figure in the Commission's report and it was careful to maintain his integrity as an authoritative person throughout.

> We feel that it is essential to mention that this attitude [lawful] can, or should be, attributed to the wise leadership of Chief Charles Mopeli who during the whole of this difficult period brought his influence to bear in an exemplary manner. If this had not been

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[97] Ibid., p. 10.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid.

> the case, the situation would have in all possibility have taken a serious turn.[100]

In order to bolster Chief Charles and the tribal male authority he represented, the Commission took advantage of the split within the community to construct a group outside of that authority. Right from the start of the report, the Commission distinguished between 'loyal' and 'disloyal' factions within the community.[101] Whilst a split *had* occurred within the community during the rebellion, the Commission's description and understanding of it was crude. The community was not divided by a clear line as the Commission intimated, as support for the rebel leaders was juxtaposed to support for Chief Charles. If anything, the division between rebels and loyalists was hazy; it was only among the leadership that the split was overt. The rebel leaders had to defy the authority of Chief Charles in order to fulfil their function as leaders of the rebellion. However, despite this, they continued to claim that they had no wish to undermine his authority.

By distinguishing between the Chief and disloyal members of the community, the Commission was able to reiterate the legitimacy of tribal authority and cast the rebels' authority as illegitimate.

> Mopelyana and his three followers came into open conflict with the officials of the Department and the movement under his leadership known as 'lingangele' or the 'Leihlo la sechaba', whose activities were directed against the Trust, gained increasing strength.

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[100] Ibid., p. 12.

[101] Ibid., p. 3.

> The campaign against the trust, its officers and the Chief intensified.[102]

Although their representation of the split in the community was underdeveloped, it was rooted in a real threat to Chief Charles' authority. This was a menace which he had verbalised himself.

> Chief Charles Mopeli wrote to the Native Commissioner and reviewed the position [February, 1950]. He stated that Paulus Howell Mopeli was the instigator of trouble and that he, 'Mopelyana', worked hand in glove with the Witzieshoek Vigilance Association, which body had caused trouble when the lands were surveyed.[103]

Chief Charles' assertion of links between Mopelyana and the Vigilance Association supported the notion of a source outside the reserve and outside tribal authority.

> It is of great importance to point out that this organisation has no place in the normal tribal life and that it has repeatedly been condemned by the present Chief. The aims that it purports to serve are amply served by the Chief and his councillors.[104]

Thus, the Commission's distinction between the Chief and the 'disloyal section' of the community was embedded in Chief Charles' testimony. The Commission's so-called conclusions were hence more reflections of the Chief's opinion, fears and perceptions, than an unbiased evaluation. By setting up the rebels and the Association

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[102] Ibid., p. 4.

[103] Ibid., p. 8.

[104] Ibid., p. 13.

as opponents of the tribal authority, the Commission ignored the tremendous importance of the disruption of that authority to the rebels, as well as their characteristically 'tribal' discourse.

This study has already indicated that the rebellion was about reinstating the 'tribal' way of life and more specifically re-asserting the patriarchal authority of the chief. By demanding a return to the 'tribal system' the rebels were displaying their loyalty to Chief Charles' authority rather than disputing it. The Commission's rigid distinction between 'loyal' and 'disloyal' factions denied the rebels the space in the report to express their 'tribal' allegiance.

Furthermore, the Commission's decision to divide the rebellion into 'Unrest and Disturbances' effectively closed the lid on the rebels' association with 'tribalism'.[105] The Commission maintained that 'unrest' was ' a state of mind' in opposition to disturbances which were 'an outward active manifestation of a state of mind'.[106] The assumption was that unrest as such could be condoned whereas disturbances could not. To this end the Commission argued that those members of the community who were loyal to the Chief had legitimate reasons for unrest. It was these loyal members of the community who had behaved in an exemplary manner.

> They conducted themselves as a community who had a bona fide grievance which they persistently and rightly brought to the notice of the proper authority without any unlawful or improper demonstration.[107]

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105 Ibid., p. 10.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid., p. 12.

In contrast to the causes for the disturbances, according to the Commission, the causes of the unrest were closely associated with 'radical and unpopular changes in the tribal life of the Natives'.[108] Tribalism or disruption of the tribal process was predictably excluded from the reasons for the disturbances. The theory that the disturbances had their source outside the reserve as well as outside tribal authority was a deliberate attempt to castigate and condemn the actions of the rebels, while conveniently elevating the Chief. The discussion of the Witzieshoek community was therefore carefully constructed to lead the reader to this particular conclusion.

