

Emancipatory Politics and the Mpondo Revolts

by

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Abstract

This thesis aims to offer a revised view of the Mpondo revolts. The central theoretical concept of the thesis is that of emancipatory politics. Drawing predominantly on archival sources the primary concern of the thesis is to expose and interrogate certain aspects of this historical moment of popular politics which can be seen as emancipatory. In particular the notions of egalitarianism and universal human dignity will be analysed in relation to the popular political subjectivities, formations and praxes of the Mpondo revolts. In so doing this thesis attempts to make a meaningful contribution to present day debates concerning alternative theories of human emancipation by showing what emancipatory politics looked like historically and in practise within the context of the Mpondo revolts.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all sources I have quoted or used have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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Abbreviations

AAC – All African Convention

AbM – Abahlali base Mjondolo

ANC – African National Congress

BA – Bafarutshe Association

BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party

BIZ - Mbizana

CMT – Chief Magistrate of the Transkeian Territories

NAD – Native Affairs Department

NP – National Party

NUM – National Union of Mineworkers

PAC – Pan African Congress

RDO – Rock Drill Operator

SACP – South African Communist Party

UTTGC – United Transkeian Territories General Council

VA – Vigilance Association

WWII – World War Two

ZCA – Zoutpansberg Cultural Association

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Declaration.....	iii
Acknowledgments.....	iv
Abbreviations.....	v
Table of Contents	vi
Chapter One - Introduction: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review	9
Theoretical Frame.....	12
Emancipatory Politics	17
Method	21
Literature Review	28
Chapter Outline	37
Chapter Two - Contextualizing the Mpondo Revolts.....	43
Introduction.....	43
Capitalism, Colonialism, the Chieftaincy and Popular Politics	44
Betterment, Bantu Authorities and Widespread Resistance in the Reserves	66
Conclusion	74
Chapter Three - Popular Politics and the Early Stages of the Mpondo Revolts	76
Introduction.....	76
Public Meetings and the Crowd	77
Acts of Sabotage	88
Conclusion	94
Chapter Four - The Mountain Movement: Egalitarianism and Emancipatory Politics.....	96
Introduction.....	96
Mountain Meetings and Peoples Courts.....	99

Leadership and the Mountain Movement	108
Conclusion	113
Chapter Five - Violence and Dignity: The Kraal Burning Campaign and Emancipatory Politics.....	115
Introduction	115
Violence and the Emergence of the Mountain Movement	117
The Kraal Burning Campaigns	120
The Mountain Movement and the Armed Struggle	126
Conclusion	129
Chapter Six - Women, Gender and the Mpondo Revolts.....	131
Introduction	131
The Pitfalls of Androcentric Perspectives of the Mpondo revolts	132
Gender, Women and the Mountain Movement	134
Gender Beyond the Mountain Movement.....	144
Conclusion	146
Chapter Seven - Slaying a Head of the Hydra: The Ngquza Hill Massacre and Mass Boycotts	148
Introduction	148
Contextualizing the Ngquza Hill Massacre	150
Cutting off a head of the Many-Headed Hydra	154
Mass Boycotts: A crisis for state and capital	160
Conclusion	167
Chapter Eight - Unheard of History and Impossible Politics: A ‘view from above’ of the Mpondo revolts.....	169
Introduction	169
State perspectives of the early stages of the revolts	170
The Outside Agitator and Mastermind Theories of the State	173
Knowing the Native: Tradition, Tribes, and Custom	176
White Traders and Social Response of Panic	182
Conclusion	186
Chapter Nine - State Repression, Emancipatory Politics and Memory	188
Introduction	188
Police Brutality, Terroristic Violence and Proclamation R400	189
Echoes of Emancipatory Politics: The Mpondo revolts and Popular Politics of the Present.....	196
The Memory of the Mpondo Revolts	203
Conclusion	205
Chapter Ten - The Mpondo Revolts: A History <i>of</i> and <i>for</i> Emancipatory Politics	207
Introduction	207
Parallels between History and Theory	207
Limitations and Future Areas of Research	214

Conclusion	217
References.....	219
Archival sources in the Cape Town Archive Repository:	219
Archival sources in the Cory Library, Rhodes University:.....	219
Secondary Literature:	220

Chapter One:

Introduction: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Introduction

In the 1890s Mpondoland was the last remaining independent African chiefdom situated between the Cape and Natal.¹ Its annexation had been delayed by the Cape Colony in an attempt to avoid another costly war but through the exertion of political and economic pressure, Mpondoland was eventually annexed in 1894, thus completing the formation of the Transkei.² After annexation, Mpondoland was divided into seven magisterial districts constituting both Eastern and Western Mpondoland. Western Mpondoland lay to the west of the Mzimvubu River and north of the Mthatha River and was constituted by three districts: Port St. Johns, Libode and Nqeleni. Eastern Mpondoland, situated to the east of the Mzimvubu River, included the districts of Lusikisiki, Flagstaff, Mbizana and Tabankulu. The geographical landscape of Eastern Mpondoland is predominantly one of dramatic hillsides extending from the coastline of the Indian Ocean roughly 100 kilometres inland.³ Settlement patterns reflected a preference for dispersed homesteads, usually built on hill-tops, rather than concentrated villages. It was in Eastern Mpondoland, in the district of Lusikisiki, that Qawukeni (or Qaukeni) the Great Place and seat of power of the senior branch of the Mpondo paramountcy was located.⁴

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Eastern Mpondoland and, to a lesser but by no means insignificant extent, Western Mpondoland, became the scene of widespread popular resistance against the apartheid state and its structures of indirect rule in the form of the Bantu Authorities system. Generally dated between 1959 and 1961, this moment of resistance, popularly seen as a 'peasant rebellion', has become known as the Mpondo revolts.⁵ The late-1950s saw a series of public meetings held in Eastern Mpondoland, predominantly in the Mbizana district, in which large collectives of people voiced their

¹ Beinart, W. 1982. *The Political Economy of Pondoland*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney, p. 35.

² Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. vii.

³ Pieterse, J. 2007. *Traditionalists, traitors and sell-outs: the roles and motives of 'amaqaba', 'abangcatshi' and 'abathengisi' in the Pondoland Revolt of 1960 to 1961*. PHD Dissertation, University of Pretoria, p. 26.

⁴ Pieterse, J. 'Traditionalists, traitors and sell-outs', p. 26.

⁵ Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) 2012. *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town.

rejection of the Bantu Authorities system and apartheid state' socio-agriculturalist interventionist projects in the form of Betterment schemes. While these public meetings of the late 1950s are an important political foundation of the Mpondo revolts, it was the assault on newly imposed tribal authority councillors in the Isikelo location of Mbizana on the 9th of March 1960 which is considered to have been the trigger which sparked the Mpondo revolts.⁶ In the wake of the assault of 9th March 1960, the practice of holding public meetings was intensified in the Mbizana district, accompanied by mass marches, pickets, demonstrations and the formation of an autonomous political organisation known as the mountain movement.⁷

The formation of the mountain movement in Mbizana coincided with the burning of the homestead of the Chairman of the District Authority, and infamous supporter of Paramount Chief Botha Siqawu, Saul Mabude.⁸ By mid-1960, kraal and hut burning campaigns targeting agents and supporters of the state and its Tribal Authorities system became a central political tactic of various branches of the mountain movement throughout Mpondoland. By the latter half of 1960, the mountain movement had firmly established itself as an alternative political authority in Eastern Mpondoland functioning in opposition to the chieftaincy and the apartheid state.⁹ The extent and effectiveness of the mountain movement's popular support base amongst the commoners of Eastern Mpondoland was demonstrated in a series of boycotts targeting traders, government institutions, taxes, labour recruiters, and the whole of Mbizana town¹⁰, which took place in the months following the

⁶ Beinart, W. 2012. 'The Mpondo Revolt Through the Eyes of Leonard Mdingi and Anderson Ganyile' in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 102.

⁷ Beinart, W. 'The Mpondo Revolt', p. 102.

⁸ *Ibid*, p. 102.

⁹ Drew, A. 2012. Govan Mbeki's 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 79.

¹⁰ Throughout this thesis I have used the term 'Mbizana town' to refer to the administrative centre of the magisterial district of Mbizana. Within the state archival materials this town – which included the local courthouse, police station, hospital, post office, labour recruiting station, as well as many white (and some coloured) owned residences, among other things – is referred to as 'Bizana Village'. I have chosen to adopt the term 'Mbizana town' as opposed to 'Bizana Village' as the latter term is not, either presently or historically, a name popularly used and understood to refer to the administrative centre of the magisterial district of Mbizana. It is also worth noting that throughout this thesis I have chosen to make use of the decolonised terms such as Mpondoland, Mbizana, Thembuland. However, in the case of direct quotations and references taken from state archival materials or secondary literature I have kept the terms as they appear in their colonised forms – such as Pondoland, Bizana and Tembuland, to name just a few.

Ngquza Hill massacre of 6th June 1960.¹¹ The multiple political praxes deployed by the mountain movement during 1960 reached a level of intensity and effectivity that, by December of that year, the state deployed unprecedented levels of terror to crush the revolts. Through a combination of draconian legislation and state coercion in the form of location raids, mass arrests, collective fines, public humiliation, banishment, and torture, the state effectively stagnated the momentum of the mountain movement and repressed the revolts in Eastern Mpondoland by 1963. Govan Mbeki's famous description of the resistance in Mpondoland as a 'peasant revolt' continues to dominate popular perceptions of the Mpondo revolts.¹² However, most historians question the appropriateness of the term 'peasant' as an effective descriptor of the participants in the revolts.¹³ Tom Lodge argues that a slump in the sugarcane industry in Natal during the period of the revolt led to a number of Mpondo migrant workers – who were usually younger and earned lower wages than those who went to the mines – being laid-off and returning to Mpondoland to take up an important role in the revolts.¹⁴ William Beinart argues that whilst returning or recently unemployed migrant workers, as well as poor rural dwellers, were important components of the 'commoners' who were the bulk of participants in the revolts 'the leadership were probably above average in land holding and livestock'.¹⁵

Three factors have been advanced commonly by historians as to why the Mpondo revolts signify an important moment in South African resistance history. The first is the highly organised and disciplined form the revolts took, which some scholars contend was unparalleled in other known instances of rural resistance in twentieth century South Africa.¹⁶ Second is the duration and scale of the revolts. Between March and December 1960, the political praxes of the mountain movement and its supporters rendered the majority of locations in all four districts of Eastern Mpondoland effectively ungovernable.¹⁷ Scholars have seen in the mountain movement's capacity to sustain an effective and widespread resistance

¹¹ Drew, A. 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', p. 79.

¹² Mbeki, G. 1964. *South Africa: the peasants' revolt*. Penguin: Middlesex.

¹³ Pieterse, J. 'Traditionalists, traitors and sell-outs', pp. 4 – 5.

¹⁴ Lodge, T. 1983. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg, p. 281.

¹⁵ Beinart quoted in Pieterse, J. 'Traditionalists, traitors and sell-outs', p. 15.

¹⁶ Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 288.

¹⁷ Ntsebeza, L. 2012. 'Resistance in the Countryside: The Mpondo Revolts Contextualized' in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 21.

for nine months under conditions of apartheid as significant, despite the seeming failure of the struggle. However, the third feature, which, although contested, is also identified commonly as the most important, is the extent to which this moment of rural resistance connected with the broader struggle for national liberation, especially urban-based liberation organisations such as the African National Congress (ANC). Govan Mbeki argued, for example, that the 'movement [in Mpondoland] succeeded by example in accomplishing what discussion had failed to do in a generation – convincing the leadership of the importance of the peasants in the reserves to the entire national struggle'.¹⁸

Without diminishing the importance of these and other aspects of the Mpondo revolts, the purpose of this thesis is to bring to the fore an aspect of the Mpondo revolts which has hitherto been neglected and in so doing, build on and contribute to existing historiography. What has arguably been neglected to-date, is an understanding of the emancipatory political features of the Mpondo revolts. Put simply, this thesis argues that the Mpondo revolts are a particularly important event within South African resistance history because they allow for an interrogation of what emancipatory politics looks like historically and in practice. Furthermore, an analysis of the political formations, practices and subjectivities of the Mpondo revolts can contribute to our understanding of emancipatory politics within a specific historical context and to the development of a theoretical understanding of emancipatory politics which is applicable to other instances of resistance, both past and present. To this end, this thesis offers a revised view of the Mpondo revolts with the explicit aim of exposing and interrogating aspects of this moment of popular politics which can be seen as emancipatory.

Theoretical Frame

History from below, or 'new' labour history/ social history is most closely identified with the radical Marxist historian E.P. Thompson. It was his novel approach to class, consciousness and his placing of workers and the poor at the centre of history that inspired a generation of historians.¹⁹ Social class lay at the heart of Thompson's analysis but rather than seeing class as a static theoretical concept, he believed it to be a dynamic historical phenomenon located in social relationships, and 'experienced' by people in specific contexts.

¹⁸ Mbeki, G. 'The Peasants' Revolt', pp. 130 – 131.

¹⁹ Sakar, S. 1998. *Writing Social History*. Oxford University Press: Delhi, pp. 50 – 82.

This experience was central to class formation in that it gave rise to different cultures, consciousness, and resistance and, Thompson argued, workers played an active part in class formation. Indeed, he famously wrote that '[t]he working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making'.²⁰

In South Africa, social history played a key role in the rejection of the functionalism and reductionism of structuralist arguments, and instead highlighted contingency, contradictions and rupture in analysis.²¹ This approach generated a significant literature that documented the lives of working and poor people in South Africa, covering a wide range of themes related to work, politics, culture, and everyday life. Although many social historians focus on urban contexts, here are some notable social histories that deal with rural life and resistance.²²

The transnational-turn and emergence of global labour history presented a robust response to the ascendancy of poststructuralist and postmodern scholarship after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the related disillusionment with Marxism and labour as a key political actor in societal transformation.²³ In this regard, *The Many Headed Hydra* by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker marks an important watershed.²⁴ Linebaugh and Rediker complicate the category of class formation, noting that a motley proletariat – which they define broadly to include slaves and other marginalised peoples – transcended the boundaries of the nation-state and was 'made' across the Atlantic. In so doing, they highlight the connection between the rise of capitalism and colonial dispossession and demonstrate that, through numerous struggles, the motley trans-Atlantic proletariat contributed to key historical events, including the American and Haitian revolutions. Their work is significant for

²⁰ Thompson, E. P. 1966. *The Making of the English Working Class*. Vintage Books: New York, p. 9.

²¹ Bonner, P., Hyslop, J., and van der Walt, L. 2007. 'Rethinking Worlds of Labour: Southern African Labour History in International Context'. In *African Studies*, Vol. 66, No. 2-3, pp. 148-9; for an overview of South African historiography see also Bozzoli, B. and Delius, P. 1990. 'Radical History and South African Society'. In *Radical History Review*, Vol. 46, No. 7, pp. 13 – 45.

²² See for instance, Bradford, H. 1988. *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa, 1924 – 1930*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg; and van Onselen, C. 1996. *The Seed is Mine: the life of Kas Maine, a South African sharecropper, 1894 – 1985*. David Philip: Cape Town.

²³ Eley, G. and Nield, K. 2007. *The Future of Class in History: What's Left of the Social?* University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, pp. 44 – 48.

²⁴ Linebaugh, P. and Rediker, M. 2013. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Beacon Press: Boston.

disrupting the problematic categories of rulers and the elite, and for documenting the truly emancipatory nature of some of the trans-Atlantic proletariat's struggles.

While social history continues to be influential, and has the potential to further develop notions of emancipatory politics, it is difficult to ignore its shortcomings or the critiques of Marxism raised by postmodernist scholars, particularly in postcolonial theory. This is especially so if the aim is to understand the histories of marginalized people in colonial contexts such as South Africa.

According to Nissim Mannathukkaren, Subaltern Studies, which emerged in India, is the most prominent postcolonial theory and one of the most influential discourses in social sciences today.²⁵ Subaltern scholars, including Ranajit Guha, counter the 'elitism' of Indian historiography and call for the study of histories made by people independently from elite actors.²⁶ Their goal is to make the 'subaltern' the agent of history.

The similarities between social history and Subaltern Studies may appear obvious, but Subaltern Studies should not be interpreted as merely a continuation or variant of social history, or of British Marxist 'History from below' perspectives. To do this would obfuscate significant conceptual and epistemological ruptures between Subaltern Studies and social history and diminish key concerns and insights offered by the Subaltern School.²⁷

The Subaltern School questions, for example, the privileging of European history and experience, which has come to represent the norm, and as such, is *the* lens through which India and other colonial contexts are studied. A Subaltern critique of Marxist analysis, such as that offered by social history, is that it is too Eurocentric and class reductionist to understand the specific nature of subaltern resistance, especially within colonial conditions. In addition, subalternist have argued that Marxist analysis does not pay adequate attention to issues related to power and knowledge.²⁸ A key concern, is Marxism's preoccupation with industrial worker and its failure to recognise the political centrality of the peasant in the making of

²⁵ Mannathukkaren, N. 2006. *Communism and the Appropriation of Modernity, Kerala, India: A critique of the Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Theory*, PhD Dissertation, Queens University, p. 10

²⁶ Mannathukkaren, N. 'Communism and the Appropriation of Modernity', p. 9; Chakrabarty, D. 2000. 'Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography' in *Nepantla: Views from South*. Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 9.

²⁷ Chakrabarty, D. 'Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography', pp. 10 – 11.

²⁸ Mannathukkaren, N. 'Communism and the Appropriation of Modernity, pp. 10 – 11; Chakrabarty, D. 'Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography', p. 15.

contemporary, modern India. Thus, Guha is critical of scholars who label the peasant revolts that deploy discourses of caste (or ethnicity in an African context) and religion as 'back-ward looking' or 'pre-political' and argues that peasant consciousness should not be dismissed as simple vestiges of the past.²⁹

The Subaltern School goes on to reject what it perceives as 'hyper-rationalism' of Marxist thought as well as the separation between religion and politics, which is considered unsuitable for 'traditional societies'.³⁰ This is linked to a deeper rejection of Enlightenment ideas – rationality, universalism and progress – as well as modernity, which have been thoroughly implicated in colonialism.³¹ At the heart of the Subaltern Studies project is the goal of developing an alternative anti-elitist historiographical tradition in which the subaltern subject can be reclaimed from his/her position of obscurity within world history and shown to be 'the maker of his [sic] own destiny'.³² Working from this premise, Guha in particular offers generative intellectual strategies which are useful for analysing critically resistance and revolts in colonial contexts, especially rural ones.

According to Guha, the most informative and important of all the paradoxes characterising colonialism as a historical deviation is '*the co-existence of two paradigms as the determinant of political culture*'.³³ Guha argues that in colonial contexts there exists an 'autonomous' domain of politics, which functioned according to political principles, praxes and subjectivities that were different to those within the 'official' domain of elite politics.³⁴ This autonomous domain is referred to by Guha as the 'politics of the people', but is also known widely as a subaltern domain or sphere of politics. Although the notion of an autonomous domain of subaltern politics has come under heavy criticism, I argue that it is useful because it forces scholars to understand the developments in Mpondoland during the revolts on their own terms. In addition, Guha's theorisation of a subaltern domain of politics

²⁹ Mannathukkaren, N. 'Communism and the Appropriation of Modernity', p. 11; Chakrabarty, D. 'Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography', p. 16.

³⁰ Mannathukkaren, N. 'Communism and the Appropriation of Modernity', p. 5.

³¹ Ahmad, A. 2011. 'On Postmodernism'. In *The Marxist*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1, pp. 1-38.

³² Guha, R. 1984. 'Introduction' in Guha R. (ed.) *Subaltern Studies III: Writings on Indian History and Society*. Oxford University Press: Delhi, p. vii.

³³ Guha, R. 1988. 'Dominance Without Hegemony and its Historiography' in Guha R. (ed.) *Subaltern Studies VI*. Oxford University Press: Delhi, p. 272.

³⁴ Chakrabarty, D. 'Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography', pp. 15 – 16.

also provides a very necessary caution against assuming the applicability of mainstream conceptual categories when understanding the politics and events of the revolts.

However, as in the case of social history, Subaltern Studies also has its limits, one of which is its approach to the Enlightenment. Scholars have argued that Subaltern Studies, and postcolonial theory more generally, view European society and the Enlightenment as homogenous and, therefore, mistakenly dismiss all European thought and motivations for being written by and for elites.³⁵ However, as Linebaugh and Rediker show in the *Many Headed Hydra*, there are radical currents in Enlightenment thought and praxis, and, moreover, that people from different continents – Europe, Africa and the Americas – all contributed to the making of an alternative, radical Enlightenment in the Atlantic.³⁶

Mannathukkaren also notes, in the context of India, that Subaltern Studies ignores the appeal of ‘rational’, ‘modern’ thought amongst peasants and is unable to explain the widespread, and deep-rooted communist movement in places such as Kerala.³⁷ Similarly, Aizaz Ahmad notes that Subalternists fail to engage seriously with unions, peasant organisations, and workers’ parties.³⁸ Finally, Ahmad argues that the rejection of modernity has resulted in a romanticisation of a conservative communalism, with some Subalternists having a direct link to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).³⁹ Indeed, in the African context, there is a real danger that a simplistic portrayal of subalterns as irrational and as bound within fixed ethnic groups may re-inscribe problematic colonial assumptions.

Whilst acknowledging and being sensitive to these weaknesses, this thesis draws on the invaluable contributions that both social history and Subaltern Studies have made to frame the analysis of the Mpondo revolts. Thus, this study takes economic factors and social class seriously, but argues that class is not always central. Indeed, the focus on class in previous studies of the Mpondo revolts has eclipsed the important role of women or youth as resistance actors, in addition to inadequately interrogating the multi-ethnic nature of participants. Related to this, this study recognises that there are political consciousnesses (or subjectivities) other than class-consciousness that are legitimate and that can be radical and

³⁵ Mannathukkaren, N. ‘Communism and the Appropriation of Modernity’, pp. 29 – 31.

³⁶ Linebaugh, P. and Rediker, M. ‘The Many-Headed Hydra’.

³⁷ Mannathukkaren, N. ‘Communism and the Appropriation of Modernity’, p. 35.

³⁸ Ahmad, A. ‘On Postmodernism’, p. 34.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 34.

transformative. In addition, I recognise the specificity of colonial contexts such as South Africa. For example, capitalism in South Africa and more specifically in Mpondoland, did not follow the same historical trajectory as that of capitalism in Europe and elsewhere. This means that developments in Mpondoland have to be understood on their own terms and conceptual categories applied with great care.

Emancipatory Politics

Emancipatory politics is the theoretical concept lying at the core of this thesis. However, it is difficult to provide a neat definition for the kind of emancipatory politics featured in the Mpondo revolts. Numerous authors have acknowledged the remarkable nature of the Mpondo revolts, particularly their popular character. My aim is to elaborate on existing observations by examining some of the core features of the revolts and their relation to emancipatory politics. Underpinning this examination is a conviction that the political subjectivities and praxes deployed by the commoners of the Mpondo revolts did not coincide with mainstream theories of emancipation – be they Marxist, nationalist or liberal. Therefore, understanding particular aspects of the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts as emancipatory necessarily requires an alternative conception of emancipation than those offered by these theories. I argue, therefore, that it is necessary to engage with a number of intellectuals whose works are concerned with rethinking the idea of emancipatory politics from outside of the narrow conceptual confines of these mainstream approaches.

The two main theorists of emancipation which I draw upon are Frantz Fanon and Jacques Rancière and I take Rancière's broad definition of emancipation as a point of departure. According to Rancière:

Emancipation is the way out of a situation of minority. A situation of minority is a situation in which you have to be guided because following the path with your own sense of direction would lead you astray... [E]mancipation can only mean the autonomous growth of the space of the common created by the free association of men and women implementing the egalitarian principle'.⁴⁰

This broad definition of emancipation is extremely useful for its applicability to certain aspects and characteristics of the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts. For instance, Rancière argues, correctly, that that emancipation is not something which can be given to a person or

⁴⁰ Rancière, J. 2010. 'Communists Without Communism' in Douzinas, C. and Zizek, S. (eds.) *The Idea of Communism*. Verso: London, pp. 168, 176.

group of people by some external agent. Rancière shared with Frantz Fanon and Steven Biko, amongst many others, the perception that emancipation is the result of an autonomous processes of collective becoming in which people think and act in ways which defy their social location of minority (that which makes them subaltern), and constitute themselves as the makers of their own destinies and histories. This is a crucial insight, and one which speaks directly to the popular political subjectivities, formations and praxes developed by commoners as self-conscious political agents of their own struggle for emancipation rather than as un-thinking subjects acting under the tutelage or orders of outsiders or enlightened experts.⁴¹

Another characteristic of emancipation, as understood by Rancière, which speaks directly to the history of the Mpondo revolts presented in this thesis, is the featuring of a prescriptive politics in which people, whilst struggling *against* the forces of oppression, also struggle *for* creating an alternative form of political community. Importantly, for Rancière, the ‘autonomous growth of the space of the common’ – understood here as the development of a new kind of society or political community – is dependent on people choosing, without being coerced or intimidated, to join together and act according to the ‘egalitarian principle’.⁴² This egalitarian principle is arguably the most significant aspect of his theorisation of emancipation for understanding the politics of the Mpondo revolts.

Rancière’s egalitarian principle can be read as the affirmation of equality amongst all people as a point of departure for emancipatory politics and not a goal to be attained once power has been obtained.⁴³ Implicit to the principle, is the recognition of the equal humanity and intellectual capacity of everyone and anyone. It will be shown in Chapter Four, for example, that the implementation of this kind of egalitarian principle in the space of the mountain resulted in the manifestation of participatory consensus-based democratic decision-making processes in which any man who came *as an equal* was included.⁴⁴ The egalitarian features of the Mpondo revolts will be explored primarily in relation to the composition and practices of the mountain movement in the space of the mountain, in the context of mountain meetings and peoples’ courts. However, I also highlight the limits to this

⁴¹ Rancière, J. ‘Communists Without Communism’, p. 168.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 168.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p.p. 176 – 177.

⁴⁴ Drew, A. ‘The Peasants’ Revolt: A Critical Examination’, p. 79.

inclusivity and to the egalitarianism of the mountain movement, particularly in relation to the exclusion of women from specific decision-making processes and political praxes.

Thus, it is Rancière's ideas regarding the self-conscious and deliberate movement out of a situation of minority, the willing creation of an 'autonomous space of the common', as well as the implementation of the egalitarian principle, which I argue are useful concepts for understanding the historical manifestation of emancipatory politics during the Mpondo revolts.⁴⁵ However, as indicated, I also draw on Frantz Fanon's ideas regarding emancipation and the processes involved in emancipatory political struggles.

Drawing on the work of Fanon, I argue that during the Mpondo revolts, and specifically in the context of the kraal burning campaigns and boycotts during the latter half of 1960, commoners displayed a collective commitment not only to egalitarianism but also to the principle of universal human dignity.⁴⁶ In evidencing this claim, I analyse the limitations placed on the tactical deployment of violence by commoners during the revolts. For, as Govan Mbeki argues, one of the most remarkable features of the mountain movement was the unwillingness of its members to 'shed their humanity' in their struggle for emancipation.⁴⁷ However, I argue that the commoners of the Mpondo revolts were not only committed to the preservation of their own dignity, but that they also recognised and were concerned with the human dignity of the people who were the targets of their political praxes.

In considering the significance of this insight for thinking critically about emancipatory politics, I argue that it is most useful to engage with Fanon's ideas on violence and the processes involved in emancipatory struggles in colonial contexts. The association between Fanon and the theme of violence within the academy is extensive, to say the least. Scholars such as Ato Sekyi-Otu have argued that this widespread association is problematic because it is often premised on a misreading of Fanon's phenomenological dialectical description of the processes of de-colonization in *The Damned of the Earth* as a doctrinal prescription of violence.⁴⁸ In line with the interpretation of Fanon's work provided by Ato Sekyi-Out, Homi K. Bhabha, Lewis Gordon, Nigel Gibson and others, I argue that Fanon was actually horrified by

⁴⁵ Rancière, J. 'Communists Without Communism', p. 168.

⁴⁶ Fanon, F. 1967. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press: New York.

⁴⁷ Mbeki, G. 'The peasants' revolt', pp. 129 – 131; Drew, A. 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', p. 78.

⁴⁸ Sekyi-Out, A. 1996. *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, p. 4.

violence – the devastating consequences of which he was exposed to as a psychiatrist treating both torturers and tortured in the context of colonial Algeria.⁴⁹ However, despite this, Fanon was undeniably of the view that violence was an inevitable outcome of any colonial situation.

According to the political philosopher, Lewis Gordon, violence can be understood as an act of force considered as a violation of some right.⁵⁰ Furthermore, he draws on Fanon's phenomenological dialectical description of the violence involved in the processes of decolonization in *The Damned of the Earth*, to argue that: '[a]s long as the justice of the *status quo* is presumed, any response that portends real change will take the form of violence'.⁵¹ Therefore, because the political project of the mountain movement presented a real challenge to the apartheid state and because the state officials' viewed the segregationist and racist policies and institutions of the apartheid regime as both just and right – it was inevitable that they understood the movement, its politics and its supporters as violent. However, for Fanon violence is only liberatory – or emancipatory – and thus, is only endorsed by him, when those who deploy it do so with the full recognition of the humanity of the targeted enemy.⁵²

Arguably, therefore, violence can be a feature of an emancipatory political project premised on a conception of universal human dignity. As we shall see, the fact that all targeted enemies of the mountain movement were invited to join the mountain movement, as equals, and were given at least two warnings that 'the horsemen are coming' before having their kraal burnt is indicative, I argue, of the collective recognition of the enemy's equal humanity within the context of the Mpondo revolts. Moreover, I argue that while the violence of the state was often terroristic, the violence of the mountain movement was predominantly, although not always, liberatory or emancipatory. In other words, I argue that it is the self-conscious collective commitment of commoners to the principles of egalitarianism and universal human dignity, as well as the associated participatory consensus-based democratic formations and political praxes which they developed, which constitute the emancipatory political aspects of the Mpondo revolts.

⁴⁹ Bhabja, H. K. 2004. 'Foreword: Framing Fanon'. In Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press: New York, p. xxxiv.

⁵⁰ Gordon, L. 1995. *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. Routledge: New York and London, p. 77.

⁵¹ Gordon, L. 'Fanon and the Crisis of European Man', p. 77.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 77.

By considering the emancipatory political aspects of the Mpondo revolts this thesis hopes to make a useful contribution from the field of history to the task of reviving debates on human emancipation within the humanities and social sciences which the social theorist, Michael Neocosmos, identifies as urgent and necessary.⁵³ One of the greatest values of historical analysis is its ability to reveal in the events of the past possibilities for the present and future. Revisiting the history of the Mpondo revolts from a perspective which emphasises its emancipatory political aspects, is, I believe, a critical first step in developing new historiographies which contain important insights that can aid in efforts to rethink human emancipation in South Africa today.

Thinking emancipatory politics in the context of the Mpondo revolts requires scholars to grasp that commoners who have often been collectively assigned the category of 'tribal peasants' were in fact able to think and act in ways that completely defied many of the problematic assumptions associated with this conceptual category – such as inherent conservatism, backwardness, traditionalism, ethnic and regal loyalties, as well as a worldview consumed by religion and spirituality. Furthermore, it challenges us to consider the significance of the Mpondo revolts as an event in which commoners organised themselves politically outside of the categories of nation, class and ethnicity; concepts which have dominated African resistance historiography and which many scholars have been unable to think beyond.

Method

On Thursday the 16th of August 2012, the town of Marikana situated in the North West Province of South Africa bore witness to the first state sanctioned massacre in the post-apartheid era. On that day, a combined police task force shot indiscriminately at a group of circa 3 000 men who were attempting to flee the large granite koppie upon which they had gathered.⁵⁴ At least 30 of the men who were shot by the police died at the scene, while four others died from their injuries while in hospital shortly after the police attack.⁵⁵ In addition, around 80 other men who had joined the strike on the koppie, positioned just outside the

⁵³ Neocosmos, M. 2014. *Statement of Purpose for UHURU: Unit for the Humanities at Rhodes University*. Unpublished Document, Rhodes University.

⁵⁴ De Villiers, R (ed.). 2013. *We Are Going To Kill Each Other Today: The Marikana Story*. Tafelberg: Cape Town, p. 1.

⁵⁵ De Villiers, R (ed.). 'We Are Going To Kill Each Other Today', p. 1.

Lonmin platinum mine and the neighbouring eNkanini shack settlement, were also injured severely by the onslaught of semiautomatic rifle fire by the police force.⁵⁶ Video footage of the Marikana massacre, as the incident is known, shocked viewers across the world, prompting many to lament over the similarities between what had just taken place and the history of state violence commonly deployed against black bodies during the apartheid regime. In the immediate aftermath of the massacre, scholars and public commentators argued that, as the first of its kind in the post-apartheid era, the Marikana massacre was an 'exceptional' event whereas others who sought to draw historical comparisons, tended to focus on similarities with the well-known urban-based Sharpeville massacre of 1960.⁵⁷ However, what was lacking in these early accounts and analyses of the massacre was a consideration of the importance of rural histories, politics and subjectivities in urban-based struggles.

Keith Breckenridge and Gavin Hartford were the only scholars who stressed the fact that those leading the strike for a living wage of R12 500 at Marikana were predominantly Rock Drill Operator (RDO) migrant workers from the Eastern Cape Province.⁵⁸ Furthermore, over 80 percent of these RDOs came from the Mpondoland region of the former Transkei.⁵⁹ In addition, Hartford argued that the RDOs who spearheaded the strike at Marikana were generally between the ages of 45 and 55 years old.⁶⁰ After having been led by Breckenridge and Hartford into recognising the interesting and underappreciated significance of Mpondo migrant workers as primary agents of the strikes at Marikana, I decided to explore the political history of Mpondoland with the intention of identifying any potential synergies or similarities between popular political struggles in this region during the twentieth century and the Marikana strike and massacre of 2012. However, while it was the demographic analysis

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 1 – 2.

⁵⁷ See for example Hart, G. 2013. *Rethinking the South African Crisis: Nationalism, Populism and Hegemony*. UKZN Press: Durban, p. 2; and Smith, D. 2012. 'Marikana mine shootings revive bitter days of Soweto and Sharpeville'. In *The Guardian*, available online at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/07/marikana-mine-shootings-revive-soweto>.

⁵⁸ Breckenridge, K. 2012. 'Revenge of the Commons: The Crisis in the South African Mining Industry'. In *Histories of the Present*, available online at <http://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/revenge-of-the-commons-the-crisis-in-the-south-african-mining-industry/>; and Hartford, G. 2012. 'The Mining Industry Strike Wave: What are the causes and what are the solutions?' In *Ground Up*, available online at <http://groundup.org.za/content/mining-industry-strike-wave-what-are-causes-and-what-are-solutions>.

⁵⁹ Hartford, G. 'The Mining Industry Strike Wave'.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*.

provided by Breckenridge and Hartford which initially prompted my focus to turn towards the rural areas of Mpondoland, it was the featuring of a mountain (or koppie) as a site of popular politics during the strikes at Marikana which led me to a serious consideration of the Mpondo revolts of 1960.

As we shall see, mountains were a defining feature of the popular struggle against the Traditional Authorities system and the apartheid state during the period of widespread resistance in Eastern Mpondoland. In fact, Mountains have featured as sites of popular politics in Mpondoland since precolonial times and have also appeared as important sites of politics in Mpondoland and elsewhere in southern Africa prior to and after the revolts.⁶¹ However, it was during the Mpondo revolts that mountains became the location of a particular mode of democratic politics practiced in the form of the mountain movement. During the Marikana strike the RDOs – as well as other mine workers and community members of the eNkanini shack settlement – collectively gathered on a mountain (koppie) in order to discuss their grievances and negotiate with mine management directly.⁶² This collective decision to reject established institutions of representative politics – in this case, trade unions – and to conduct a political struggle from the space of a mountain was the first significant commonality between the politics of the Marikana strike and the Mpondo mountain movement. The second aspect of the Marikana strike which drew my attention by way of comparison to the Mpondo revolts was the featuring and significance of state massacre in both instances. The Ngquza Hill massacre of June 6th 1960 took place at the height of the Mpondo revolts and held many similarities in its character and consequences with the Marikana massacre. Of particular significance, is the fact that both massacres resulted in an intensification and broadening of resistance, rather than, as the state intended, a decline or defeat of popular resistance politics.⁶³

It was the want to understand and interrogate these apparent similarities and connections which motivated me to take a research trip to Eastern Mpondoland and attend the commemoration of the Ngquza Hill massacre in June 2013. The event took place over

⁶¹ Moodie, D., 1994, *Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and California: University of California Press, p. 245.

⁶² Alexander, P., Leggowa, T., Mmope, B., Sinwell, L. & Xezwi, B. 2012. *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and a Case to Answer*. Jacana Media: Johannesburg.

⁶³ Alexander, P. *et al*, 'Marikana', p. 191; Drew, A. 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', p. 78.

three days on a hill-top next to the main road connecting nearby coastal villages to the town of Flagstaff and directly neighbouring the valley which was the site of the Ngquza Hill massacre. As at this stage I had no formal training in isiXhosa, it was necessary for me to conduct my interviews with the assistance of a translator. I posed questions which related to the significance of the Mpondo revolts in regard to contemporary forms of resistance such as the Marikana strike. I also sought in my interviews to interrogate people's understanding of the mountain as a site of resistance politics as well as the connections, if any, between the massacre at Ngquza Hill and that at Marikana. In the interviewing process it became apparent that while some people were able to make some general connections between the two events – indicating, for example, that both revealed moments in which Mpondo people fought for their rights against an oppressive system of authority – the majority felt that they did not have a good enough understanding of what had transpired at Marikana to comment. However, what struck me most during my time at the Ngquza Hill commemoration was the extent to which it appeared that the event and its associated history had been co-opted by officialdom.

The very nature of the three day event in its spatial arrangement and program of speakers and performances reflected the ways in which certain academics, politicians, and members of the rural elite, have sought to selectively incorporate the memory of the revolts into an elitist narrative of 'the Struggle' in South African resistance history. Increasingly, this has translated into a history of the revolts in which headmen, chiefs and officials of the Tribal Authorities system are portrayed as key agents in the resistance rather than the targets of the revolts.⁶⁴ In one interview I conducted, a woman in her late twenties employed at the Holy Cross Hospital explained that she felt that the increasing involvement of politicians, particularly politicians associated with the ANC, in the commemoration of the Mpondo revolts had 'diluted' the importance and meaning of its history. She explained that the commemoration event at Ngquza Hill was problematic because the 'politicians' who were conducting it had forgotten that the history of the Mpondo revolts 'is a history about the people and not politicians' and it was in this way that she felt its meaning had been 'diluted'. The sentiments of this interviewee conform to what Thembele Kepe and Lungisile Ntsebeza have identified as a tendency amongst certain academics and politicians to espouse a

⁶⁴ Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. 2012. 'Introduction' in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 10.

narrative which seeks to highlight causal links between the ANC's involvement in rural politics and the revolts, which commonly include claims that key ANC figures, such as Govan Mbeki, played a vital role in forming the resistance witnessed in Eastern Mpondoland.⁶⁵

The nefarious consequences of narratives in which chiefs, headmen and rural elites or urban based nationalist organisations such as the ANC are posited as primary agents of the Mpondo revolts is evident in their silencing of some of the most notable aspects of the political history of the revolts, including the rejection of the apartheid state and the institution of chieftaincy as well as the establishment of an alternative, radically egalitarian political authority which was autonomous from and functioned differently to nationalist organisations such as the ANC. Thus, my research trip to the commemoration of the Ngquza Hill massacre inspired me to analyse systematically what I believed to be the emancipatory political features of the Mpondo revolt which were being 'diluted' or silenced today.

When I began my Masters degree I completed a course in basic conversational isiXhosa and intended to return to Mpondoland to conduct further interviews during the year. However, due to financial and time related constraints I was unable to return to conduct further interviews. As a result, my research has focused primarily on documentary evidence relating to the revolts and includes insights from the preliminary interviews of commoners I conduct in 2013 – as mentioned above. The implications of having only limited access to the testimonies of participants is perhaps the greatest constraint within this thesis and it has translated into a relative absence of the voices of commoners within its chapters. It is my hope that in my future PhD work I will have the opportunity to overcome this glaring silence by conducting more in-depth interviews with commoners and providing a platform for the expression of these voices. In light of limited financial resources I was able only to visit the Cape Town Archival Repository for the period of one month in May 2015. During this time I photographed and analysed hundreds of documents in two archival collections. The first were the documents of the Chief Magistrate of the Transkeian Territories (CMT) which are classified in series three of the Cape Archives. The papers of the CMT stored in the Cape Archive are dated from 1871 to 1976 and include documents pertaining to all aspects of administration.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, p. 10.