Moralizing about the Department of Native Affairs

The Witzieshoek Commission had set out to establish the 'facts' of the situation in Witzieshoek.[109] As a body set up by the Department of Native Affairs but with its own authority, it essentially had the licence to moralize about the actions of the Department. The Commission, though, tended to castigate the actions of the Department of Native Affairs operating under the United Party government, leaving the Nationalists relatively untarnished.

The Commission concluded that one of the reasons for the the 'unrest' within the community was that

> [t]he Department did not recognise or appreciate the various danger signs which appeared from time to time and followed a policy which further disturbed the Natives.[110]

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[108] Ibid.

[109] Ibid., p. 3.

[110] Ibid., p. 12.

The Commission's main problem with the Department was its actions before the 1948 elections and thus before the Nationalists came to power. It bemoaned the Department's 'powerlessness' in 1946 and 1947, arguing that the Department's inability to initiate charges against Mopelyana and others, after they refused to submit their cattle for culling, effectively indicated to the Witzieshoek community that 'the Trust as such had no status in the Reserve'.[111] The Commission found this state of affairs puzzling, and a further indictment on the Department.

> [T]heir continued successes and the apparently powerless attitude of the Department is a matter which greatly suprises the Commission, considering the enormous powers vested by legislation in the Supreme Court which could have been exercised at a much earlier stage.[112]

The Department and the Minister of Native Affairs, in particular, were criticized for an earlier decision not to appoint a Commission of Enquiry, despite the Additional Native Commission's recommendation to do so in 1947.

> In the light of all the evidence, we are obliged to state that the decision of the Minister was a very unfortunate one. We are of the opinion that a detailed and frank investigation by independent investigators was justified at that stage and that it would have prevented a situation, which was bad at that time, from developing in the direction and assuming the proportions that it did.[113]

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[111] Ibid., p. 4.

[112] Ibid., p. 13.

[113] Ibid., p. 11.

In contrast, its criticism in 1950 was restricted to a statement made by the Under-Secretary of the Department of Development and not the Department of Native Affairs. 'A further set-back to co-operation by the Natives was a statement made by the Under-Secretary of the Department [Development] on the 18th January, 1950'.[114]

The Commission's apparent reluctance in this section to point fingers at the Nationalists is interesting, especially in the light of its subsequent recommendations which in some cases clashed with Nationalist thinking. Verwoerd was quick to point out in a debate in parliament in 1951 that the Chairman of the Commission was 'probably one of the most impartial, most reasonable and most sensible magistrates we have'.[115]

This kind of discrepancy within the discourse of the Commission is yet another indication of the fact that it tended to mirror the on-going debate on Native Affairs rather than to represent a specific viewpoint. This was articulated, again, in the parliamentary debates on the Commission. Verwoerd claimed in 1951 that Eyles was an 'adherent of the United Party' whilst endorsing his criticism of Van der Byl, the ex- Minister of Native Affairs.[116] In his defence, Van Der Byl pointed out the ambivalence of Verwoerd's position.

> According to the recommendation contained in this report, the permanent industrial worker is to live in the town and have a say in his own Affairs. the Minister is very anxious to quote

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[114] Ibid.

[115] HAD, (1951), Vol. 74, col. 3066

[116] Ibid.

> the part where I am criticized, but is he anxious to adopt the other side as well?[117]

Conclusion

The Witzieshoek Commission of Enquiry was not only an active participant in the debate on the 'native question', but it also reflected the variety of opinions expressed in the debate. The contradictions and inconsistencies in its own argument reflect the incongruities in the ideologies on the party political front. It vacillated between advocating the policies of the 'practical' and 'puritan' Nationalists and those of the United Party. Ultimately, it produced its own blend of policy which elicited criticism and praise, sometimes from the same quarters.

The Commission's representation of the Witzieshoek community was guided by proposed solutions to the 'problem' of 'native' policy. In its determination to elevate the chief and the tribal system he represented, it produced a crude explanation of the rebellion. Women were the biggest victims of the Witzieshoek report. They were not only silenced by the Commission's report but were also constructed negatively.

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[117] HAD, (1951), Vol. 76, col. 7854.