Volumes 3/1475 and 3/1472 were particularly useful and important in elucidating information relating to the emancipatory political aspects of the Mpondo revolts.

The second category of files which I explored was a separate series of the Resident Magistrate of Mbizana (1/BIZ). Whilst the Cape Archives contain such separate series for each of the Resident Magistrates in the Transkeian Territories due to the time constraints I was working in the archive under I was unable to consult and include archival sources from these other series. Two further reasons motivated my choice to prioritise the magistrate files of Mbizana as opposed to other districts in Mpondoland. Firstly, it was in Mbizana that the mountain movement first emerged as an alternative political authority in March 1960 and the widespread resistance campaigns and mass meetings which accompanied its emergence in the Isikelo location made these files stand out as particularly important for this thesis. Secondly, Mbizana stood out as a point of focus above other districts because much of the secondary literature pertaining to the revolts claims that Ndlovu Hill in Mbizana remained the 'national headquarters' and 'nervous centre' of rebel activities throughout the duration of the revolts.⁶⁶ However, as my analysis suggests, the extent to which Ndlovu Hill was influential in dictating or shaping decision making processes amongst rebel groups in other districts and locations in Eastern Mpondoland is unclear; such statements in the secondary literature undoubtedly influenced my decision at the early stages of my archival research to focus on Mbizana.

In selecting files for consideration from the CMT and 1/BIZ collections I was guided by the references of other scholars who have contributed key texts to the historiography of the Mpondo revolts. I was interested in re-examining some of the data that scholars such as Lodge, Beinart, Ntsebeza and others have analysed in their works on the revolts in order to see if a focus on emancipatory politics would offer a new interpretation of these sources and potentially uncover hitherto neglected aspects of this history. In addition to reading the above mentioned files in the Cape Town Archives, I also spent a substantial amount of time reading and analysing the transcripts of the proceedings of the Departmental Inquiry into Unrest in Pondoland stored in the Cory Library at Rhodes University.⁶⁷ The transcripts detail all of the

⁶⁶ See for example Drew, A. 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', p. 76.

⁶⁷ *Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, July 1960. The Cory Library, Rhodes University.

witnesses who chose to give evidence to the committee during the three days over which it sat to hear testimonies during June 1960. The transcripts also include state reports and newspaper articles submitted as evidence to the committee as well as a copy of the committee's final report – the report is also available in both the CMT and 1/BIZ files stored in the Cape Archives. While many scholars have cited the committee's findings given in the final report within their work, fewer have given serious consideration to the transcripts stored in the Cory Library detailing witness statements. Despite many of the members of the mountain movement and other insurgent commoners boycotted the Inquiry entirely, for a number of reasons, there remains in these transcripts some very interesting insights into the revolts.

Working with the colonial – or in this case, the apartheid – archive to interrogate and write about a history of popular politics directed against the state is an inherently challenging and flawed task, which I have attempted to remedy by drawing on the work of Anne Stoler and her notion of reading with and against the archival grain.⁶⁸ According to Stoler, colonial archives should be seen by critical historians as not comprised merely of skewed and biased sources, but as 'condensed sites of epistemological and political anxiety'.⁶⁹ Thus, the historian dealing with the colonial archive not only has to read the sources with an understanding of what has been silenced or excluded from these documents but also what they illuminate about the 'deeply epistemic anxieties' which produce 'affective tremors' within the colonial archives.⁷⁰ Put differently, this means that one has to take seriously the task of reading the colonial/apartheid archive 'with the grain', as Stoler argues, in order to appreciate how the documents stored within provide direct evidence of apartheid state officials' subjectivities and deeply held beliefs about the Mpondo people as an ethnic group or 'tribe'. After all, it was their worldview which determined what apartheid state officials believed was possible in terms of commoners' resistance politics and which often prevented them from being able to interpret and understand what was happening around them. However, in order to write a history focused on the emancipatory aspects of the Mpondo revolts it is necessary to think

⁶⁸ Stoler, A. L. 2009. *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey.

⁶⁹ Stoler, A. L. 'Along the Archival Grain', p. 20.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 19.

beyond what apartheid state officials believed was possible. In other words, it is also necessary to read *against* the archival grain.

In *The Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency*, Ranajit Guha argues that when working from the colonial archive:

[T]he historical phenomenon of insurgency meets the eye for the first time as an image framed in the prose, hence the outlook, of counter-insurgency – an image caught in a distorting mirror. However, the distortion has a logic to it. That is the logic of opposition between the rebels and their enemies ... The antagonism is rooted deeply enough in the material and spiritual conditions of their existence to reduce the difference between elite and subaltern perceptions of a radical peasant movement to a difference between the terms of a binary pair. A rural uprising turns thus into a site for two rival cognitions to meet and define each other negatively.⁷¹

Guha describes the task of the historian seeking to understand ‘rebel consciousness’ as having to move through ‘enemy country’ – that is, the colonial archive – and force ‘the evidence of elite consciousness’ inscribed within it to show ‘us the way to its Other’.⁷² For Guha, doing so necessarily requires that ‘the documentation on insurgency must itself be turned upside down in order to reconstitute the insurgent’s project aimed at reversing his world’.⁷³ Guha’s insights have been highly influential in my own reading of the apartheid archive and my efforts to extract from its documents evidence of the emancipatory political aspects of the Mpondo revolts. Understanding both Guha’s notion of reading from a ‘distorting mirror’ as well as Stoler’s ‘reading with and against the grain’ encouraged me to analyse the documentary evidence within the apartheid archive with a deeply suspicious attitude towards the assumptions, categories and truth-claims made by state officials and other elite actors about the commoners of Mpondoland and their politics during the revolts.

Literature Review

A significant amount of scholarship dealing with rural resistance in South Africa, and the Mpondo revolts in particular, is premised on the analysis of ‘peasants’.⁷⁴ Two key examples of this, both of which drew on Eric Wolf’s theorisation of the revolutionary potential

⁷¹ Guha, R. 1983. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Oxford University Press: Delhi, p. 333.

⁷² Guha, R. ‘Elementary Aspects’, p. 333.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 333.

⁷⁴ Pieterse, J. ‘Traditionalists, traitors and sell-outs’, p. 3.

of the peasantry, are Govan Mbeki's analysis of events as a 'peasant's revolt', and John Anthony Copelyn's 1974 thesis, the latter of which is still considered the most influential academic study of the Mpondo revolts.⁷⁵ However, as indicated, there has been some discussion in the secondary literature with regards to the inadequacy of the category of 'peasant' in defining the actors of the Mpondo revolts. For example, Jimmy Pieterse claims that, 'the terms "peasant" and "peasantry" have been imbued with so many different sets of meanings over time that they have become blunt analytical instruments'.⁷⁶

In line with Pieterse's claim, I argue that the term peasant is inappropriate for defining the participants of the Mpondo revolts in Eastern Mpondoland since, as historians have indicated, a large proportion of the membership of the mountain movement and the revolts more broadly were migrant workers.⁷⁷ As many of these migrant workers were invested and involved in supporting and maintaining agricultural production on a homestead level they were neither quite proletarian nor peasant. In addition, an important thread in my argument which we will return to, is the fact that participants of the Mpondo revolts organised and practiced a popular politics which was distinct in form and content from that of the local ruling elite (chiefs and headmen) and the institution of the chieftaincy. Thus, reflecting on how to define the actors of the Mpondo revolts, I argue that it is critical to note that the struggle to retain the commons – communal tenure – lay at the forefront of the collective political subjectivities and political praxes of the revolts. It is for these reasons that I have chosen to identify the actors in the Mpondo revolts as commoners.⁷⁸

With regard to the secondary literature, Jimmy Pieterse's recent analysis of the historiography presented first in his doctoral thesis and later reprinted in a chapter entitled *Reading and Writing the Mpondo Revolts* in Thembela Kepe and Lungisile Ntsebeza's edited book *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years* is a useful point

⁷⁵ Wolf, E. R. 1969. *Peasant wars of the 20th Century*. Harper & Row: New York; Mbeki, G. 'The peasants revolt'; Copelyn, J. A. 1974. *The Mpondo revolts 1960*. Unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand; Pieterse, J. 'Traditionalists, traitors and sell-outs'.

⁷⁶ Pieterse, J. 'Traditionalists, traitors and sell-outs', pp. 4 – 5.

⁷⁷ See for example Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 281; and Beinart quoted in Pieterse, J. 'Traditionalists, traitors and sell-outs', p. 15.

⁷⁸ Although this thesis prefers to refer to the subjects of the Mpondo revolts as 'commoners' as opposed to 'subalterns' (originally a military term used in the theorisations of Antonio Gramsci and later adopted and popularised by the subalternists in India) there are many concepts taken from the subaltern studies project which have informed the theoretical orientation of this revised view of the Mpondo revolts.

of departure.⁷⁹ Pieterse's analysis of the historiography of the Mpondo revolts provides an extremely well researched and written review of not only the bulk of secondary literature relating to the revolts but also of many of the newspaper articles released at the time of the revolts, the former of which is of particular relevance for this thesis.

In his analysis of the historiography of the Mpondo revolts, Pieterse analyses the contributions of liberal, revisionist and social, as well as cultural historians.⁸⁰ Within the liberal tradition, Pieterse focuses specifically at T.R.H. Davenport and Christopher Saunders' *South Africa: a Modern History*, Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson's edited volume *The Oxford history of South Africa: II South Africa 1870-1966*, and J.D. Omer-Cooper's *History of Southern Africa*.⁸¹ According to Pieterse the contribution of liberal historians to the historiography of the Mpondo revolts has been relatively weak in comparison to that made by revisionist and social historians. The vast majority of liberal historian's considerations of the Mpondo revolts have been in the form of general histories which offer very little to the reader by way of interrogation or interpretation.⁸²

Revisionists and social historians, on the other hand, have produced the majority of studies on the Mpondo revolts. Copelyn's 1974 honours dissertation, entitled *The Mpondo Revolt 1960*, as Pieterse suggests, is still 'one of the most comprehensive investigations of the revolt' available today. The influence of Eric Wolf's theorisation of peasant revolts is evident in Copelyn analysis and explains why he believes the revolts were constituted by 'the complex conjunction of both "local problems" and "major social dislocations"'.⁸³ For Copelyn, these 'local problems' included, amongst other issues, the high levels of class differentiation internal to Eastern Mpondoland society; the unusually high levels of power afforded to Paramount Chief Botha Sigcawu; the Paramount Chief's unpopularity amongst his constituency since his government sponsored succession to power (over his half-brother

⁷⁹ Pieterse, J. 2012. 'Reading and Writing the Mpondo Revolts' in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 44.

⁸⁰ Pieterse, J. 'Reading and Writing', p. 44.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 51 – 53; Also see Davenport, T. R. H. and Saunders, C. 2000. *South Africa: a Modern History*. Macmillan Press: Basingstoke; Wilson, M. and Thompson, L. 1971. *The Oxford history of South Africa: II South Africa 1870-1966*. Oxford University Press: Oxford; and Omer-Cooper, J. D. 1994. *History of Southern Africa*. David Philp: Cape Town.

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 51.

⁸³ Copelyn, J. 'The Mpondo revolts 1960', p. 27.

Nelson Sigcawu) in 1939; and increasing levels of corruption.⁸⁴ In describing what the 'major social dislocations' were in relation to the broader context of the Mpondo revolts Copelyn also draws on the work of the radical scholar, Harold Wolpe, and specifically his well-known theorisation of the symbiotic relationship between capitalism and apartheid in South Africa.⁸⁵ The influence of Wolpe is evident in Copelyn's argument that the Bantu Authorities Act and the Betterment and Rehabilitation schemes implemented by the Nation Party (NP) government were aimed at creating and maintaining a reservoir of cheap black labour in the already ecologically and economically deteriorating reserve areas. These government 'reforms', in addition to the host of other repressive measures adopted, including the extension of the pass system to rural women, and the implementation of influx control policies, are identified by Copelyn as being the 'major social dislocations' which, in conjunction with the aforementioned 'local problems', fuelled the resistance campaign against local authority in Eastern Mpondoland.⁸⁶

Pieterse shows that Copelyn's work has and continues to underpin a significant amount of the secondary literature dealing with the Mpondo revolts. For example, Lodge, the second revisionist scholar analysed by Pieterse, bases much of his interpretation of the revolts in *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*, on the work of Copelyn.⁸⁷ Lodge provides a broad discussion of the history of black resistance movements within South Africa from the end of the Second World War (WWII) until the 1980s. While Lodge must be credited for the great wealth of empirical detail he provides in relation to the equally great number of black resistance movements across South Africa during the mid to late-twentieth century, he offers a very scant account of rural resistance in the Eastern Cape.⁸⁸ In relation to the Mpondo revolts specifically, Lodge saw unemployed migrant workers, many of whom had just been laid-off from their jobs as workers on the sugarcane fields in Natal, as the largest section of those who took part in the resistance.⁸⁹ In his analysis of the Mpondo revolts, Lodge's key claim, which is also drawn from Copelyn, is that, unlike the other rebellions he studies, in

⁸⁴ Pieterse, J. 'Reading and Writing', p. 54.

⁸⁵ Wolpe, H. 1972. 'Capitalism and cheap labour in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid' in *Economy and Society*. Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 433.

⁸⁶ Pieterse, J. 'Reading and Writing', p. 54.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 55.

⁸⁸ Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 261.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, p. 281

Mpondoland the traditional political structure ‘was completely discredited and consequently dissatisfaction was unlikely to cohere around any representative of the old order’.⁹⁰ This insight is an important insight and one which holds great significance for thinking emancipatory politics and its practical manifestation within the revolts. Furthermore, as Pieterse argues, Lodge’s account of the revolts is significant because so many other scholars, including Davenport and Saunders, have relied heavily upon it in their own work.⁹¹

Pieterse also offers an in-depth consideration of Colin Bundy and, to a greater extent, William Beinart’s work; arguably the two most prolific and well known historians on the subject of rural resistance in southern Africa. In their collaborative study, Beinart and Bundy argue that the primary subjects of the resistance in Mpondoland – and, in fact, in the militant resistance movements in the Transkei more broadly since the 1930s – to have been ‘traditionalist middle migrants or peasant-migrants’.⁹² Echoing the majority of accounts in the secondary literature, Beinart and Bundy argue that the Mpondo revolts were a collective response to the state’s forced introduction of Bantu Authorities and Betterment Schemes; with a particular emphasis on the transition from ‘reclamation’ to ‘stabilisation’ and the resistance which this shift engendered.⁹³ They also share Lodge and Copelyn’s view of the resistance as being the necessary development of new organisational forms by peasants who had at least some conception of an alternative political system to both “traditional” governance structures and the “modern” conceptions of British constitutionalist forms of governance.

An additional benefit of Pieterse work, is his analysis of the differences in understandings of the revolts amongst revisionist and social historians. He highlights, for example, that Beinart dissents from Lodge and Copelyn’s view when he argues that the revolt ‘... was not particularly a revolt of the poor, but of those protecting rural resources and ... the leadership were probably above average in land holding and livestock’.⁹⁴ In his later work, Beinart also offers an interesting investigation of the environmental causes and origins of the revolts. In short, Pieterse argues that the majority of studies on the Mpondo revolts written

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 282.

⁹¹ Pieterse, J. ‘Reading and Writing’, p. 55.

⁹² Beinart, W. and Bundy, C. 1980. ‘State intervention and rural resistance: the Transkei, 1900-1965’ in Klein, M. (ed.) *Peasants in Africa: historical and contemporary perspective*, Vol. 4. Sage: Beverly Hills, p. 312.

⁹³ Pieterse, J. ‘Reading and Writing’, p. 55.

⁹⁴ Beinart quoted in Pieterse, J. ‘Traditionalists, traitors and sell-outs’, p. 15.

by revisionist and social historians have emphasised themes and issues relating to a political economy perspective. While these works continue to dominate the canon of secondary literature on the Mpondo revolts, according to Pieterse, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, they were challenged by the emergence of new accounts of the revolts written by historians of a 'post-modern or discursive disposition' who emphasised 'cultural' factors.⁹⁵

According to Pieterse, with the general decline of South African revisionist and social historians following their rise to prominence in the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s saw a massive waning in scholarly interest in the revolts.⁹⁶ When scholarly interest was rekindled a decade later, it was primarily amongst those influenced by and eager to apply insights from popular 'culturalist' and postmodernist discourses.⁹⁷ Sean Redding, for example, was the first historian to focus on what she perceived to be the fundamental role that local cultural idioms of witchcraft played in 'shap[ing] the timing and the substance of the revolt'.⁹⁸ Her argument centred on a belief that during the mid-twentieth century, black commoners in Eastern Mpondoland understood difficulties and injustices imposed upon them by state interventionist policies and practices – such as stock theft, increasing taxation – as evidence of the state's ability to effectively manipulate 'supernatural powers'.⁹⁹

I argue that one of the most contentious twenty-first century interpretations of the Mpondo revolts is to be found in Clifton Crais' book *The Politics of evil: magic, state power, and the political imagination in South Africa*. Crais draws heavily on the work of Redding to argue that that subaltern politics in twentieth century South Africa was 'theodic in that it was centrally concerned with the problem of evil'.¹⁰⁰ Crais is very explicit that in the context of rural South African resistance history, he does not consider 'evil' to be a synonym for injustice, corruption, or the actions of sinful persons as commonly understood by Christian Pietists.¹⁰¹ Rather, he particularises an 'African worldview' as mediating subaltern subjectivities in which evil must be understood as:

⁹⁵ Pieterse, J. 'Reading and Writing', p. 58.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 57 – 58.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 58.

⁹⁸ Redding, S. 1996. 'Government witchcraft: taxation, the supernatural, and the Mpondo revolt in the Transkei, South Africa, 1955-1963' in *African Affairs*. Vol. 95, No. 381, pp. 555 – 579.

⁹⁹ Redding, S. 'Government Witchcraft', p. 577.

¹⁰⁰ Crais, C. 2002. *The politics of evil: magic, state power, and the political imagination in South Africa*. Cambridge Press: Cambridge, p. 122.

¹⁰¹ Crais, C. 'The Politics of Evil', p. 4.

the intentional or instrumental use of occult forces... to cause harm and to bring disorder. Evil stands in opposition to life and, especially, to the ways life should be lived. Certainly people are capable of being bad. Evil, however, attacks individuals secretly and mysteriously, hurting or even destroying the innocent who are unblemished by original sin. Moreover, evil attacks the wider community, like some ravenous animal, sowing chaos and discord where there should be order and harmony. Evil is the very opposite of *Ubuntu*, of hospitality and sharing of those virtues that make one human and good and life worth living.¹⁰²

Crais argues that subaltern subjects in rural South Africa understood the colonial cum apartheid state as inherently evil and thus, because of their supposedly unique ethno-philosophical African and subaltern understanding of power, the commoners collectively 'engage[d] in terroristic violence to end a world they see as profoundly evil'.¹⁰³

I argue that Crais' over-emphasis on predominantly abstract notions of 'the occult' and 'magic' re-inscribes colonial and elitist assumptions that black rural Africans are inherently incapable of understanding and producing forms of politics for themselves, which are not predetermined by tradition, religion or a homogeneous 'African worldview'. Crais is also problematic in his re-inscription of the binary assumption that urban-based nationalist politics was strictly secular and popular while subaltern politics in the rural areas was inherently religious – an assumption that is entirely at odds with the empirical reality of resistance politics in modern South Africa. Furthermore, by focusing both on the notion of magic, and even more so on the concept of evil as *the* cornerstone of subaltern political subjectivity, Crais constructs an extremely afro-pessimistic and reductive understanding of subaltern subjectivities. His analysis is even more questionable when he moves from the idea that a certain politics of evil lies at the centre of subaltern consciousness to claim that, this dictates what he describes as 'terroristic violence' in the responses of subalterns.

As I argue in Chapter Five, Crais' categorisation of the majority of violence deployed by commoners during the Mpondo revolts as 'terroristic' is historically inaccurate. Moreover, Crais' deterministic and afro-pessimistic framework reduced black rural subaltern agency to the point of near nonexistence. As Diana Wylie, Jeff Pieres, Timothy Keegan and Jimmy Pieterse argue, there is little evidence to support Redding and Crais' claims regarding the

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, p. 5.

centrality of witchcraft and occult subjectivities in the Mpondo revolts.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, as Keegan contends, Crais' 'nominal focus on witchcraft as a central element in African political consciousness runs the risk of relegating the mass of South Africa's people to a pre-modern world, in which magic and superstition rule supreme'.¹⁰⁵ As I share this critique of Crais and Redding's 'culturalist' interpretation of the revolts, I do not draw substantially on their work in this thesis.