Postscript

Witzieshoek: the aftermath

The crushing of the Witzieshoek rebellion did not herald the end of resistance in the Witzieshoek reserve. In 1952, the Native Commissioner reported to the Chief Native Commissioner that the women employed to repair the damage caused by the rebels had protested about low wages, refusing to return to work until they were given an increase. In the same report, the Native Commissioner complained that he was still experiencing 'trouble' at Namoha, Paulus Howell Mopeli's headquarters, and that he had received a request from the chief to expel Mopelyana once the latter had served his jail sentence.[1] Mopelyana was subsequently banned from Witzieshoek and never returned, but, despite his expulsion, the spirit of the rebellion lived on.[2] The authority of the chief remained precarious and the members of the community continued to air their grievances in meetings of the Chiefs and people. The Witzieshoek reserve was the first to embrace the bantustan policy of the Nationalist Party, and in a bid to entrench his legitimacy with the Nationalists, Charles Mopeli was the first chief to accept the system of Tribal Authorities in 1953.[3]

A Historiography

The present examination of the Witzieshoek rebellion has attempted to approach the Witzieshoek community from a fresh perspective. In order to test more directly the approaches of the few historians who have written about

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[1] SAB: NTS, 9779, 961/400, part 2, NC to CNC, 15/4/1952.

[2] Interview, Shan Beerstecher with Mr Modernwame.

[3] UNISA: AAS219, Interview Prof Kotze with Mr Mohali.

the rebellion, it is necessary to examine their work within the context of South African historiography.

The historiography of the Witzieshoek rebellion reveals wider historiographical trends between 1976 and 1983. The 1970s saw the onset of a new approach to the writing of history. The doctrines of liberal historians were challenged by marxist interpretations in which the hegemony of capital was stressed, and its impact on black South Africans subjected to intense scrutiny.

Colin Bundy asserts that 'the relationship between politics and scholarship in South Africa is immediate and pervasive'.[4] The first historians to emerge out of the 1960s were influenced by 'the climate of repression' characteristic of the country at the time'.[5] They were driven by a desire to account for the 'obvious success the South African state had controlling the contradictions over which it presided'.[6] Their work was distinguished by a materialist approach, giving class precedence over race and gender. As a result, African nationalism, racism and the influence of gender were underplayed. Bozzoli and Delius label these methodological theories as 'realist' as they combined empiricism with categorization of theories and concepts.[7]

Structuralists also inhabited the South African academic space in the 1970s. They merged a structuralist approach with marxism and were mainly concerned with finding the answer to 'why the South African state had managed to

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[4] C Bundy, 'An Image of Its Own Past? Towards a Comparison of American and South African Historiography', Radical History Review, 46/7, (1990), p. 139.

[5] B Bozzoli and P Delius, 'Radical History and South African Society', Radical History Review, 46/7, (1990), p. 19.

[6] Ibid., p. 20.

[7] Ibid., p. 21.

accumulate and retain such an extraordinary degree of power; [and] how it was able to oversee the process of capitalist accumulation with such success.'[8] They divided the history of capitalism in South Africa into a series of epoches, each defined by a new ruling elite and by a particular interplay between classes.[9] These historians could not escape eventual censure and, Bozzoli and Delius contend, were castigated as functionalists and Stalinists whose work was typified by 'mechanistic rigidities', a lack of appreciation, and a systematic evaluation, of the relationship of the oppressed classes to capitalism.[10]

A third group of historians working in the 1970s comprised Africanists whose primary aim was to redress the imbalance of history which had largely ignored the agency of the African populace. Their work was often embedded in the revisionist tradition. The realities of Africans' experiences informed their work and their initial optimism concerning independence from colonial rule was replaced by a determination to explain the underdeveloped nature of African societies post-independence.[11] Bozzoli and Delius indicate that although underdevelopment theories continued to influence the work of some Africanists in the 1970s, others who were investigating the 'internal dynamics of African societies and African initiative' struggled to accommodate these ideas.[12]

Sean Maroney inhabited the Africanist enclave. His key argument was that the Witzieshoek rebellion was a

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[8] Ibid., p. 24.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Amongst these historians were Colin Bundy and William Beinart.

[12] Bozzoli and Delius, 'Radical History and South African Society', p. 25.

'typical "peasant" response to administrative interference in, and control of, household management',[13] as well as a response by the inhabitants to 'their plight as an increasingly deprived group within the South African economy.'[14] He examined the community's response to its 'pattern of underdevelopment'.[15]

In his investigation, Maroney also made use of marxist theories, intersecting these with his approach to underdevelopment. This however, precluded an exploration of the differential impact of underdevelopment on men and women in Witzieshoek and the resultant breakdown of the community's mechanisms of control. He focussed on the 'development of a peasantry',[16] plotting the transition of the community from a viable peasant economy to one which was characterized by 'a familiar pattern of overcrowding, taxation, migrancy, inefficient production and increasing migrancy [sic]'.[17] According to Bozzoli and Delius, the wealth of information generated by Africanist studies focussing on local experiences was enriched by the latter's examination of 'the interaction between the societies they were studying and the processes involved in the prolonged and painful birth of an industrial economy.'[18]

Maroney argued that the deterioration of Witzieshoek was due to the demands of white agriculture and industry for labour on the one hand, and government legislation, such as the Land Act of 1913 and the Native Trust and Land Act

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[13] Maroney, '1950 Witzieshoek Rebellion', p. 2.