By far the most influential text which I have drawn upon in considering the history of the Mpondo revolts is Thembela Kepe and Lungisile Ntsebeza's edited volume *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*.¹⁰⁶ Jimmy Pieterse's chapter, referred to extensively in the above discussion, is just one of a number of extremely useful chapter contributions within the book that provide us with some of necessary understandings with which we can attempt to interrogate the emancipatory aspects of the Mpondo revolts.

Written primarily in 2010, and then published in 2012, Kepe and Ntsebeza's is the first edited book to deal directly and exclusively with the history of the Mpondo revolts. The thirteen book chapters are written by scholars from a wide range of disciplines, including geography, history, political science and anthropology, and engages the revolts from multiple theoretical angles to offer a broad spectrum of perspectives covering the nature and meaning of the Mpondo revolts within the broader context of South African resistance both past and present, urban and rural. In their introductory chapter, Ntsebeza and Kepe take as their point of departure, an analysis and critique of the continuous and widespread tendency within South African scholarship to marginalise the rural, to dismiss the importance of the rural imprint in urban struggles, and the tendency to ignore the on-going importance of migrancy within the South African political landscape.¹⁰⁷

Rural Resistance in South Africa is a serious attempt to critically reconsider the history and politics of rural resistance, and migrant workers struggles, in South Africa and to give the

¹⁰⁴ Pieterse, J. 'Reading and Writing', p. 60.

¹⁰⁵ Keegan, T. 2004. 'Review: Magic and subaltern nationalism in South Africa' in *The Journal of African History*. Vol 45, No. 1, pp. 143-145.

¹⁰⁶ Many of the observations regarding Kepe and Ntsebeza's edited volume *Rural Resistance in South Africa* discussed within this chapter can be found in my honours research paper and in a journal article I wrote in 2013 which was published by the *Journal of Asian and African Studies* in 2015. See Bruchhausen, S. 2015. 'Understanding Marikana Through the Mpondo Revolts', in *The Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 4, pp. 412 – 426.

¹⁰⁷ Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. 'Introduction', pp. 3 – 4.

same weight to the rural areas, their histories, and their people, as we do the urban in our analyses. In their respective contributions to the volume, “new” labour historians Dunbar T. Moodie and Ari Sitas, present a fundamental challenge to the modernist myth of rural backwardness by demonstrating how the memory of the Mpondo revolts enhanced, and to a large extent shaped, the organisational capabilities and actions of trade unionists and activists in the urban areas of apartheid South Africa.¹⁰⁸ Moodie and Sitas’ contributions are significant for me because they stress, as is common in alternative labour history and revisionist scholarship, the important entanglement of the rural and the urban. However, one challenge of their respective contributions is that they pose more questions than they give answers although, in so doing, they have opened a space for future scholarship to interrogate the issue of Mpondo resistance in trade unions and urban spaces throughout the apartheid era.

As previously indicated, in their introductory chapter, Kepe and Ntesbeza argue that the history and memory of the Mpondo revolts is extremely contested in the contemporary era. Moreover, it has been appropriated in a myriad of different ways over the last 50 years by academics, politicians, and members of the rural elite, seeking to selectively incorporate the memory of the revolts into an elitist narrative of ‘the Struggle’ in South African resistance history. This has translated into a history of the revolts in which headmen, chiefs and other members of the Tribal Authorities system are erroneously portrayed as key agents of the revolts.¹⁰⁹ According to Kepe and Ntsebeza, this was evident in 2000, when traditional leaders in Mpondoland invoked a distorted elitist memory of the revolts as part of their collective protest against the demarcation of a municipal boundary which would affect their jurisdiction (see Chapter Nine).¹¹⁰ More commonly, such distorted appropriations are used to construct narratives which seek to highlight causal links between ANC’s involvement in rural politics and the revolts by claiming that key ANC figures such as Govan Mbeki played a vital role in forming the resistance in Eastern Mpondoland.¹¹¹

Collectively, the contributions made in *Rural Resistance in South Africa* fulfil the brief of a social history, or a history from below, perspective of the revolts. Although there is not the time or the space here to go into an in-depth consideration of each of the chapters

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 10.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 10 – 14.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 10.

provided in the volume, it is necessary to at least acknowledge that each has a great deal to offer by way of deepening and broadening our understanding of the revolts and their significance in present day South Africa. I therefore seek to build on the empirical and theoretical insights pertaining to the Mpondo revolts found in *Rural Resistance in South Africa*, to bring to the fore of analysis their emancipatory features, and in so doing offer a new contribution to the historiography of the revolts. I also reflect on an area of inquiry which Kepe and Ntsebeza acknowledge continues to be inadequately addressed but which I consider to be critical aspect and one which is necessary to strengthen social history accounts; that of gender and women's political involvement in the Mpondo revolts.¹¹²

Chapter Outline

Following this introduction, the thesis is organised into nine additional chapters. The first of these is Chapter Two which draws primarily from the secondary literature and situates the Mpondo revolts within the wider context of state power and popular resistance in the rural areas during the mid-twentieth century. It does so by tracing the history of colonial state and capitalist encroachment in Mpondoland from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century, and by providing a deep historical perspective of the relationship between popular politics, the chieftaincy and the colonial cum apartheid state. In so doing the chapter aims to locate the Mpondo revolts in a longer history of struggle against capitalist and colonial enclosure and in traditions of popular politics that sought the preservation of the commons, rather than simply viewing the revolts as a response to Betterment/Rehabilitation schemes and the implementation of Tribal Authorities under the auspices of the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951.¹¹³ Thereafter, the analysis turns to the more immediate context of state power, indirect rule and related instances of rural resistance in the reserves during the 1940s and 1950s. Particular instances of rural resistance, which took place across the reserves during the mid-twentieth century, are discussed and shown to have had important and influential associations with the Mpondo revolts. The main argument of the chapter is that in Mpondoland prior to the 1950s and 1960s forms of popular political expression and organisation had not bypassed the chieftaincy in the same way as had happened with certain

¹¹² *Ibid*, pp. 15 – 16.

¹¹³ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 4.

movements in the Transkei during the twentieth century.¹¹⁴ The importance of this insight is directly related to the arguments made in Chapter Three.

The analysis in Chapter Three is developed through a critical reading of the primary documentation relating to the Mpondo revolts stored in the colonial/apartheid archives. The shift to an engagement with the archival material also marks a move towards a focus on specific moments within the history of the Mpondo revolts. This is a deliberate move intended to facilitate the teasing out of the emancipatory features of the Mpondo revolts by analysing early tactics of popular political engagement in Eastern Mpondoland. The crowd gatherings of the late-1950s and early months of 1960 are shown as having held much in common with the type of public meetings expressing popular discontent seen in Mpondoland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, I argue that by this period, the crowd gatherings at public meetings had taken on a political form and content which distinguishes them from the earlier expressions of popular political opinion identified in Chapter Two. My reading of the archive suggests that at this time, popular politics was bypassing members of the chieftaincy as a vehicle for the expression of popular discontent and the institution had in fact become thoroughly discredited in Eastern Mpondoland by the late 1950s.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, I argue that by the late 1950s popular politics in Eastern Mpondoland was being influenced by a collective conception of egalitarianism and direct forms of democratic involvement, which stood in opposition to the political practices and structures of the chieftaincy. Thus, it is in these early crowd gatherings that we see initial glimpses of the interesting nature of 'leadership' within the context of the Mpondo revolts and the ways in which popular politics functioned so as not to reproduce the power structures of the state and Traditional Authorities systems within their own organisational forms.

In Chapter Four, I focus predominantly on the emergence, membership, and praxes of the mountain movement as a popular political formation with emancipatory features in the context of the Mpondo revolts, and I make the case that a collective commitment to egalitarianism was a foundational political principle of the mountain movement. My principle aim is to demonstrate the ways in which this emancipatory principle shaped the political form of the mountain movement into a kind of leaderless movement of equals. In addition, I argue

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 160.

¹¹⁵ Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 282.

that this egalitarianism was also influential in shaping the political praxes in the space of the mountain, such as mountain meetings and peoples' courts, in a way that privileged participatory consensus-based democratic decision making processes. By emphasising the emancipatory political aspects of the mountain movement, and particularly its egalitarianism, this chapter poses a challenge to prevailing interpretations of the movement as being strictly hierarchical with a leadership structure and decision-making processes similar to that of the chieftaincy with its councillor system.

In Chapter Five the focus on the mountain movement is maintained and a consideration of its political praxes deployed outside the space of the mountain is provided. In particular, I focus on the kraal burning campaigns of the mountain movement as well as the related themes of violence and human dignity as a means to challenge perceptions of the politics of the Mpondo revolts as being conditioned above all else by an unrestrained and 'terroristic' violence.¹¹⁶ In so doing the chapter argues that tactical violence was used as a mechanism to create the conditions of possibility in which the mountain movement was able to establish itself as an alternative political authority in Eastern Mpondoland. The kraal burnings prevented the state and the chieftaincy from functioning effectively as an authority in the majority of locations in Eastern Mpondoland during much of the year 1960. However, they also allowed for the peoples' courts of the mountain movement to become a vehicle for the manifestation of a prescriptive politics which adopted and adapted certain functions and powers of the state and the chieftaincy and reconfigured them in line with their own political principles and collective democratic practices. This chapter brings to the fore the collective commitment commoners' held in regard to the recognition and preservation of universal human dignity which I argue is, coupled with radical egalitarianism, a defining emancipatory feature of the Mpondo revolts.

The gendered dynamics of, and women's political involvement in, the Mpondo revolts is an important aspect which has, as indicated, so far been given limited scholarly attention. In Chapter Six I argue that the issue of gender cannot be ignored or neglected when interrogating emancipatory politics and its historical manifestation within the context of the revolts, especially given women's perceived absence in the mountain meetings, people's

¹¹⁶ Crais, C. 'The Politics of Evil', p. 5.

courts and kraal burning campaigns. The exclusion of women from the political decision-making processes of the mountain meetings must, I argue, be seen as a limitation on the movement's ability to function as an embodiment of the principles of egalitarianism and universal human dignity. However, this is not to suggest that, as an event, the Mpondo revolts was necessarily liable to the same limitations of the mountain movement. It is important not to see the mountain movement as the *only* formation through which emancipatory politics was conceived and practiced during the revolts. Women in Eastern Mpondoland were also fighting for their emancipation, and they did not wait for permission from the mountain movement to place themselves in direct confrontation with the state and its police force.

My analysis turns in Chapter Seven to the events surrounding the Ngquza Hill massacre of June 6th 1960 and to the deployment of a campaign of mass boycott which developed in its wake. I begin my analysis with a consideration of the local political context in the Lusikisiki area immediately prior to the massacre and the significance of increasing attempts by the state to enclose the commons under the guise of Betterment Schemes and how these processes influenced the politics of the mountain movement. I draw on the work of historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, and specifically their concept of a many-headed Hydra as an analytical tool to understand the revolts and particularly the phenomenal growth of the mountain movement and the associated deployment of new political praxes which followed the Ngquza Hill massacre.¹¹⁷ Thereafter, I provide an in-depth analysis of boycott as a key aspect of the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts and, in so doing, argue that the act of boycott was a praxis imbued with the emancipatory political principles of egalitarianism and human dignity.

In Chapter Eight I read the archive, as Stoler suggests, 'with the grain' by examining the Mpondo revolts 'from above' so as to highlight the way in which preconceived ontological assumptions about the inhabitants of Mpondoland held by state officials and white traders' shaped their understandings of and responses to the revolts. It was, I argue, the power of a number of deeply-held colonially constructed beliefs regarding the Mpondo as tribal and ethnic people shared by state officials and other white residents in Mpondoland that prevented them from conceptualising the revolts as an autonomous popular political

¹¹⁷ Linebaugh, P. and Rediker, M. 'The Many-Headed Hydra'.

formation driven by the thoughts, actions and agency of commoners in Eastern Mpondoland. My objective is to show how the 'view from above' perspective of the revolts stored in the pages of the state archive is incapable of speaking to the issue of emancipatory politics and its functioning within the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts. This is precisely because those in positions of political and economic power during the revolts refused to accept that commoners could be the intellectual architects and political agents of such a sophisticated, organised and effective moment of resistance as that seen in Eastern Mpondoland during 1960.¹¹⁸

The analysis turns in Chapter Nine is to the repression and memory of the Mpondo revolts. On the 30th of November 1960 the apartheid government declared a state of emergency in Mpondoland as a direct response to the proliferation of mountain meetings, the crippling boycotts, and the ever increasing deployment of popular political praxes against the administration and traditional authorities. The emergency regulations enforced under the auspices of Proclamation R400 of December 1960 were some of the harshest and most draconian polices to be put into practice in South Africa during apartheid. However, it is noteworthy that a significant number of the violent tactics used by the state to suppress the open and mass-based form of the Mpondo revolts were deployed prior to the state of emergence being declared. In particular, I focus on the government efforts to crush the revolts, which included a series of location raids, mass arrests, torture, robbery, collective fines, public humiliation, and banishment. I argue that between December 1960 and 1963, the autonomous political formations driving popular politics during the revolts, in their popular and public form, were effectively repressed in Eastern Mpondoland. However, I also argue that the acts of terroristic violence and the draconian stipulations of Proclamation R400 which successfully repressed the Mpondo revolts in their public form, failed to prevent the emancipatory political aspects of the revolts from surviving and reemerging to challenge the authority of the state and capital both before and after the collapse of the apartheid regime. In justifying this claim, I turn to the Marikana strike and its aftermath as a moment in post-apartheid South Africa in which the emancipatory politics of the Mpondo revolts reared its head in the praxes and formations of the organised poor and working classes.

¹¹⁸ Stoler, A. 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', pp. 104-105.

In Chapter Ten I draw my thesis to a conclusion by drawing together in synopsis form, my key findings in relation to the emancipatory aspects of the popular politics in the Mpondo revolts. This, I do, by relating them to theories regarding emancipation and emancipatory politics drawn upon throughout the thesis including those of Rancière, Fanon, and Neocosmos. In particular, I argue that Neocosmos' notion of 'excessive politics', when read critically, is a useful conceptual tool for thinking emancipatory politics and the history of the Mpondo revolts.¹¹⁹ I conclude the chapter with a reflection on what I believe to be some of the most interesting and important questions arising from my research which provide a useful point of departure for future historical enquiry into the emancipatory nature and present-day relevance of the Mpondo Revolts.

¹¹⁹ Neocosmos, M. 2012. 'Are Those-Who-Do-Not-Count Capable of Reason? Thinking Political Subjectivity in the (Neo-)Colonial World and the Limits of History' in *The Journal of Asian and African Studies*. Vol. 47, No. 5.

Chapter Two:

Contextualizing the Mpondo Revolts

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is twofold and it structurally takes the form of two sections. Section one traces the history of colonial state and capitalist encroachment in Mpondoland from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century, providing a deep historical perspective of the relationships between popular politics, the chieftaincy and the colonial cum apartheid state. In so doing this chapter attempts to trace the shifting social landscape, including the role of migrant labour, and show how popular political subjectivities in Mpondoland have historically been concerned with the defence of communal land and access to productive resources held in common. It should be noted that in order to achieve these objectives, this chapter draws extensively from William Beinart's foundational book *The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860 – 1930*.¹²⁰ In providing a deeper historical contextualisation of the revolts that stretches back to the mid-nineteenth century, the Mpondo revolts is located in a longer history of struggle against capitalist and colonial enclosure and traditions of popular politics in favour of the preserve of the commons and is not simply viewed as a response to Betterment/Rehabilitation schemes and the implementation of Tribal Authorities under the auspices of the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951.

Section two of this chapter is concerned with the more immediate context of state power, indirect rule and related instances of rural resistance in the reserves during the 1940s and 1950s. It aims to discuss the implications that state socio-agricultural interventionist projects in the form of Betterment/Rehabilitation schemes held for the social composition, modes of production and political relationships in the reserves. Thereafter it goes on to provide a basic analysis and synopsis of the newly imposed authoritarian system of governance and land tenure in the form of the Tribal Authorities system ushered in under the auspices of the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951. Particular instances of rural resistance, which took place across the reserves during the mid-twentieth century (specifically events in the rural areas of Witsieshoek, Zeerust and Tembuland), are discussed and shown to have had important and influential associations with the Mpondo revolts. Here the influence that the

¹²⁰ Beinart, W. 1982. *The Political Economy of Pondoland*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney.

migrant labour system had on the popular political resistance movements and campaigns developed by their inhabitants during the twentieth century is also considered.

Capitalism, Colonialism, the Chieftaincy and Popular Politics

Unfortunately, many pre-colonial histories are 'written from above' and, much like European history, are centred on royalty and ruling elites. Nevertheless, it is necessary to consider the political constitution of the Mpondo polity in order to trace the ways in which the role and authority of chiefs changed over time and how they – and commoners – interfaced with neighbouring colonies and capitalist encroachment. Scholars consider the Mpondo chiefdom to have been an established political unit in the undulating coastal area of the Mzimvubu River for a number of centuries prior to the 1800s.¹²¹ Like other so-called 'Nguni' polities in the nineteenth century the political structure of Mpondoland consisted of a number of subchieftoms.¹²² Each subchieftom had its own hereditary leaders who were, in various ways and degrees, subordinated to a royal lineage to which many claimed to have had direct genealogical links. At the apex of the Mpondo political structure was the paramountcy which was constituted by the paramount chief and his councillors.

Paul Landau argues that, contrary to colonial conceptions of 'tribes' and their 'customs' as fixed entities defined by the homogeneous ethnicity of its members, historically, African polities were actually fluid and changing entities that were dependant for their survival on the incorporation of commoners as opposed to the exclusion of 'outsiders'.¹²³ This means that a chief's constituency was made up of those people who chose to live in the area under his (sic) control and people could easily change their allegiance simply by moving to another area.¹²⁴ The significance of this point cannot be overstated as it speaks to the limits of chiefly power.

Furthermore, while there was no overarching standardisation in the ways in which chiefs in Mpondoland operated, ethnographic work carried out by social anthropologist

¹²¹ See for example Hunter, M. 1961. *Reaction to Conquest*. Oxford University Press: London; Copelyn, J. A. 1974. *The Mpondo revolts 1960*. Unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand; and Mbeki, G. 1964. *South Africa: the peasants' revolt*. Penguin: Middlesex.

¹²² Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 9.

¹²³ Landau, P. S. 2010. *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa*. Cambridge Press: New York.

¹²⁴ For a relevant discussion on popular politics in South Africa before the 1800s see: Landau, P.S. 'Popular Politics'. Also see Myers, J. C. 2008. *Indirect Rule in South Africa: Tradition, Modernity, and the Costuming of Political Power*. University of Rochester Press: New York, p. 4.

Monica Hunter Wilson indicates that the role of a chief in Mpondoland prior to European annexation was usually as the commander of the army, the arbiter of disputes within the district, as well as the allocator of land.¹²⁵ However, as Hunter notes, in all three of these areas of authority the chief could never act as autocrat as he had to consult with a group of community elders, who served as the most direct institution through which the powers of the chief were checked and balanced.

In addition to this, a chief was also expected to maintain a relationship of mutuality with the people in his (sic) district, which was measured in terms of the chief's generosity and ability to provide for people in times of need.¹²⁶ An apt example of this is the historical practice of building work parties in which people were called upon by the chief to do various forms of labour, such as cultivating fields or building homes and kraals. In return the chief would provide food and drink as well as make him/herself available to listen to any grievances people had who came to call at his/her kraal.¹²⁷ Similarly, the process of tax collection was open to negotiation and the spending of any funds was decided upon by the community itself. Any taxes which were collected by the chief were used for the benefit of his people in times of dearth.¹²⁸

Thus we can see a brief sketch of the numerous limitations placed on the power of the chiefs in the pre-colonial political landscape of Mpondoland as well as the way in which the institution of chieftaincy was, to an extent, controlled and conditioned by the will of the people within a given community.

Between the years 1820 and 1840 the Mpondo chiefdom went through a period of rapid transformation.¹²⁹ As a result of conflict with regiments of the expansionist Zulu state which culminated in the destruction of the Mpondo peoples' settlements on the east side of the Mzimvubu River and the accompanying loss of their cattle in 1828, the Mpondo people retreated to the forests and valleys which lay to the west of the river. For roughly fifteen years

¹²⁵ Hunter, M. 'Reaction to Conquest', p. 392.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 394.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 394.

¹²⁸ Lodge, T. 1983. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg.

¹²⁹ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', pp. 10 – 11.

the Mpondo people who fled to the western side of the river lived in dense settlements surrounding the paramount Faku's new homestead.¹³⁰

On the western side of the river, Faku began to reconstitute the pre-eminence of the Mpondo chiefdom by actively absorbing large numbers of refugees and immigrants within his sphere of authority.¹³¹ In so doing Faku not only received the benefits of having more followers – with which he reconstituted a formidable military force as well as increased availability of labour for communal tasks such as hunting and raiding – but also of securing access to many of the cattle which came into the chiefdom in the shape of tribute. By the mid-1840s the Mpondo people had recovered the cattle that had been lost in 1828 and many chose to re-establish their homesteads on the eastern side of the river.¹³² Although Faku's authority over the people and settlements on the eastern side of the Mzimvubu River was no longer under threat from the regiments and raiding parties of the Zulu state, it was now subject to the threat of the newly established 'trekker state' in Natal.¹³³

The way in which Faku chose to respond to the threat posed by the 'trekker state' in Natal to the independence of the Mpondo chiefdom in the mid-1840s was to enter into negotiations with the Cape Colonial government.¹³⁴ In 1844 Faku ensured that his authority over the area was recognised and protected by signing a treaty with the Cape Colonial government.¹³⁵ The signing of the treaty was followed by a period of expansion in which the various subchiefdoms, many comprised of people from different African polities (or so-called 'tribes') absorbed into Mpondo society following the Mfecane, moved throughout the region searching for grazing land for their recently replenished and acquired herds of cattle.¹³⁶ Faku was able to exert a considerable amount of control over the pattern of settlement as well as, and perhaps most importantly, over the distribution and circulation of cattle during this phase of expansion back towards the southern border of Natal.

¹³⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 10 – 11.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹³² *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹³³ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 11.

¹³⁶ It is important to note that the notion of the Mfecane, its characteristics and its causes have been extensively debated by historians and, most notably, in the work of Julian Cobbing. See for example: Cobbing, J. 1988. 'The Mfecane as Alibi: Thoughts on Dithakong and Mbolompo'. In *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 29, No. 3.

However, by the 1860s many more groups had been incorporated into the Mpondo chiefdom and as patterns of settlement returned to a more decentralised character the subchiefdoms gradually began to usurp some of the power monopolised by the paramountcy.¹³⁷ During this period the paramount's power to control the circulation of cattle in society, to organise large labour teams for communal activities such as harvesting or hunting, and to intervene in the relations between chiefs and their people, became increasingly limited.¹³⁸ This was especially the case for the powerful chiefs of large immigrant groups who tended to build settlements and live in areas of the region farthest from the paramount's Great Place at Quakeni. Thus, although the treaty of 1844 formally acknowledged and protected Faku's position of authority as paramount chief of the region of Mpondoland the internal socio-political changes wrought by processes of geographical and political decentralisation significantly affected the relationships between the paramount, chiefs and the people.¹³⁹

However, it must be noted that political negotiations which resulted in the treaty of 1844 are an important indication of the way in which the people of Mpondoland were able, to varying degrees, dictate the terms upon which they became integrated into the broader political economy of the region.¹⁴⁰ One of the dangers this thesis faces in relying extensively on Beinart's *Political Economy of Pondoland* is that it risks reproducing the classic history from above perspective in which 'big men' such as paramount Faku are seen as the organisers and agents of historical change. This history from above perspective does not characterise the whole of Beinart's study but it is clearly discernible in his analysis of the Mpondo chiefdom under the paramountcy of Faku as discussed above. As such, I have attempted to draw from Beinart's analysis selectively, bringing to the fore those insights within the text which are useful for understanding the historical expressions and experiences of popular politics in Mpondoland and how they relate to the political formations and praxes of the Mpondo revolts.

¹³⁷ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 12.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 13.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 11 – 23.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 4.

One of the conditions of the treaty of 1844 which was agreed to by Faku was the free access of British traders to the region of Mpondoland.¹⁴¹ Although colonial traders had been visiting the area since the 1820s and 1830s it was only in the 1860s that the Mpondo began to expand their trade links with the colonies primarily through the trade of cattle, draught animals and hides.¹⁴² Between 1860 and 1880 roughly fifty trading stations were established in Mpondoland.¹⁴³ The majority of these were in the eastern half of the chiefdom and the colonial traders were allowed to build permanent settlements, break fields and graze stock on sites allocated by the local chief. The early encroachment of modern capitalism into Mpondoland in the form of colonial traders and the cattle trade was once again a phenomenon which was not dictated by colonial agendas alone.¹⁴⁴ Despite the trade agreements of 1844 colonial traders had, prior to the late 1850s, been mostly unsuccessful in their attempts to barter goods for stock in Mpondoland.¹⁴⁵ It was only once the Mpondo had comfortably replenished and increased their herds in the late-1850s and had developed an urgent need for specific manufactured goods (such as blankets and firearms) and labour saving devices (such agricultural implements and tinder-boxes) that burgeoning trade with the colonies took place.¹⁴⁶ This serves to illustrate once again the point that the Mpondo people did, in many ways, set the terms upon which colonial and capitalist encroachment developed in the area. The establishment of permanent trading stations in Mpondoland not only modified the social organisation of production in Mpondoland (particularly through the introduction of metal agricultural implements), but the arrival of traders also resulted in a modification of the relationship between chiefs and the people.¹⁴⁷

As previously mentioned by the mid-nineteenth century political authority in Mpondoland was increasingly devolving to the level of the sub-chiefs and the activities of colonial traders in the latter half of the nineteenth century did much to facilitate this process. The extensive involvement of colonial traders in the bartering of cattle for firearms throughout Mpondoland had serious implications for the ability of the paramount to exercise

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 23.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, pp. 22 – 23.

¹⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 23.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 4.

control over both the sub-chiefs and homesteads in the area.¹⁴⁸ Many powerful chiefs had begun to accumulate large stores of guns, some even establishing centres for the manufacturing of gunpowder in their areas of authority, which had a considerable influence on the political landscape of Mpondoland as chiefs increasingly struggled between themselves and with the paramountcy to broaden their sphere of political authority.¹⁴⁹ Hence it is clear that these, and other factors relating to the encroachment of modern capitalism into Mpondoland had a significant effect on the locus of power within the chieftom and the nature of chiefly politics.¹⁵⁰

However, it was not only the locus of political authority that was affected by the encroachment of modern capitalism in Mpondoland; the socio-economic and political relationships between the chieftaincy and the people was fundamentally modified too. This could be seen with the introduction of the plough, which was supplied by colonial traders. With access to ploughs, homesteads were able to greatly increase their land under crop and in so doing gained a greater degree of independence from the chiefs upon whom they no longer needed to rely for their basic subsistence needs.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, as chiefly politics became increasingly orientated around the accumulation of firearms and new forms of income, chiefly control over the circulation of cattle and production at the homestead level declined.¹⁵² By the late-nineteenth century both chiefs and commoners were directing a considerable amount of their cattle to the traders in exchange for manufactured products that remained under the control of individual homesteads. However, despite the modifying influence that traders had on the social organisation of production as well as the relationship between chiefs and commoners, their presence was never able to destroy the central institutions and tributary relationships in society.¹⁵³

The central point being made above is that, in the decades prior to annexation in 1894, the Mpondo chieftom was able, to varying degrees, to set the pace and extent to which capitalist and colonial encroachment took place in the region. Unlike many other African polities during the nineteenth century, the Mpondo chieftom was able to escape the direct

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 29.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 39.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 29.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, pp. 38 – 39.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 4.

effects of settler expansion and the loss of land and access to communal resources it entailed. As such the institution of the chieftaincy remained the political authority under which the changes wrought by capitalist and colonial encroachment in the nineteenth century took place. However, the ability of the Mpondo chiefdom to dictate the terms upon which it was integrated into the broader political economy of the region was significantly checked in the period just before and during annexation.

In the 1870s the Cape colony began an expansionist project to extend its authority over the chiefdoms surrounding Mpondoland.¹⁵⁴ It was during this period that the interest of the paramount and chiefs in Mpondoland began to come into direct confrontation with those of the colonies. In 1878 Cape Governor and High Commissioner Bartle Frere tried to convince the Mpondo paramount Mqikela to sell the land at Port St. Johns to the Cape colonial government so as to ensure control over all the ports along South Africa's coastline and prevent access from foreign powers.¹⁵⁵ When Mqikela refused to sell the port he was 'deposed' by Frere. Although the deposition of Mqikela had little effect on his internal authority in Mpondoland, he did lose annual payment of £100 the paramount had been entitled to receive from the colony since the treaty of 1844 as well as all levies received from ships arriving at the port and the licence fees from the community of traders settled in the area.¹⁵⁶ Furthermore, a short time after Mqikela's refusal, Frere bought the strip of land at the Mzimvubu River mouth from the chief of Western Mpondoland, Nqwiliso, anyway. Colonial encroachment into the areas surrounding Mpondoland also resulted in chiefs on the borders who had in the past been subject to Mpondo raids and were reluctant to recognise Mqikela's authority, taking up allegiances with the colonial forces. In the same year of 1878 the country of the Xesibe chief was taken over and a British resident was appointed for the first time within the region of Mpondoland.¹⁵⁷

The colonial encroachments of the 1870s had serious consequences for both the paramountcy and the sub-chiefdoms in Mpondoland. The paramount was extremely reluctant to try and quell colonial incursions into Mpondoland by force preferring to rather amass as many firearms as possible and simultaneously look for diplomatic means of

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 31.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 32.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 32.

protecting the independence of the chiefdom from Cape policy.¹⁵⁸ In 1880 when revolts against colonial authority developed in neighbouring Eastern Griqualand the paramount in Eastern Mpondoland showed no more than a symbolic solidarity by mobilising a very small Mpondo force to offer support to the revolts. With the paramountcy being relatively conservative at this time, it was the chiefs seeking to transform the power relations of the Mpondo society and gain control over trade and tariffs that brought the chiefdom into direct conflict with the Colony.¹⁵⁹

The annexation of Mpondoland by the Cape colony in 1894 was preceded by a three year civil war in the region resulting from a power struggle between the newly installed paramount, Sigcau, and the dominant councillor of the old paramount, and a powerful chief in his own right, Mhlangaso.¹⁶⁰ According to Beinart, although Mhlangaso had a significant following in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the majority of chiefs and commoners in Mpondoland chose to support Sigcau.¹⁶¹ In an attempt to preserve the independence of Mpondoland and increase the power and authority of the chiefs, Mhlangaso pursued a number of extremely aggressive policies in alliance with some of the powerful traders settled in the area. This directly challenged the Cape and imperial governments. In 1885 Mhlangaso even went so far as to promise German agents land concessions in exchange for their help against the Colony.¹⁶² In response, an imperial protectorate was declared over the entire coastline of Mpondoland. When the civil war broke out in 1891 Mhlangaso had lost the support of many of the less powerful chiefs in the region who, echoing the sentiments of their constituencies, argued that Mhlangaso was bringing the chiefdom into dangerous conflict with the Colony for his own aggrandisement. For the chiefs believed that Mhlangaso's 'progressive' policies envisioning 'a rapid increase in trade with tariffs as the basis of state revenue, concessions, and mining and transport development within Pondoland' would only reap benefits for the paramountcy.¹⁶³ Furthermore, it was argued by chiefs and commoners

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 32.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 34 – 35.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p. 33.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid*, p. 34.

¹⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 32 – 33.

¹⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 34.

alike that the policies envisioned by Mhlangaso would result in the alienation of land and a severe disruption of the basis for communal access to resources in Mpondoland.¹⁶⁴

The majority of commoners in Mpondoland accused Mhlangaso of 'selling' the country for his own enrichment and the dispute between himself and Sigcau over trade, tariffs and the powers of the paramountcy were a direct precursor to direct intervention by the Colony in the region.¹⁶⁵ However, the annexation of Mpondoland was not simply the result of the Colony's need to crush a rival authority seeking to invite foreign powers and draw revenue from trade within its sphere of authority. The annexation and colonisation of Mpondoland was intimately linked to the rapid and far-reaching transformations brought about by the industrial revolution based initially on the mining of diamonds and gold.¹⁶⁶ Such changes not only led to the incorporation of colonial economies (and eventually the establishment of the Union of South Africa) but they also intensified the incorporation of the remaining independent African polities in the last decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁷ Mpondoland was the last of these remaining independent African polities to be colonised in 1984, having managed to avoid direct military conflict with the Colony and imperial governments, it is considered as having had a somewhat atypical experience of colonisation.¹⁶⁸

After annexation, chiefs became the immediate targets of colonial policy. Colonial agents such as Prime Minister Cecil Rhodes argued that chiefs in Mpondoland had maintained a 'barbarous' government centred on the practices of 'murder, rapine and spoliation'.¹⁶⁹ In order to both save the people from these predatory chiefs and remove them as a significant threat to colonial rule the annexation of the region was deemed necessary. Following annexation the powers, incomes and privileges of the paramount and the chiefs were greatly reduced.¹⁷⁰ The region of Mpondoland was divided into seven magisterial districts each under the control of a magistrate who had both administrative and judicial authority. These districts were then divided into locations and placed under the control of government appointed headmen upon whom the magistrate's relied to keep order. In this way most of the chiefs and

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 34.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 34 – 35.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 41.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 41.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. vii.

¹⁶⁹ Cecil John Rhodes quoted in Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 35.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 35, 40.

those few commoner leaders of sub-chiefdoms in Mpondoland became government-paid headmen and the agents of a colonial system of indirect rule. For those chiefs who had prior to annexation controlled areas larger than that of the location allocated to them under the new system of colonial rule, the transformation to headmen represented a significant loss of power. The allocation of headmen and the demarcation of locations thus became the focal point of many serious disputes as chiefs competed for control over headmen and the customary dues and new intermediary functions associated with them. As the primary means of financing this new system of colonial rule, which had been intentionally designed to curtail the powers of the chiefs, every married man in Mpondoland was made to pay an annual ten-shilling hut tax for each of his wives.¹⁷¹

The annexation of Mpondoland had implications for the commoners of the area. Although it can be argued that colonial policies towards the chieftaincy contributed to processes (evident since the mid-1800s) whereby homesteads became increasingly freed from the tributary controls held by chiefs; they also to incorporate these homesteads deeper into the broader colonial economy.¹⁷² The introduction of the hut tax meant that each family now had to find a means of gaining cash in order to pay the annual sum to the colonial administration. This would have given an incentive to at least some men within homesteads to take up a contract as a migrant worker on the mines in the East Rand or on the sugarcane fields in Natal.¹⁷³ However, the annexation of Mpondoland actually had the effect of stimulating the production of crops in Mpondoland thus giving a number of families the option of selling grain to the local traders in the area instead of having to send a male family member to the mines or other industries.¹⁷⁴ Yet the production advantages brought on by annexation were soon evaporated by a series of natural disasters in Mpondoland. Severe drought and a series of extreme locust plagues between 1894 and 1896.¹⁷⁵ As cultivation began to recover the area was hit by the virulent cattle disease, rinderpest, which completely destroyed the cattle trade in Mpondoland. In order to buy grain and for homesteads to recover their herds roughly 4 000 men had to migrate from Mpondoland to find work.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 36.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, p. 41.

¹⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 44.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 44.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 47.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 48.

Although the number 4 000 may be seen as particularly low in comparison to the rates of migration from other African polities in the reserves since the mid-nineteenth century, it was a dramatic increase in the context of Mpondoland where, prior to 1898, a high of only about 2 000 men were engaged in migrant labour. By 1904 it is estimated that about 10 000 men were engaged in migrant labour in order to replenish individual homesteads' herds.¹⁷⁷

By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century traders were able to increasingly tie local homesteads to their stores by offering 'good fors' metal tokens in exchange for commoner's produce, particularly grain, instead of cash payments.¹⁷⁸ Furthermore, many homesteads (especially poorer homesteads) became increasingly indebted to traders who managed to find loop-holes in the Usury Act of 1908 and acted as money-lenders disguising loans as cash payments for cattle which had been pledged but not yet made available.¹⁷⁹ Although not widespread in the first decade of the twentieth century, indebtedness to traders soon became a general feature of Mpondo society and a primary reason for the structural dependence of Mpondo homesteads on wage labour. Taking the nature of migrant labour seriously, and the way the system developed in Mpondoland, is important because it demonstrates, once again, the way in which the people of Mpondoland sought to negotiate the terms upon which they interfaced with capitalism and the state. Of particular significance is the way in which commoners used the incorporation of men into the migrant labour system as a means to protect the material and social basis of communal life and modes of production in Mpondoland.¹⁸⁰

A defining feature of early migrant labour from Mpondoland was the cattle advance system. The chiefs had managed to keep labour recruiters out of Mpondoland until the last decades of the nineteenth century. While some specialised labour recruiters hired by private companies within the mining industry and other industries took up residence in the magisterial centres of Mpondoland, it was the traders throughout the area that were the primary recruiters and beneficiaries of the migrant labour system in the first decade of the twentieth century.¹⁸¹ Put simply, the cattle advance system operated as follows: traders in

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 51.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 52.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 54.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 68 – 69.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 56.

Mpondoland hired coloured or black men as ‘runners’ who received a small commission for going to locations and convincing men to take up labour contracts at the mines or sugarcane fields.¹⁸² The prospective labourers would be sent by the runners to the local trading station at which the trader would offer each man an advance of one beast in exchange for his cash wages to be received whilst he was away at work. The traders had huge power in that they set the price for the cattle and often received the cash wages directly from the mining company. According to Beinart, the cattle advance system in addition to benefiting the local traders, was also of great advantage to the heads of homesteads in Mpondoland who felt that through the system they could better ensure that both the migrant family member and his earning would return to the homestead.¹⁸³ However, in 1910 (the year of the creation of the Union of South Africa) the advance system was abolished on the mines because it had allowed for such high levels of desertion and it only remained a common practice for recruiters to the sugar industries in Natal until 1921 when parliament legislated to abolish advances in all industries of the Union of South Africa.¹⁸⁴

The cattle advance system was much more popular in Mpondoland than in other areas of the reserves in which labour was drawn for the mines and other industries. Unlike in many other rural areas of South Africa in which Africans had been severely cut off from access to arable land as a result of colonial and state policies (such as the Glen Grey Act of 1894 and the 1913 Natives Land Act), in Mpondoland by the 1930s land was still relatively available to commoners.¹⁸⁵ It was the continued access to land for settlement and for commonage which commoners in Mpondoland had persevered which made the cattle advance system so appealing for many forced into the migrant labour system. Furthermore, it appears that many Mpondo migrant workers engaged very selectively with the migrant labour system as they typically made sure that their contracts away at the mines coincided with the seasonal calendar in Mpondoland so that they would be home in the months when crops were harvested.¹⁸⁶ Thus, contrary to a number of general analyses of migrancy in South Africa, the phenomenon in Mpondoland was not one which was symptomatic of a collapse of rural

¹⁸² *Ibid*, p. 56.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, pp. 56 – 57.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 95.

¹⁸⁵ Beinart, W. 2014. ‘A Century of Migrancy from Mpondoland’. In Delius, P., Phillips, L. and Rankin-Smith, F. (eds.) *A Long Way Home: migrant worker worlds 1800-2014*. Wits University Press: Johannesburg, pp. 59 – 74.

¹⁸⁶ Beinart, W. ‘The Political Economy of Pondoland’, p. 100.

production and economy.¹⁸⁷ In Mpondoland there appears to have been a more positive relationship between increasing dependence on wage income and smallholder production and this positive relationship between agricultural output and migrant earnings seems to have lasted until the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁸⁸ It is important to have this deeper historical perspective of migrant workers in Mpondoland as they constituted a large number of participants in the mountain movement and the Mpondo revolts more broadly. However, it is interesting to note that a number of scholars – most notably Lodge – have argued that a large proportion of the male participants within the revolts were recently laid-off migrant workers from the sugarcane industries in Natal.¹⁸⁹ What is interesting about this insight is that it indicates that in terms of these migrant workers' experience the relationship between migrancy and a more favourable agricultural output – as theorised by Beinart to have been in-tact into the 1970s – was in fact breaking-down in certain circumstances by the years 1959 and 1960.