[14] Ibid., p. 11.

[15] Ibid., p. 2.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid., p. 4.

[18] Bozzoli and Delius, 'Radical History and South African Society', p. 26.

of 1937, on the other. He subscribed to the cheap labour power theory of Harold Wolpe, one of the early structuralists. Wolpe had propounded a top-down argument that the capitalist sector had exploited migrant labourers and their relationship with the reserve economies in order to pay lower wages. Maroney maintained that the needs of farming and industrial capital precipitated the transformation of Witzieshoek into a 'high-density labour pool'.[19] The Land Act had led to 'increasing pressure on the arable land of the Reserve', resulting in increased rates of migrancy as well as escalating landlessness.[20] Consistent with historical writing in the 1970s, his analysis was primarily concerned with capital accumulation.

This kind of approach to South African history was important as it entailed an evaluation of the relationship between capital, the state and the 'black masses' and their transition from pre-capitalist modes of production to capitalist ones. Historians such as Maroney though, have been criticized for 'economic reductionism', for casting the black population as passive victims of capital accumulation and for ignoring the subtle interplay of discourses on the South African landscape.[21]

Baruch Hirson's investigation into the Witzieshoek rebellion was also revisionist. He compared the Witzieshoek rebellion with a sequence of events in the Zoutpansberg in the early 1940s. His arguments incorporated a relatively detailed account of the reserves' interaction with the state and capitalism.

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[19] Maroney, 'Witzieshoek Rebellion', p. 4.

[20] Ibid., p. 5.

[21] P Hetherington, 'Women in South Africa; the Historiography in English', International Journal of African Historical Studies, 26/2, (1993), p. 241.

Hirson stressed that like the Zoutpansberg, in Witzieshoek

> there was the same redistribution of land, and the reduction of area that could be ploughed; the same form of resistance and co-operation with a parallel urban organization; and the same confrontation with the police. In addition there was repeated culling of cattle, and this exacerbated the peasants' bitterness.[22]

It would have been useful if Hirson had attempted a more detailed comparison of the two rebellions. He failed to investigate the relevance of divisions other than class. For example, one important issue he ignored was whether women participated in either or both revolts. Such an analysis would have shed light on the subtleties and complexities of each reserve's interaction with the state and on the proletarianization of Africans in the different areas.

Hirson's examination of Witzieshoek and the Zoutpansberg included an analysis of aspects of the internal dynamics of each society and its initiatives, but his primary focus was the state and capital accumulation. He argued that both rebellions were doomed in the sense that they could not overturn the Land Act, which was there to ensure that 'the land could not provide a living for most of the peasants'.[23]

The 1980s heralded a new historiographical trend, with new theories and methods. The 1976 Soweto riots, the development of the ideology of black consciousness and the growth and radicalization of new organizations and

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[22] B Hirson, 'Rural Revolt in South Africa: 1937-1951', in collected seminars, Societies of Southern Africa in the 19th and 20th Centuries, 8/22, (University of London, 1976), p. 123.

[23] Ibid., p. 127.

associations had 'politicised the educational and cultural domain.'[24] The response in the hallways of knowledge was to revise contemporary ideas about history. Studies were increasingly informed by attempts to 'incorporate notions of culture and consciousness into that of "class".'[25] This led to a fresh analysis of history, appropriately labelled radical history.[26]

Radical historians viewed the historical process 'from below'. They substituted a top-down analysis for one which tried to incorporate the notion of human agency into an understanding of the state. They realized that African, and indeed South African, experiences were unique and had to be viewed within their particular contexts. Their concern was with how the active engagement of African societies whad shaped processes such as capitalist penetration. They went beyond the purely economic concept of class, acknowledging that

> class could not be understood without reference to the divisions produced, not only by factors such as proletarianization, but also by inherited and imported cleavages of race, religion and other cultural forms, chiefly authority, region, ethnicity, age, community form and gender which in turn were refashioned by multiple popular struggles and processes of change.[27]

Within this framework, notions of daily action and response, nationalism, the state, and the interaction

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[24] Bundy, 'An Image of Its Own past?', p. 138.