In the period following the 1910 Union of South Africa, the people and chiefs of Mpondoland placed a considerable amount of pressure on the state to cement the status of the reserves and, in so doing, entrench and protect communal land tenure.¹⁹⁰ Having avoided an outright military conflict with the colony at the time of annexation, the Mpondo chiefdom had managed to avoid the more destructive forms of state intervention which usually followed the conquest of formerly independent African polities. In so doing the Mpondo people were able to negotiate their relation with the colonial state so as to maintain the communal land tenure system and at least some access to productive resources held in common.¹⁹¹ In both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries what is clear is that the commoners of Mpondoland were prompted to active resistance when capitalism threatened to undermine communal access to land and resources. Although, as Beinart contends, after 1910 the Union's 'Native Policy' was such that, by entrenching the reserve system, it did not place disputes over land in a central position in the relationship between chiefs and the state; there were a number of occasions in which disagreements over land policy emerged.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 4.

¹⁸⁸ Beinart, W. 'A Century of Migrancy from Mpondoland', p. 62.

¹⁸⁹ Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 283.

¹⁹⁰ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', pp. 125 – 126.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, p. 122.

The paramounts in Eastern Mpondoland refused, on several occasions, to allow the alienation of even the smallest plots of land to traders or for state purposes. For example During Sigcau's reign as paramount he refused to allow for a lighthouse to be built by the state on the coastline of Lusikisiki for two reasons.¹⁹³ The first reason was that he believed it would interfere with communal access to winter grazing land in the coastal area and the second reason was that the paramount did not want to allow the lighthouse to set a precedent whereby the state could claim access to land for similar purposes.¹⁹⁴ Beinart argues that the paramount Marelane, Sigcau's successor, gave his support to the 1913 Natives Land Act because he believed that without the entrenchment of the reserves, processes of land commodification could take place in Mpondoland and directly threaten the communal tenure system.¹⁹⁵

The 1913 Natives Land Act was originally drafted by J.B.M Hertzog, the Minister of Native Affairs, in accordance with the proposals of 'necessary' segregation made by the Lagden Commission (1903-1905) as well as the findings of the 1912 Native Affairs Committee report, which was headed by Hertzog's predecessor as Minister of Native Affairs, Burton.¹⁹⁶ However, the ideological underpinnings and legal foundations of the Land Act were crystalized in the Glen Grey Act drafted by Cecil Rhodes and passed in 1894 – the same year in which Mpondoland was annexed. Despite Hertzog's departure from cabinet in December 1912, the Natives Land Act bill was hastily taken through Parliament by the new Native Affairs Minister, J.W. Sauer, and passed into law in June 1913.¹⁹⁷ Some historians, such as Feinberg, have argued that the passing of the 1913 Land Act by Botha after Hertzog's departure from cabinet was an attempt to satisfy the interest of the disaffected Afrikaner population, specifically those white Afrikaner farmers in the Orange Free State, who were seen to have applied great pressure upon the Botha administration to address the 'Native Question' as a matter of urgency.¹⁹⁸ However, the passing of the Act was inefficient in healing the Anglo-Boer divide, both in cabinet and in wider white South African society, as demonstrated in the

¹⁹³ *Ibid*, p. 122.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 122.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 123.

¹⁹⁶ Feinberg, H. 1993. 'The 1913 Natives Land Act in South Africa: politics, race and segregation in the early 20th century', in *International Journal of African Historical Studies*. Vol. 26, No. 1, pp. 65-109.

¹⁹⁷ Feinberg, H. 'The 1913 Natives Land Act in South Africa', p. 67.

¹⁹⁸ Feinberg, H. 2009. 'South African Territorial Segregation: New Data on African Farm Purchases, 1913–1936', in *Journal of African History*. Vol. 50, p. 59.

breakaway and formation of the National Party (NP) under the leadership of Hertzog. While the Act was far from a solution to the various conflicting interests within the Union, its passing into law did represent the unanimous belief of both factions of the white population in the institutionalisation of racial segregation as an attempt at solving the 'Native Question'.

Although the issue remains contested, it is widely accepted that the primary objective of the Natives Land Act was to promote and attain territorial segregation in South Africa as a means of stopping (or at least severely limiting) black people from buying land.¹⁹⁹ The Land Act provided for the purchase, ownership, leasing and occupation of land for black people and 'other persons', as well as it defined the nature and limitations of black African land tenancy.²⁰⁰ It entailed the incorporation of all existing African reserves, 'tribal locations' and black-owned farms into a 'schedule of native areas' totalling less than eight percent of the total land of South Africa.²⁰¹ These 'scheduled native areas' defined by the Act would later be the same physical boundaries used by the apartheid regime to enclose the notorious Bantustans and enforce the stipulations of the Land Act to the extreme.²⁰² The reserves were a key component of the general plan of the South African Parliament and the latter NP to 'circumscribe and confine the black people as far as their economic rights and political aspirations are concerned to a small portion of the country'.²⁰³ As Feinberg comments, '[t]he 1913 Native Land Act was so important because it was the first piece of legislation that would later comprise the legal structure of apartheid'.²⁰⁴ Historians such as Keegan and Lacey have suggested the Land Act sought to satisfy the interest of various sectors of capital within the Union, all at the expense of the rural African population which was forced, by the far-reaching implications of the Land Act and the legislation that preceded it, to the point of economic stagnation.²⁰⁵

The Botha administration promised that more land would be granted to Africans based on the report of the Land Act Commission established shortly after the passing of the

¹⁹⁹ Feinberg, H. 'South African Territorial Segregation', pp. 41-60.

²⁰⁰ Giliomee, H. and Mbenga, B. 2010. 'The First Black Challenges' in *New History*. Available at <http://newhistory.co.za/part-3-chapter-11-the-first-black-challenges/> online.

²⁰¹ Feinberg, H. 'South African Territorial Segregation', p. 42.

²⁰² Feinberg, H. 'The 1913 Natives Land Act in South Africa', p. 108.

²⁰³ Giliomee, H. and Mbenga, B. 'The First Black Challenges'. p. 1.

²⁰⁴ Feinberg, H. 'The 1913 Natives Land Act in South Africa', p. 108.

²⁰⁵ Manona, C.W. 1981. *Labour Migration, Marriage and Family Life in a Ciskei Village*, Unpublished Masters Dissertation, Rhodes University, p. 28.

Act.²⁰⁶ This promise was not kept by the Botha administration, nor was it kept by that of Smuts, and as a result between 1913 and the late-1920s, the schedule areas became grossly overpopulated and began to show signs of intense ecological and economic deterioration.²⁰⁷ From as early as 1920 the nefarious effects of overcrowding, overstocking and depletion of soil were beginning to manifest themselves seriously in the reserves. During the 1930s a number of extremely alarming reports of desertification and soil erosion in the reserves came to the attention of the state. According to Fred Hendricks, in these reports:

Rural decay was invariably attributed to overstocking. Africans, so the argument went, had an irrational desire to accumulate large numbers of livestock indiscriminately. Their religious outlook towards stock-holding contradicted 'scientific' farming methods and was the root of the evil of overstocking. The proposed solution to these problems coincided neatly with their supposed causes. Africans were to be taught to abandon their uneconomic ideas, their stock was to be limited and anti-erosion measures instituted. The imbalance in the land-livestock ratio was conceived as the crux of the problem, and stock limitation its ultimate solution.²⁰⁸

The various Commissions established to report to the state on conditions in the reserves since the passing of the 1913 Land Act had all revealed shocking information regarding the ecological deterioration in the reserves which required a direct government response. However, another aspect of the 'Native Question' which required an equally direct government response at the time was the perceived 'problem' of black squatters on white owned farming land. During the 1930s the Smuts government passed, what Baruch Hirson refers to as, the three 'Hertzog Bills', in order to address these issues.²⁰⁹ The first two of these laws were the Natives Land and Trust Act and the Representation of Natives Act of 1936. The original drafting of these legislations took place a decade earlier in 1926 and was directly geared towards eradicating the existence of African farm squatters. Although the legislation was delayed, by 1929 the Native Service Control Registration Bill was introduced by the Minister of Justice which forced so-called squatters to work for at least three months a year and imposed a heavy penalty on any black man between the ages of 18 and 60 who did not

²⁰⁶ Hirson, B. 1977. 'Rural revolt in South Africa, 1937-1951' in *Collected Seminar Papers*. No. 21, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, p. 116.

²⁰⁷ Giliomee, H. and Mbenga, B. 2010. 'A Crisis In The Reserves' in *New History*. Available at <http://newhistory.co.za/part-3-chapter-11-the-first-black-challenges-a-crisis-in-the-reserves/> online.

²⁰⁸ Hendricks, F. 1989. 'Loose Planning and Rapid Resettlement: The Politics of Conservation and Control in the Transkei, South Africa, 1950-1970' in *Journal of Southern African Studies*. Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 316.

²⁰⁹ Hirson, B. 'Rural revolt in South Africa', p. 117.

comply.²¹⁰ When the Natives Land and Trust Act was finally passed in 1936 the fourth chapter of the Act dictated that, in order to create the conditions for controlling labour-tenants and eradicating the practice of squatting, labour-tenants were made to work for no less than 180 days (roughly seven months) a year and all squatters were forced to pay an annually increasing fee to be registered and licenced with the state.

Thus what becomes apparent is that land dispossession and the establishment of a coercive migrant labour system held a symbiotic relationship within the historical process of racially-based capitalist state development in South Africa.²¹¹ The successful functioning of the migrant labour system and the segregationist South African state was dependant on the establishment and maintenance of native reserves as spaces for the social reproduction of a cheap black workforce and as a dumping ground for undesirable black people from the urban centres of the Union. The importance of the reserves for capitalist state development in the Union, coupled with numerous reports of the deteriorating ecological conditions, prompted the state to develop and impose heavy-handed agricultural interventionist policies in the form of the Betterment scheme during the mid-twentieth century.

However, it is important at this juncture to take note of the increasingly contradictory role and positionality of chiefs and headmen as they became absorbed into the machinery of the state. The interests of chiefs and headmen coincided with those of commoners in regard to the maintenance of communal tenure that guaranteed chiefs and headmen control over land distribution and also guaranteed all homesteads access to land and grazing. However it would be misleading to suggest that the interests and politics between the commoners, paramounts, as well as the lesser chiefs and headmen of Mpondoland always corresponded in the early twentieth century.

The dipping crisis in Mpondoland during the early twentieth century, following the devastating spread of East Coast fever to the area in 1912, was perhaps the clearest instance in which we see a divergence in the politics of the paramountcy and the commoners during the period under consideration.²¹² During this time commoners rejected state sponsored

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 116.

²¹¹ In fact this symbiotic relationship can be traced right back to the history of the enclosure of the commons in Europe during the fifteenth century which facilitated the rise of the industrial revolution.

²¹² Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 155.

cattle dipping programmes on a number of grounds. First, in order to build the dipping tanks the government imposed an additional annual levy of two shillings and sixpence on each hut tax payer which became a popular source of resentment for the commoners of Mpondoland.²¹³ Second, historians have suggested that many Mpondo people rejected cattle dipping because they reasoned that the bringing together of so many herds of cattle to one location meant that the dipping process actually increased the risk of disease spreading it further and more rapidly.²¹⁴ Stapleton also argues that in addition to the above two points the 'popular anti-dipping campaign' of this period was also fuelled by commoner's resentment of the newly erected fence along the Natal border.²¹⁵ At a series of well attended public meetings, lesser chiefs became the spokespersons of popular opinion which believed that the paramountcy (under the authority of a regent at the time) had been wrong to negate the suspicions of the people and to willingly receive decisions taken by the state administration regarding the restrictions of cattle movements and the imposition of dipping practices.²¹⁶ However, despite this, the role of the chieftaincy and its legitimacy in the eyes of the commoners of Mpondoland came under serious popular scrutiny during the dipping crisis. According to Beinart during the dipping crisis 'the role of the chieftaincy came under question, providing a focus for discontent about the broader implications of agricultural improvement; the fencing of land, the disturbance of winter grazing patterns and the threat of stock limitation, which had already become an issue'.²¹⁷

This was equally the case when popular discontent regarding the nefarious consequences of state agricultural extension schemes resulted in the resurfacing of public denouncements and critiques about the role of the chieftaincy.²¹⁸ From as early 1904 an experimental farm was established in the district of Tsolo and African students were trained to function as agricultural demonstrators in the Transkeian Territories.²¹⁹ As Eastern Mpondoland had remained outside of the Transkeian Territories General Council (TTGC)

²¹³ Stapleton, T. 2001. *Faku: Rulership and Colonialism in the Mpondo Kingdom (c. 1780 – 1867)*. Wilfrid Laurier University Press: Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, p. 134.

²¹⁴ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', pp. 107 – 108 and Stapleton, T. 'Faku: Rulership and Colonialism', p. 134.

²¹⁵ Stapleton, T. 'Faku: Rulership and Colonialism', p. 134.

²¹⁶ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 155.

²¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 156.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 156.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 86.

system until 1927 the area did not receive agricultural demonstrators, aside from a few working on cotton projects, until well after other districts in the Transkei. However, state officials had been promoting the programme since 1922 and in 1926 were able to introduce a demonstrator to each of the districts of the area.²²⁰

Although the demonstrators in this period had a very limited impact in Mpondoland, the majority of commoners were highly suspicious of their role as agents of what they saw as further attempts at state intervention, and their efforts at producing better and more crops with new agricultural techniques was embraced by only a few headmen who benefited from the harvest gathered from plots of land allocated to demonstrators.²²¹ The views of commoners in Mpondoland were articulated in a series of public meetings in the 1920s and 1930s in which the agricultural extension schemes, involving the fencing of land and the interrogation of stock numbers, was denounced as it was said to be sure to impact negatively on winter grazing patterns and promote stock limitations which had already become a threat to homesteads. Although many lesser chiefs and headmen voiced popular opinion and remained sceptical of the work of demonstrators, many eventually accepted them into their locations.²²² On the one hand these meetings about the state extension schemes are an important indicator of the fact that the form of democracy practiced under the auspices of the chieftaincy during the twentieth century did not always allow for popular consensus to dictate policy or practice.²²³ However, on the other hand, the public meetings are also significant as they demonstrate the extent to which lesser chiefs and headmen, in the context of the political processes surrounding the chieftaincy in Mpondoland, were still useful as vehicles for the expression of popular political opinion during the early twentieth century. It is for this reason that Beinart argues that popular movements that emerged from outside the sphere of the chieftaincy, such as that in East Griqualand during the dipping crisis, did not have a large impact in Mpondoland in the early decades of the twentieth century.²²⁴

However, one such independent popular movement, known as the Wellington movement, did take root in Mpondoland after the experience of drought and the introduction

²²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 87.

²²¹ *Ibid*, p. 88.

²²² *Ibid*, p. 156.

²²³ *Ibid*, p. 157.

²²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 157.

of the new poll tax in 1926-1927.²²⁵ The Wellington movement derives its name from Wellington Buthelezi and the group of individuals who were at the forefront of harnessing and spreading the movement's millennial political message far and wide from its epicentre in East Griqualand, Fingoland and the Western Transkei. The areas in which the movement emerged were those in which rural polities had been transformed and strained by the rural crisis of the late-1920s, to a greater degree, than in the communities in Mpondoland. Put briefly, the thrust of Buthelezi's political message was that black Americans would be coming in aeroplanes to liberate the Africans from the yoke of white colonialism and that in preparation for their arrival black people in the Transkei were told to slaughter all the pigs in their areas. Although pig-killing had featured as an expression of popular millennial politics in the past during the 1920s as part of the Wellington movement it was also accompanied by a popular rejection of dipping, taxes, and government controlled schools as well as mission churches.²²⁶

The Wellington movement was an example of a moment in time in which the vertical lines of communication between the people and the local figures of authority, such as chiefs and headmen loyal to the administration, were breaking down and the people were forging for themselves new ideas which rejected state control and 'traditional' forms of political authority.²²⁷ Beinart and Collin Bundy argue in *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* that magistrates and other state officials were unable to understand the development of these 'new' ideas and their accompanying modes of political mobilisation fostered by the horizontal lines of communication between subaltern groups in rural society: 'The affairs of rural Africans "away in the locations" were submerged, and were dropping below the gaze of government, of white sympathisers, and even of African political leaders'.²²⁸

In Western Mpondoland the movement was directly linked and associated to the wider organisation under the leadership of Buthelezi. However, in Eastern Mpondoland during the late-1920s the popular resistance movement which emerged, while being dominated in much of its conception and practices in line with Buthelezi's millennial message,

²²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 158.

²²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 158.

²²⁷ Beinart, W. and Bundy, C. 1987. *Hidden struggles in rural South Africa*. James Currey: London, p. 3.

²²⁸ Beinart, W. and Bundy, C. 'Hidden Struggles', p. 1.

was known as the 'ICU'.²²⁹ The movement was named after the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union which was the largest African trade union in South Africa during the 1920s.²³⁰ In 1928 one of the key leaders, Clements Kadalie, split from the organisation and established the Independent Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (IICU). He prioritised trying to build a support base for his new organisation in the rural areas by sending committee members to establish links with people in the Transkei. The IICU had correspondents in Eastern Mpondoland and it was their presence which, perhaps, helped to facilitate the merging of the Wellington movement's political message with the name and spirit of the ICU amongst the majority of commoners in Eastern Mpondoland.²³¹

The emergence of the ICU movement saw people in the districts of Mpondoland refusing to pay taxes and at one stage a large group of commoners from various locations in the coastal areas of Lusikisiki gathered as a communal work force to clear a large patch of land in anticipation of the arrival of aeroplanes carrying the black Americans Buthelezi prophesied about. However, unlike in parts of the Western Transkei where popular political movements engaged in projects such as the establishment of independent schools and churches, the local 'ICU' resistance movement in Mpondoland was not accompanied by similar political projects aimed at dismantling the state's apparatus of ideological control.²³² The resistance of the 1920s embodied yet another moment in which the politics of the people and the interests of the chiefs, councillors and certain prominent members of the Christian community, who often had working ties with the administration, were placed into an antagonistic relationship in Mpondoland. The group of chiefs, councillors and members of the Christian community felt threatened by the movement and worked with the state in order to suppress its influence in the region.²³³ It was as a result of the combined efforts of the chieftaincy and the administration that the organisational abilities and scope for action of the popular political movement was constrained in Mpondoland.²³⁴

²²⁹ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 158.

²³⁰ For a discussion of the ICU see Bradford, H. 1988. *A Taste of Freedom: The ICU in Rural South Africa 1924 – 1930*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg.

²³¹ *Ibid*, p. 158.

²³² *Ibid*, p. 158.

²³³ *Ibid*, p. 158.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, p. 159.

The limited, although not insignificant, impact that the popular political movements of the 1920s had in Mpondoland was not able to displace the chieftaincy as the dominant vehicle for, and focus of, popular politics in the 1930s.²³⁵ The late 1930s saw a major conflict in Eastern Mpondoland over the issue of succession to the paramountcy. The vast majority of commoners, lesser chiefs and headmen supported Nelson Sigcau's claim to the paramountcy as they argued that according to Mpondo custom Marelane's eldest son, Botha Sigcau, could not be the paramount precisely because he was the eldest son of the former paramount's first wife.²³⁶ However, Botha Sigcau was well known as a government supporter and was, with the support of the state administration, able to gain the support of many of the leading chiefs and councillors (notably Victor Poto of Western Mpondoland). The majority of commoners in Mpondoland supported Nelson's claim to the paramountcy because he was known to be far less supportive of the administration as well as highly sensitive to, and receptive of, popular political opinion. However, after a state-led commission of enquiry the administration officially installed Botha as paramount and, although the instillation was boycotted and denounced by Nelson's supporters, with the support of an armed guard, Botha was able to secure his paramountcy.²³⁷

Thus it can be seen that the issues pertaining to the political processes surrounding the chieftaincy continued to dominate the political landscape of Mpondoland well into the twentieth century.²³⁸ It would seem that in Mpondoland prior to the 1950s and 1960s, forms of popular political expression and organisation had not bypassed the chieftaincy in the same way as had happened in areas such as East Griqualand and other parts of the Western Transkei where the experience of colonial and capitalist penetration had rendered the chieftaincy far less powerful and relevant to the majority of inhabitants, than in comparison with Mpondoland.²³⁹ Understanding the complex and changing nature of the role of the chieftaincy in Mpondoland during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries is necessary in order to historicise our understanding of the popular rejection of the chieftaincy as a defining and emancipatory political feature of the Mpondo revolts of 1960. The discussion above has also attempted to show that state interventionist policies and practices,

²³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 159.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 160.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 160.

²³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 160.

²³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 160.

such as the imposition of dip tanks, the erection of fences and the setting aside of land for cash-cropping, were a source of popular discontent in Mpondoland for much of the twentieth century. However, despite a number of notable exceptions, it appears as though it was until the period between late-1940s and early-1960s that state agricultural interventionist projects, in the form of Betterment schemes, enforced and facilitated by the Bantu Authorities system, became a source of widespread and diverse forms of popular resistance throughout the reserves.

In the following second section to this chapter, I explore some important features of the more immediate context of the Mpondo revolts in the mid-twentieth century. Specifically, the section will attempt to provide an overview of the processes of state and capital encroachment in the rural areas in the form of Betterment schemes and the Bantu Authorities system as well as the widespread popular resistance it stimulated in the 1940s and 1950s.

Betterment, Bantu Authorities and Widespread Resistance in the Reserves

It was Proclamation 31 of 1939, which was gazetted under a provision of the 1936 Land Act that stipulated any area of land could be declared a 'Betterment area' by the apartheid government.²⁴⁰ The essential aim of the Betterment scheme was to conserve the land in the reserves by limiting livestock and replacing 'unscientific' African land-use practices with 'modern', 'scientific' methods developed in the West. The language used by the state in justifying its agricultural interventionist projects in the reserves is an important indication of the way in which the policy of Betterment and Rehabilitation was a manifestation of the racist modernist ideological underpinnings of successive white administrations in South Africa. Acting from the colonial belief that African agricultural knowledge and practices were inherently backward in comparison to the 'science' of Western agricultural norms, was just one of a number of fundamentally racist ontological assumptions that eventually formed a cornerstone of apartheid state policy in rural South Africa.

The processes necessary to implement the stipulations and infrastructure of Betterment schemes were largely delayed until the post-World War Two (WWII) period. At this time no less than half of the technical and administrative staff of the Department of

²⁴⁰ Hirson, B. 'Rural revolt in South Africa', p. 118

Native Affairs were required to leave their posts and join the war effort.²⁴¹ This, along with the drastic cut in the budget assigned by the state for Betterment, as well as a significant shortage of fences and other materials, resulted in the process of practical implementation being very slow with officials on the ground being unable to meaningfully enforce any compulsory limitation of stock numbers.²⁴² When the proposal for Betterment was finally introduced in practice in the mid-1940s it was called Rehabilitation and entailed, in addition to stock-culling, the re-division of African land into residential, grazing and cultivating areas.²⁴³ It also included the setting aside of communal land for forestry schemes and thus the implementation of extremely severe restrictions on access to natural resources such as fire wood and thatching grass. The processes of stock-culling had drastic implications for the poorest of rural dwellers as they were carried out without any consideration of the size of a person's herd or the amount of land they had access to for grazing. Similarly, the forced demarcation of fallow lands, restrictions on access to communal grazing land and natural resources, were of hugely negative consequences for the majority of the rural population. In essence the state socio-agricultural interventionist practices and policies of the 1940s and 1950s embodied a process of enclosure which posed a direct threat to commoners' access to communal land and productive resources. Collectively, the stipulations of Rehabilitation embodied a top-down process of 'villagisation' which forced rural dwellers who were dependent upon wages to live in rural townships, at times becoming completely alienated from the land. By far the hardest hit by the nefarious outcomes of Rehabilitation were the migrant workers whose families were forced to move into rural townships without access to land.²⁴⁴ This was perhaps the most dangerous aspect of the scheme as it threatened to cut the important ties that migrants held to the land of the rural reserves and thus threatened the widely-held goal amongst migrants to return to the rural areas to establish a homestead and become a farmer, husband and father. Of equal importance was the threat posed to women by the scheme which denied them access to previously held fields whilst simultaneously undermining their social and economic relationship with migrant family members.²⁴⁵ It is thus unsurprising that these two groups in rural society formed the

²⁴¹ Hendricks, F. 'Loose Planning and Rapid Resettlement', p. 316.

²⁴² *Ibid*, p. 316.

²⁴³ Chaskalson, M. 1987. 'Rural resistance in the 1940s and 1950s' in *Africa Perspective*. Vol. 1, No. 5-6, p. 47.

²⁴⁴ Chaskalson, M. 'Rural resistance in the 1940s and 1950s', p. 48.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 48.

backbone of the resistance to Betterment and Rehabilitation in the reserves during the 1940s and 1950s.

Mathew Chaskalson argues that in the 1940s Rehabilitation aimed to gain a monopoly over whatever resources there were in the reserves and concentrate them in the hands of a minority of so-called 'good' African farmers, thus forcing the majority of rural dwellers 'to be consigned to rural dormitory villages'.²⁴⁶ However, it is crucial to note that at this stage Rehabilitation did more than just threaten the majority of rural dwellers, it also undermined the position of chiefs.²⁴⁷ The relationship between chiefs and the Rehabilitation schemes is an important one to consider particularly because the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts was predominantly concerned with thinking beyond, and acting against, the institution of chieftaincy. At first the introduction of Betterment and then Rehabilitation undermined the power of lesser chiefs and headmen in the reserves by taking away their control over the allocation of land, as well as by placing them under the control of the Native Affairs Department (NAD). While some chiefs accepted and promoted amongst their constituencies the Rehabilitation scheme and its new system of land use and allocation, many chiefs felt that their legitimacy and popular support would be undermined by their acceptance, and thus they joined the popular resistance against it.

Chaskalson argues that it was the need to 'consolidate the support of this [former] collaborationist class against the resistance which rehabilitation provoked that the state introduced the 1951 Bantu (Tribal) Authorities Act'.²⁴⁸ At the time of its implementation from 1951 onwards, the Bantu Authorities Act functioned so as to increase the powers of the chiefs which had been undermined by the policy of Rehabilitation. However, this increase in power was based on the condition that chiefs accepted to greater degree than ever before their role as bureaucrats upwardly accountable to the NAD as opposed to their constituencies.

In his important text, *The Peasant's Revolt*, Govan Mbeki provides a robust discussion of the 'bastardisation' of the system of traditional governance by the colonial cum apartheid state detailing the processes whereby the historically fluid and multidimensional tradition of chieftaincy had become increasingly crystallised into colonial conceptions of 'customary' or

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 48.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 48.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 49.

'tribal' law which culminated in the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951.²⁴⁹ Within this new system of governance state appointed chiefs, paid by the apartheid government, and whose power was no longer curtailed by the historically older limitations of their constituencies, began to impose all kinds of new and unprecedented taxes upon their subjects who, as a result, were increasingly forced into the migrant labour system. In many ways Mbeki's work was an important precursor to what is perhaps the most well-known discussion and theoretical engagement with the issue of traditional authority under colonial conditions as presented in Mahmood Mamdani's book *Citizen and Subject*.

According to Mamdani the role given to chiefs within the system of Tribal Authorities was moulded, and to a large extent outright invented, by colonists based on their selective understanding of administrative chiefs belonging to the conquest states of nineteenth century, pre-colonial Africa.²⁵⁰ The category of administrative chief is distinguished from that of traditional chief by Mamdani as he highlights that the colonial state really liberated administrative chiefs from all institutional constraint and thereby laid the foundation for decentralised despotism and indirect rule.

As a result of Mamdani's conception of apartheid as a generic form of colonialism, his insights are easily applied to the South African historical context and the passing of the Bantu Authorities Act in 1951. Under apartheid legislation the administrative powers of chiefs were strengthened and they became the site of a great fusion of powers: judge, bureaucrat, treasurer, and so on; which installed in them total, unchecked and unrestrained authority over all their peers and subjects within a so-called 'tribe'. As such the Bantu Authorities Act provided the opportunity for chiefs to greatly increase their personal wealth, at the expense of whatever legitimacy they may still have held in the minds of their people. Evans explains that with these greater administrative powers, chiefs were expected to 'to contain and discipline the reserve army of African labour: those Africans prevented by law from departing to the urban areas, the "idle or disorderly" evicted from the urban areas, and the "excess labour" skimmed off the white farming areas'.²⁵¹ Importantly, the establishment of the

²⁴⁹ Mbeki, G. 1964. *South Africa: the peasants' revolt*. Penguin: Middlesex.

²⁵⁰ Mamdani, M. 1996. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey.

²⁵¹ Evans, I. T. 1997. *Bureaucracy and Race: Native Administration in South Africa*, University of California Press: Berkeley, p. 260.

Traditional Authorities system in the Transkei also made chiefs and headmen responsible for the funding, and development of, practices and infrastructure associated with the Rehabilitation schemes.

According to Hendricks, at the time of the introduction of the Bantu Authorities Act, 'the state's policy was transformed from a stated commitment to "saving the soil" to an attempt to reinvigorate tribalism in the reserves as a co-optive device bringing African Chiefs and Headmen into the local machinery of government'.²⁵² However, as previously stated, in many cases chiefs across the former Bantustans chose to resist the implementation of Bantu Authorities. For example Abram Moilwa, a chief of Dinokana, when faced with the decision to accept the new system or not, stated: 'It seems to us that they just want us chiefs to sign a document which says destroy me, baas. Let them destroy us without our signatures'.²⁵³ After refusing to accept his newly assigned role as state bureaucrat, Moilwa was deposed as chief by the NAD. This disposition was the spark which ignited the Hurutshe resistance in the Zeerust District which has been discussed in some detail in the work of Lodge.²⁵⁴ Other dissident chiefs, such as Sabata Dalindybo of Thembuland and chief Moroamoche of Sekhukhuneland, also played similarly important roles in the popular resistance against Bantu Authorities in their districts.²⁵⁵ However, in Eastern Mpondoland, as in a great many other places, the majority of chiefs and headmen chose instead to follow the path of collaboration with the apartheid state.

What made the Bantu Authorities system so unpopular with rural dwellers was firstly the fact that they now had to pay a host of additional taxes in order to finance the, at times, lavish lifestyles of the Tribal Authorities; and secondly, they directly bore the burden of the rising institutionalised corruption amongst chiefs who were compliant with the state. Therefore, Chaskalson explains, 'the total drain on the reserve population increased substantially at the same time as the rehabilitation measures (which were now enforced by

²⁵² Hendricks, F. 1990. *The Pillars of Apartheid: Land Tenure, Rural Planning and the Chieftaincy*. Acta University, Studia Sociologica Upsaliensa: Uppsala, p. 122.

²⁵³ Chaskalson, M. 'Rural resistance in the 1940s and 1950s', p. 49.

²⁵⁴ Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 269.

²⁵⁵ However, the extent to which chiefs such as Dalindybo, Sabata and Poto can be seen as part of the resistance against the state is debatable. See: Matoti, S. and Ntsebeza, L. 'Rural resistance in Mpondoland and Thembuland', p. 179.

the Tribal Authorities) undermined their material position'.²⁵⁶ In addition to these, Tribal Authorities became closely associated during the 1950s with the increased policies and practices of 'influx control,' which included the extension of the pass system to women as well as the forced removal of 'illegals' from urban areas to the reserves. All of these processes were carried out and enforced by the Tribal Authorities in the reserves during the 1950s and 1960s, resembling Mamdani's description of chiefs embodying a great fusion of powers.

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s across all of the reserve areas in South Africa, 'fences were broken down, stock cards and land certificates burnt, erosion banks destroyed, culls restricted, restrictions on firewood ignored and relocations opposed'.²⁵⁷ These political tactics deployed against the infrastructure and practices which formed the material backbone of the Betterment scheme are extremely important signifiers of a history of popular resistance to state enforced processes of enclosure in the rural areas of South Africa during the mid-twentieth century.

In many of the more organised instances of rural resistance in the former reserves, which were a precursor to the Mpondo revolts, struggles against symbols of influx control, rehabilitation and tribal authorities were combined in the thinking and political praxes of dissident members of the various rural communities concerned. What is interesting about this broad moment of rural resistance during the mid-twentieth century and the particular events which constitute it, is the fact that while each instance of popular politics was expressed around similar grievances the political modes of addressing these grievances varied greatly amongst them. Seen collectively they are testimony to the wide range of creative, and in some cases, progressive strategies which are constantly being developed, contested and recreated within the sphere of subaltern politics in South Africa.

For example, in the resistance at Witsieshoek and Zeerust, dissident rural dwellers were able to successfully use the courts to fight against the corruption and predatory practices of the local Traditional Authorities.²⁵⁸ In the case of Tembuland, in which resistance took place predominantly in the period of years just after the Mpondo revolts, assassination squads were organised, trained and tasked with killing those chiefs who refused to stand

²⁵⁶ Chaskalson, M. 'Rural resistance in the 1940s and 1950s', p. 50.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 48.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 53.

against the Tribal Authorities system.²⁵⁹ In Zoutpansberg the resistance was largely co-ordinated by local rural dwellers in tandem with the Zoutpansberg Cultural Association (ZCA), an organisation based in Johannesburg with very close links to the Communist Party, developing strategies of resistance which were to some degree dependent upon urban institutions and practices of struggle.²⁶⁰ Similarly, in Zeerust the Bahurutse Association (BA), based in Johannesburg and Pretoria, played a key role in fostering the resistance against Tribal Authorities in the reserves. In both these cases, through these urban based organisations, migrants were able to spearhead 'campaigns of retribution for collaborators and were also responsible for arranging legal representation for people arrested in the rebellion[s]'.²⁶¹

These urban-based organisations, such as the ZCA and BA, were comprised of male migrant workers from the rural communities concerned. However these 'formal' organisations in the urban areas were not the only platforms through which migrant workers involved themselves in the struggles in the reserves. This is aptly illustrated in the previously mentioned example of when Chief Abram Moilwa of Dinokana was disposed of, sparking the Hurutshe resistance. The BA took three days to send representatives to the district in order to lead a campaign of resistance against the Tribal Authorities. However, the representatives of the BA were beaten to the scene by female migrant workers from Johannesburg who were able to mobilize the female residents of the area and formed the backbone of the resistance campaign. One of the most significant campaigns organised by the women in Zeerust was against the extension of the pass system which was so successful that only 80 out of a total of 8 000 women accepted them.

In addition to this these, women were also responsible for adopting the tactic of boycott and carried it out with much success against those traders who were seen as collaborators with the state and the Traditional Authorities. Many women who were forcefully removed from urban 'black spots' by the state and dumped into the rural townships of the reserves during the 1950s and 1960s had an incredibly radicalising effect on rural resistance politics in the reserves.²⁶² A telling example of this was the group of women who

²⁵⁹ Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa'.

²⁶⁰ See Delius, P. 1993. 'Sebatakgomo and the Zoutpansberg Balemi Association: The ANC, the Communist Party and Rural Organization, 1939 – 1955.' In *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 34; and Hirson, B. 'Rural revolt in South Africa'.

²⁶¹ Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 53.

²⁶² *Ibid*, p. 55.

were forcefully removed from their homes in Cato Manor in Durban, where they had a particularly militant history already, and relocated to the reserves of Natal. Within months of the relocation unrest amongst women flared up all over the reserves in multiple forms, including: the destruction of dipping tanks, the stoning of police vehicles, as well as the burning of sugarcane fields and Bantu Administration huts.²⁶³ They held a number of marches on Magistrate Courts as well as police stations demanding ‘an end to afforestation, influx control, women’s passes and women’s labour obligations under the rehabilitation measures’.²⁶⁴

Ntsebeza argues that it was precisely because of the project of indirect rule that the institution of the chieftaincy had managed to survive, and was incorporated into, and adapted by, the apartheid state.²⁶⁵ Yet it was also this inclusion within the colonial cum apartheid state structures that resulted in the agents of the Tribal Authorities system being the focal points of strong resistance from the majority of commoners in the reserves. Ntsebeza explains clearly that, ‘[i]n so far as traditional authorities were part of government structures, they could not avoid being targets in these struggles [of the mid-twentieth century]’.²⁶⁶ As such it can be said that popular politics in the reserves during the 1940s and 1950s continued to be dominated by concerns with the role and powers of the chieftaincy - especially in its new form as the Tribal Authority.

However, this period increasingly saw instances in which the chieftaincy no longer acted as a vehicle for the expression of popular political opinion, and the will of the people had, to varying degrees, been able to do in the early-twentieth century. These popular concerns with the increasingly autocratic and predatory practices of chiefs, headmen and other agents of indirect rule were often expressed in conjunction with resistance campaigns against the agents and infrastructure of both the state and capital. Not only were local members of the Tribal Authority system targeted by popular resistance campaigns, but dipping tanks were destroyed, labour recruiting agencies and trading stations were boycotted, pass laws and influx measures were publically denounced. Understanding this history of popular

²⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 55.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 55.

²⁶⁵ Ntsebeza, L. 2002. *The Structures and Struggles of Rural Local Government in South Africa: The case study of traditional authorities in the Eastern Cape*. Unpublished DPhil thesis, Rhodes University.

²⁶⁶ Ntsebeza, L. ‘The Structures and Struggles of Rural Local Government’, p. ii.

rural resistance in the reserves during the mid-twentieth century is essential for understanding the politics of the Mpondo revolts which Ntsebeza argues should be seen as a culmination of the widespread resistance of the 1940s and 1950s.

Conclusion

The primary aim of this chapter has been to provide a historical contextualisation of the Mpondo revolts. In the first chapter, I drew extensively on Beinart's *Political Economy of Pondoland* in order to trace the history of colonial state and capitalist encroachment in Mpondoland from the mid-nineteenth to the early-twentieth century. In so doing I provided a historical perspective of the shifting social landscape, including the role of migrant labour, to show how popular political subjectivities in Mpondoland have historically been concerned with the defence of communal land and access to productive resources held in common. While Beinart's work was crucial for exposing this insight regarding the importance of the commons within popular political subjectivities in Mpondoland, I also argued that the text is in some ways limited by its reliance on a classic history from above perspective especially in relation to its discussion of the Mpondo chiefdom under the paramountcy of Faku. Yet despite its limitations Beinart's work remains useful for locating the Mpondo revolts within a longer history of struggle against capitalist and colonial enclosure and traditions of popular politics in favour of the preserve of the commons. Such an historical perspective is necessary in order to avoid reductionist interpretations of the revolts as simply a response to Betterment/Rehabilitation schemes and the implementation of Tribal Authorities under the auspices of the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951.

In the second section of this chapter, I focused on the more immediate context of state power, indirect rule and related instances of rural resistance in the reserves during the 1940s and 1950s. I argued that particular instances of rural resistance, which took place across the reserves during the mid-twentieth century, had important and influential associations with the Mpondo revolts. I also explored the influence that the migrant labour system had on the popular political resistance movements and campaigns developed by the inhabitants of the reserve areas during the mid-twentieth century. When considered collectively as part of a similar political sequence I argue that these instances of rural resistance, including the Mpondo revolts, are indicative of the wide range of creative and in

some cases progressive strategies which are constantly being created, contested and recreated within the sphere of subaltern politics in South Africa.

However, perhaps the most important argument which has been made within this chapter is that considering the complex and changing nature of the role of the chieftaincy in Mpondoland during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, it is necessary in order to historicise our understanding of the popular rejection of the chieftaincy as a defining and emancipatory political feature of the Mpondo revolts. At the core of this argument is the conviction that in Mpondoland prior to the 1950s and 1960s forms of popular political expression and organisation had not bypassed the chieftaincy in the same way as had happened with certain movements and in areas of the Transkei such as East Griqualand during the 1920s.²⁶⁷ As shall be shown in the remaining chapters of this thesis, the fact that by the late-1950s, and the time of the Mpondo revolts popular politics in a large proportion of Mpondoland had taken on forms and praxes which were autonomous from the authority of all levels of the chieftaincy is a fundamental insight for thinking emancipatory politics within the context of the revolts.

²⁶⁷ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 160.

Chapter Three

Popular Politics and the Early Stages of the Mpondo Revolts

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to start to tease out the emancipatory features of the Mpondo revolts by analysing early tactics of popular political engagement in Eastern Mpondoland. As such the primary focus of the chapter is placed on the public demonstrations of popular disapproval conceived of, and deployed by, large crowds gathered at public meetings in Eastern Mpondoland. Furthermore, the chapter will also explore acts of sabotage and the use of physical barriers against the state which accompanied these public demonstrations of popular disapproval in the early stages of the Mpondo revolts. The chapter will seek to demonstrate that the crowd gatherings of the late-1950s and early months of 1960 can be seen as holding much in common with the type of public meetings expressing popular discontent seen in Mpondoland during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, I argue that by this period the crowd gatherings at public meetings had taken on a political form and content which distinguishes them from earlier expressions of popular political opinion as discussed in Chapter Two. By the late-1950s in Eastern Mpondoland it appears as if the lesser chiefs (referred to in the archival documentation as sub-chiefs) and headmen were no longer at the forefront of popular opinion or political action in the same way as they had tended to be during earlier periods of the century. Popular politics was bypassing the chieftaincy as a vehicle for the expression of popular discontent and the institution had in fact become thoroughly discredited in Eastern Mpondoland by the late-1950s.