[25] Bozzoli and Delius, 'Radical History and South African Society', p. 29.

[26] Examples of historians include Belinda Bozzoli and Cherryl Walker.

[27] Bozzoli and Delius, 'Radical History and South African Society', p. 31.

between town and countryside were illuminated, and a new understanding emerged.[28] An example of this is William Beinart's analysis of migrant labour in Pondoland. He challenged the assertions structuralists had made, and in particular refuted the 'cheap labour thesis'[29] in an attempt to 'restore the initiative and process to dominated societies and classes.'[30] His main argument was that migrant labour 'stemmed from attempts to strengthen the existing order within the chieftaincy, or [that] it could stem from fundamental material impoverishment.'[31]

D A Kotze's analysis of the Witzieshoek rebellion encapsulated this 'bottom-up' strategy. He endeavoured to explain the variety of causes of the rebellion, stressing the sense of 'deprivation and powerlessness' among the Witzieshoek inhabitants as a result of an inadequately planned and poorly executed development policy.[32] His analysis went beyond class (and hence beyond Maroney and Hirson) and looked at Witzieshoek as a region, examining its chieftainship, its interaction with the broader white community, the white traders and officials of the Trust, as well as the divisions within its own ranks.[33]

Tom Lodge's approach towards resistance and Witzieshoek also reflects historiographical trends of the early 1980s. He introduced a chapter on 'resistance in the countryside' by explaining that the 1940s, 1950s and

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[28] Ibid., pp. 31-32.

[29] W Ruiters, ' A Historiography of Migrant Labour: Selected Works 1920-1980', (Honours Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1989), p. 51.

[30] Ibid., p. 61.

[31] Ibid., p. 62.

[32] D A Kotze, 'The Witzieshoek Revolt 1940-1950', African Studies Journal, 4/1, (1982), p. 127.

[33] Ibid., pp. 129-138.

1960s were characterized by state intervention as a result of new economic and political constraints.[34] The consequences for the reserves were that 'established social relationships were disrupted, traditional authority was to be robbed of whatever legitimacy it retained, and the area of conflict between the people and the government expanded rapidly.'[35] He examined the Witzieshoek rebellion within this framework.

Lodge felt that betterment was an 'attempt to deal systematically' with the declining level of production in the reserves. The result was 'a substantial reorganization of life' within them.[36] The population of the reserves was 'subjected to an increased range of controls and supposedly self-imposed voluntary measures'.[37] These were 'extremely unpopular' among reserve inhabitants and the 'interference by Native Affairs Department officials into matters which had previously been the concern of chiefs or headmen ... reduced the popular standing of chiefs and headmen and could conflict with the principle that each household had sufficient land for its need.'[38]

The history of the Witzieshoek rebellion written by historians from Maroney through to Lodge reflects the development of historiography in South Africa. Each new analysis of the rebellion built on its predecessors, broadening its focus and refining its interpretation. The present study, 'Witzieshoek: women, cattle and rebellion' has aimed both to augment this historiography, and to challenge it.

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[34] Lodge, Black Politics in South Africa, p. 261.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid., p. 263.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., p. 265.

Gender blindness

A common thread throughout the Witzieshoek historiography is a tendency to disregard the categories of gender and women. As this particular interpretation focussed on the implication of gender relations for the rebellion and for women, this anomaly requires specific attention. Bundy argues that South Africa is characterized by 'historiographical under-development'.[39] One result of this is that 'entire areas of the past remain blank'.[40] The lack of gendered history, in his opinion, is the 'most glaring' example of this.[41] Women and gender started receiving serious attention from academics in South African history departments at the end of the 1970s, schools such as the structuralists and early Africanists having ignored them. Women's histories concentrated on women specifically while gender histories broadened their focus to examine the impact of gender relations and gender identities on the past.

Maroney's analysis typically disregarded women and gender completely. He argued that the rebellion was 'merely sparked off by the cattle culling of the 40s'[42]. What he fails to observe is that cattle were not only central to the rebellion, but also to a specific set of gender relations. Cattle culling was the final challenge to the existing gender organization of the community. As cattle formed an integral part of the control of women, a threat to the former constituted a threat to the whole community. In essence, culling was the one challenge the

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[39] Bundy, 'An image of Its Own Past?', p. 135.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Maroney, 'Witzieshoek rebellion', p. 5.

community could not accept. Maroney's study disregarded this, analyzing the relationship surrounding cattle at a superficial level.

Ironically, Maroney did point out the centrality of cattle to the community, arguing that 'it was government interference in this area of production [livestock management] which precipitated the 1951 Witzieshoek rebellion.'[43] In his account the practice of bohali was not mentioned, let alone its significance. Writing before there had been any real development in gender studies, Maroney predictably focussed on cattle as 'the tribal equivalent of money', 'as consumption goods' and to 'provide hides'; he did not account for their other primary function to women, as draught animals in the ploughing season or their use by men as a means of acquiring and controlling women.[44]

While acknowledging women's existence, Hirson failed to distinguish their experiences from those of their men. 'It was the men and the women who were called to produce cattle for culling, or to accept reduced plots, who had to take action.'[45] By failing to examine the differential impact of culling or production on women and on men, Hirson succumbed to a gender-blind approach.

Hirson's preoccupation with the land meant that he highlighted its importance above all else. In the case of Witzieshoek, the issue of land was bound up with the issue of cattle and therefore the control of women. Hirson ignored this, placing the productive and reproductive capacities of women on the periphery of Witzieshoek society when in fact they occupied centre stage. Moreover, the organization of the community was

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Hirson, 'Rural revolt in South Africa', p. 128.

crucial to an understanding of land as an area of conflict between the inhabitants and the Trust.

Kotze's appreciation of gender was as poorly developed as Maroney's. His arguments ignored women and their role within the productive and reproductive cycle of the reserve. On the other hand, Lodge's interpretation showed a deeper sensitivity to the categories of women and gender. This is not suprising, given that he was writing in 1983 after Cheryl Walker had published a path-breaking article on gender and migrant labour. Walker stressed the impact of male migration on women and discussed women migrants themselves.[46] Lodge not only discussed women in connection with migrancy, but also with regard to land reclamation and the Witzieshoek rebellion itself. He contended that 'women also suffered from the new system of land allocation'[47] instituted along with reclamation, because land was usually allotted to household heads. According to Lodge, women 'played an unusually active role for what was still a very patriarchal society'.[48]

However, Lodge's work on Witzieshoek did not adequately account for the role of women and the impact of gender relations. In the discussion of cattle, he contended that 'cattle represented wealth, savings and security', yet failed to trace the link to women and their ability to generate surplus. It is interesting to note that Lodge's book was published in the same year as Belinda Bozzoli's article which accused radical scholars of lacking 'awareness of gender issues'.[49]

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46 Walker, 'Gender and the Development of the Migrant Labour'.

47 Lodge, Black Politics, p. 265.

48 Ibid., p. 273.

49 Hetherington, 'Women in South Africa', p. 247.

By ignoring the crucial role played by the interrelationship between men and women in the organization of the community and in the rebellion, the Witzieshoek historiography to date has failed to uncover the rebellion's complexity.

Anna Davin argues that 'working towards a complete understanding of the past encompassing the complementary and sometimes conflictual diversities of both women's and men's experience' involves more than just transforming historical practice but includes a bid to help in the long term 'transformation of society'.[50] The present examination of the history of the Witzieshoek rebellion comes at a time of transformation within the South African state. The role of women in society, and African women in particular, is being debated at all levels of society. The focus on this particular rebellion and the highlighting of women and gender relations within it, may contribute to these debates.

This study has illustrated the struggles waged by women in their own interests, and the extent to which they were breaking out of the patriarchal mould in the 1940s and 1950s. It casts doubt on contemporary claims by particular African men concerning their authority over African women, as it provides an example of female insurgency, at least partly, against such authority. Yet, at the same time, this study has contested the widely-held belief that women were universaly oppressed and exploited by 'customary' practices. In its examination of the gender relations in the Witzieshoek community, it has underlined the centralily of women to the productive and reproductive cycle of the community and the status and power they enjoyed as a result.

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[50] A Davin, 'Redressing the Balance or Transforming the Art? The British Experience' in S S Kleinberg (ed), Retrieving Women's History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society, (Oxford, 1988), p. 78.

The transformation of South African society in the 1990s is leading to a re-examination of South African history itself. The employment of gender as a tool of analysis in this process of rediscovery is vital. African women are no longer lost to history. However, their past experiences, their 'triumphs' and their 'fears' need to be uncovered further. The social and cultural roles of such women, their relationships with men and the state in the context of the dynamics of class and race, in specific contexts, require explication. The present investigation of 'Witzieshoek: women, cattle and rebellion' is part of that process.

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