The specific examples detailed in the chapter testify to the fact that popular politics during the formative stages of the Mpondo revolts was made up of some concerns which had a long history in the area. These concerns were with the defence and maintenance of the commons and guaranteed access to land and grazing for all homesteads, as well as concerns with the autocratic practices of the chieftaincy. However, the events discussed within this chapter also indicated that there were significant ruptures in the concerns and form of popular politics in the late-1950s which relate to the emancipatory features of the Mpondo revolts. It will be shown that by the late-1950s in Eastern Mpondoland popular politics was being shaped by a prevailing conception of egalitarianism and direct forms of democratic

involvement, which stood in opposition to the political practices and structures of the chieftaincy. Thus it is in these early crowd gatherings that we see initial glimpses of the interesting nature of 'leadership' within the context of the Mpondo revolts and the ways in which popular politics functioned so as not to reproduce the power structures of the state and Traditional Authorities systems within their own organisational forms.

Public Meetings and the Crowd

On 30th September 1957 the Magistrate of Mbizana, R.A. Midgely, called for a *Quarterly Meeting of Headmen and People* at the Court House in Mbizana.²⁶⁸ Although there was no expectation on the part of the administration that this meeting would commence any differently from those of the past the reality of the situation would soon reveal itself to mark a radical break in the relationship between the commoners of Eastern Mpondoland and the structures of governance forced upon them by the apartheid state. While these quarterly meetings often were attended by a large number of headmen and sub-chiefs from the district, by the late-1950s, the participation of 'the people' in these forums was usually resisted to a handful of rural elites and very few commoners. However, when Midgely arrived at the Court House he found that a large crowd of about 500 commoners had assembled on the court yard.²⁶⁹

Due to the abnormally large number of commoners who wished to attend the meeting the proceedings had to take place on the grounds at the back of the Court House.²⁷⁰ Despite the disruption of this new outdoor location the magistrate attempted to reinsert the standard bureaucratic procedures of such meetings by introducing himself, explaining his position and authority as a state official, and thereafter welcoming the paramount, sub-chiefs and headmen. After acknowledging himself and the governing rural elites the magistrate gave an opportunity, which he claims to be in line with the 'customary' practices of the Mpondo people, to allow a spokesperson of the 500 commoners to stand up and show his respect and hospitality to the Paramount Chief as well as to Midgely himself as the magistrate.²⁷¹ Yet the so-called 'customary' response the magistrate was expecting never came. After what was

²⁶⁸ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1475, R. A. Midgely to CMT, 'Report on Quarterly meeting: Chiefs, Headmen and People', 2nd October 1957, Ref: N.1/15/4.

²⁶⁹ CMT 3/1475, R. A. Midgely, 'Report on Quarterly meeting: Chiefs, Headmen and People', 2nd October 1957, Ref: N.1/15/4.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

described as an 'absences of the usual applause and an ominous silence' an unknown person from the crowd did stand up.²⁷² However, instead of welcoming and praising the paramount, the magistrate, or any of the other sub-chiefs or headmen, this person '... spoke and in a very aggressive manner asked if their chiefs were going to stand all day while the magistrate spoke'.²⁷³ The chiefs did not respond to this provocation but it had the effect of unleashing the voices of all those in the crowd who had fallen silent to listen to the magistrate's introductory note.

The anonymous person's comment directed at the sub-chiefs and headmen is a significant point to consider. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when public meetings were co-opted by large crowds of commoners in order to express popular discontent it was not usually anonymous people who acted as spokespersons for the communication of popular political opinion.²⁷⁴ As previously stated, in earlier historical periods in Eastern Mpondoland lesser chiefs and headmen were the dominant vehicles, or spokespersons, for the expression of popular political opinion at public meetings.²⁷⁵ A prime example of this is found in the series of meetings held in the 1920s and 1930s in which the agricultural extension schemes, involving the fencing of land and the interrogation of stock numbers, were denounced as it was said to be sure to impact negatively on winter grazing patterns and promote stock limitations which had already started to become a threat to homesteads in Mpondoland by this stage.²⁷⁶ Recalling the discussion in Chapter Two, Beinart has argued that it was precisely because of this ability of certain chiefs and headmen to act as the custodians of popular political opinion that the popular movements which emerged from outside the sphere of the chieftaincy, such as that in East Griqualand during the dipping crisis of the early decades of the twentieth century, did not have a large impact in Mpondoland.²⁷⁷ Just as in the case of 30th September 1957, in these earlier meetings large gatherings of people formed into a crowd with a common set of political concerns and grievances. However, the main difference was that unlike meetings of the past in this instance

²⁷² *Ibid.*

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ Beinart, W. 1982. *The Political Economy of Pondoland 1860 – 1930*. Cambridge University Press: New York, p. 157.

²⁷⁵ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 157.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 86, 156.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, p. 157.

we see that chiefs and headmen were not an exceptional part of the crowd. Those sub-chiefs and headmen who were part of the gathered crowd on 30th September 1957 were not elected as spokespersons nor did they appear to have any influence over the expression of popular political opinion. Instead those who stood with the people did so quietly at the back of the crowd and played no part in dictating or articulating the political sentiments of the collective.²⁷⁸

There was obvious discontent amongst the people in attendance at the meeting. Many had heard rumours that the main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the practical imposition of stabilisation measures, a variation of Betterment and Rehabilitation schemes, which were bitterly opposed by the majority of inhabitants in Eastern Mpondoland.²⁷⁹ In the report sent to the Chief Magistrate of the Transkei detailing the event Midgely states that he believes this rumour was started by the paramount, Botha Singcau, for reasons which are not disclosed.²⁸⁰ As the voices of dissent and rejection shouted out from the crowd at an increasing rate the atmosphere of the meeting became such that those in the official seats of power began to feel fearful for what the crowd may have had planned for them at this meeting.²⁸¹ It was at this point that a group of about 100 commoners armed with sticks, described in the report as an *Impi*, came up the street towards the meeting singing a war cry as they took up a united position at the back of the crowd.²⁸² The commoners were now gaining confidence as a plethora of voices began to shout out slogans of dissatisfaction and frustration with government officials and Tribal Authority members.

A headman of the Isikelo location, Makasonke, stood up and addressed the crowd appealing to them to maintain silence so that the magistrate and the paramount could address them all.²⁸³ However, headman Makasonke's request was met with an uproar of shouting from the crowd and a general demand that the meeting should be moved to the

²⁷⁸ CMT 3/1475, R. A. Midgely, 'Report on Quarterly meeting: Chiefs, Headmen and People', 2nd October 1957, Ref: N.1/15/4.

²⁷⁹ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1475, R. A. Midgely to CMT, 'Further report on Quarterly meeting: Chiefs, Headmen and People', 4th October 1957, Ref: N.1/15/4.

²⁸⁰ CMT 3/1475, R. A. Midgely, 'Further report on Quarterly meeting: Chiefs, Headmen and People', 4th October 1957, Ref: N.1/15/4.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

airfield so as to better accommodate the group of now over 600 people.²⁸⁴ In accordance with a commonly held inability or unwillingness amongst state officials to adapt to organic political situations and break with the procedural and bureaucratic constraints of officialdom, the magistrate refused to move the meeting for a second time and attempted instead, despite constant interjections from members of the crowd, to get through the day's agenda. In a desperate attempt to restore order Midgley informed the crowd that if they did not fall silent then he would simply close the meeting.²⁸⁵ In a remarkable display of discipline and determination to have a meaningful interaction with the state officials present, the crowd restored silence and allowed the magistrate to address the issues of Bantu Authorities and Stabilisation. There is no indication of exactly what was said by the magistrate on these issues but it is stated that once he began to explain the state's intentions for implementing these policies and schemes, 'the uproar and disorder became so bad that the meeting was closed and the crowd was ordered to disperse at about 12.50. p.m.'²⁸⁶

What the archival records of the meeting of September 30th 1957 illuminate is that this state-planned meeting was co-opted by the residents of Mbizana and used as a public platform for one of the numerous public demonstrations of popular disapproval in regard to state socio-agricultural interventionist policies as well as the Bantu Authorities system. Furthermore, the example detailed above is an important indication that the power of the chiefs and headmen to insert themselves at the forefront of popular political expressions had waned by the late-1950s in Eastern Mpondoland. The meeting of 30th September 1957 is just one brief indication of the growing autonomy of popular politics in Eastern Mpondoland as it began to bypass the constraints of the chieftaincy and engage in more direct forms of democracy in which the people demanded to represent themselves and not be represented by existing authorities.

A similar incident to that of September 30th 1958 also took place on January 28th 1960 at the Xolobeni Trading Store near the Myameni river mouth in the Mbizana District.²⁸⁷ On this day the Magistrate of Mbizana, Mr E.M. Warren, the successor of Midgley, had intended

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ CMT 3/1475, R. A. Midgely, 'Report on Quarterly meeting: Chiefs, Headmen and People', 2nd October 1957, Ref: N.1/15/4.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁷ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT/3 1475, E. M. Warren to CMT, 'Report on Mnyameni Coastal Visit', 28th January 1960, Ref: C/0.

to go to the store to meet with the local Headman of the coastal area, Qondiso, in order to discuss a complaint made by a white resident regarding signs of ecological deterioration.²⁸⁸ It is notable that the meeting took place at a trading store and signifies that traders were closely connected to the everyday workings of political authority in the region.

This white resident, Mr Mountjoy, was the owner of a seaside camp on the Myameni River mouth and had complained that the proliferation of commoners ploughing illegally on the river banks was leading to 'shocking' degradation of the soil and producing serious drift sands.²⁸⁹ There were only six people who were aware of the magistrate's intention to make a visit to the Xolobeni Trading Store: Mr. Mountjoy, Bantu Agricultural Officer Mgwatyu, Native Constable Qhali, Demonstrator Mlandu, Chief Gangata, and Headman Qondiso.²⁹⁰ Of the aforementioned people only the first three names mentioned were aware of the purpose of the magistrate's visit. However, by the time Warren arrived in convoy with Mr. Mountjoy and Bantu Agricultural Officer Mgwatyu at the trading store he was met by Headman Qondiso as well as an unexpected group of about 200 commoners standing outside the store requesting to have an audience with the magistrate.²⁹¹ Somehow, news of the magistrate's visit had gotten out and once again commoners would take the opportunity to co-opt the meeting between headman and magistrate and use it as a public platform for the expression of their grievances against the administration.²⁹²

At first the magistrate attempted to take Headman Qondiso aside into the store to have a private conversation about why it was that so many people had come to the store and for what reasons. However, as soon as the two had entered the building the door was thrust open by members of the crowd outside requesting that the magistrate should come back outside and listen to what the people had come to say. The magistrate had no choice but to comply as neither Headman Qondiso nor Bantu Agricultural Officer Mgwatyu were making any efforts to speak to the commoners and restore order.²⁹³ Thus before discussion between the magistrate and the crowd had even begun it is clear that the headman had nothing to do with the popular politics of the crowd. In a report made by Bantu Agricultural Officer Mgwatyu

²⁸⁸ CMT/3 1475, E. M. Warren, 'Report on Mnyameni Coastal Visit', 28th January 1960, Ref: C/O.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

it is stated that once back outside the magistrate told the people that the reason he had come was to 'inspect the road which was bad and which needed repairing'.²⁹⁴ This was a lie and one which was not readily accepted by the commoners who shouted in reply that they *knew* the magistrate had come to the area 'for land matters'. In the magistrate's report he stated that:

I requested them to sit down and appoint a spokesman to tell me what was worrying them. They started to sit down but a young Native about 25 years of age, who, I think wore mine clothes, continued to shout me down. Then all the Natives got to their feet and shouted and crowded round me.²⁹⁵

It is very interesting to consider the fact that the crowd which gathered outside the Xolobeni trading store were fully aware that the magistrate had come to the area because of Rehabilitation. It is interesting because it implies that the organic information networks established amongst dissident/rebellious commoners were highly effective and sophisticated even prior to the co-ordination and organisation of popular politics that came with the emergence of the mountain movement in mid-1960. Furthermore, the refusal of the crowd to elect a spokesperson to represent their views in the context of these co-opted public meetings is an indication of the crowd's rejection of the limited forms of democratic involvement allowed to them under the colonial and apartheid controlled system of rural governance as well as a popular preference for more meaningful participatory forms of democracy. Although, and as shall be discussed later in the thesis, the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts did not involve a complete rejection of the use of spokespersons as a political tactic, it did involve a refusal to do so under the terms and conditions set by the state administration or the traditional authorities. Thus, while spokespersons were nominated in the context of mountain meetings (see Chapter Four) in the public meetings of the early stages of the Mpondo revolts, when called upon to elect representative spokespersons the crowds gathered most often refused to do so. Although this tactic is often viewed as a strategy to avoid the persecution of leaders, this raises interesting questions with regards to the ways in which commoners conceived of political representation.

After receiving an onslaught of verbal critique from the crowd the magistrate left the Xolobeni Trading Store and informed the crowd that if they had a complaint they could follow

²⁹⁴ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1475, N. Mgwatyu, Bantu Agricultural Officer, 'Report on Mnyameni Coastal Visit', 28th January 1960, Ref: C/O.

²⁹⁵ CMT 3/1475, E. M. Warren, 'Report on Mnyameni Coastal Visit', 28th January 1960, Ref: C/O.

standard procedures dictated by the administration and make arrangements to write a letter or come see him in his office in Mbizana town.²⁹⁶ In the months following the Xolobeni incident in January 1960, magistrate offices throughout Eastern Mpondoland received a number of letters, some sent without an author's name and others written on behalf of entire locations, which contained clear complaints against the Bantu Authorities system as well as the state's interventionist agricultural policies. One such letter stored in the archives, which was sent by an anonymous author on behalf of the Ntsimbini Location to the magistrate of Mbizana, reads as follows:

What do you want done? The Men of the meeting are asking this question. Are we offending when we speak to you? Because the Chief Magistrate advised us to speak to you when we have complaints. Now you are sending the [police] vans out. Do you want people to burn one another by sending the van, are you acting on the Chief Magistrate's instructions?²⁹⁷

In the majority of cases the letters were used by the state as a means to try and pinpoint so-called 'ringleaders' of the unrest and there is no evidence in the archives of any attempt on the part of the administration to take seriously the content of these letters let alone act upon them in order to ameliorate the challenges faced by the commoners in Eastern Mpondoland.²⁹⁸ However, what is particularly significant about the sending of the anonymous letters is that it is a further indication of the ways in which the expression of popular political opinion was increasingly bypassing the sphere of the chieftaincy and being taken into the hands of the people themselves.

A key insight of the *Subaltern Studies Collective* with regards to subaltern political praxes is the multiple attempts made by oppressed peoples to first go to official spaces, or make use of official channels, in order to have their grievances known to and ameliorated by the state. It is only once these attempts to reason with power on its own terms had failed that people tended to seek out and create their own autonomous spaces for the purpose of conducting a popular politics of resistance.²⁹⁹ However, the emancipatory praxis of Mpondo

²⁹⁶ CMT 3/1475, N. Mgwatyu, 'Report on Mnyameni Coastal Visit', 28th January 1960, Ref: C/0.

²⁹⁷ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/48, 'Anonymous letter to Magistrate of Bizana', 10th May 1960, Ref: N. 7/14/3.

²⁹⁸ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, 'Unrest in Izilangwe and Isikelo Location: District of Bizana', 23rd December 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/1.

²⁹⁹ Guha, R. 1983. *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*. Oxford University Press: Delhi, p.2.

commoners forces us to pay close attention to the way in which subalterns approached and made use of official spaces and approached the state. Public mass meetings and (anonymous) letters indicate that while commoners aimed to make use of official spaces, they did not necessarily accept the legitimacy of official channels, or the political authority of officials. On the contrary, commoners sought to engage – and indeed challenge – officials directly and on their own terms and, in so doing, they either deliberately bent or broke accepted codes of conduct and rules of engagement.

In looking at the co-option of public meetings and the expression of popular discontent in the early stages of the Mpondo revolts it is clear that the gathering of large crowds was an essential aspect of this mode of political engagement. The term ‘crowd’ is one with a deep analytical genealogy especially within the school of social history. E. P. Thompson and others initially adopted the term ‘crowd’ as part of a broader theoretical challenge against the common tendency amongst academics to use the term ‘mob’ and in so doing promote ‘a spasmodic view of popular history’.³⁰⁰

Drawing theoretically from the work of Thompson it can be argued that during the early stages of the Mpondo revolts popular politics was to an extent defined by the deliberate use of the crowd as an instrument of pressure on authorities. However, it is important to note that unlike many of the instances in eighteenth-century Britain detailed by Thompson in which the crowd was used as an instrument of resistance ‘by persons “above” or apart from the crowd’.³⁰¹ Thompson’s theorisation of the crowd does not provide an accurate framework for the crowd during the Mpondo revolts.³⁰² The examples detailed in this chapter demonstrate that the crowd during the early stages of the Mpondo revolts was a self-conscious political entity which was not dictated in either form or political content by people or institutions outside of itself. It is necessary to engage in an analysis of these crowd gatherings because such an interrogation can tell us much about popular conceptions of representation and collective power, as well as provide insights into historical manifestations of emancipatory politics. This is particularly the case because it is in these crowd gatherings

³⁰⁰ Thompson E. P. 1971. ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’. *Past and Present*, No. 50, p. 76; and Thompson, E. P. 1966. *The Making of the English Working Class*. Vintage Books: New York, pp. 62 – 63.

³⁰¹ Thompson, E. P. ‘The Making of the English Working Class’, p. 63.

³⁰² *Ibid*, p.63.

of the late-1950s and early-1960 that popular commitment to notions of participatory democracy, self-representation and egalitarianism first come to the fore as defining aspects of the popular political history of the Mpondo revolts.

To describe the actions of crowds in Mpondoland during the late-1950s and early-1960 as ‘spontaneous’ and ‘isolated’ outbursts of collective anger, as some state officials at the time tended to, would be misleading.³⁰³ Despite the fact that these self-conscious and politically active crowds appeared at different times, different spaces and under different immediate contexts, I argue that it is necessary for us to understand them as connected. Drawing from the theoretical insights in the work of social historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Redicker, in their book *The Many-Headed Hydra*, I argue that what connected these instances in which the crowd forced itself onto the political landscape of Mpondoland was a certain understanding and mode of political praxis.³⁰⁴ In other words, these crowd co-opted public meetings were not ‘spontaneous’ in as much as such platforms had been used for the expression of popular discontent and political opinion for a very long time. The difference in the early stages of the Mpondo revolts is that the crowd was no longer an instrument used by chiefs and headmen as a means to jockey for power, privilege and status within the existing structures of rural governance.

Furthermore, to describe these early political formations of the Mpondo revolts as ‘isolated’ would be to elide the important fact that they were connected across time and space by a common set of popular political notions and practices. This is evidenced by the fact that these early political formations in Eastern Mpondoland can all be seen as sharing a number of defining political features. First they took the form of crowd gatherings in which the people themselves, as opposed to chiefs or headmen, confronted the administration directly and collectively. Second the crowds generally refused to elect representative spokespeople when instructed to do so by state officials. Despite this unwillingness to elect spokespersons at the request of the administration these crowds were still able to maintain high levels of self-discipline whilst often also deploying tactics of mass intimidation usually

³⁰³ See for example Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Bizana, ‘Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland’, 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

³⁰⁴ Linebaugh, P. and Redicker, M. 2013. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Beacon Press: Boston.

through shouting and gesturing.³⁰⁵ Moreover, the various crowd gatherings of the early stages of the Mpondo revolts all seem to have taken on the form of a self-conscious entity, the members of which were committed to a notion of egalitarianism which in practice meant that all those who were part of the crowd had to abandon their socio-political positions of power and privilege and join the commoners who were the majority as *equals* in the space of this collective. These are just a few of the most obvious points which indicate that the gathering of crowds in different times and spaces during the early stages of the Mpondo revolts was a phenomenon which, politically speaking, was far from isolated.

Trying to provide a clear depiction of the demographic composition of the crowd as it manifested in different times and spaces in Mpondoland is a difficult task – especially in relation to the issue of its ethnic and class composition. Taking into consideration the general demographics of Eastern Mpondoland at the time of the revolts it is likely that in terms of ethnicity these crowds were far from homogeneous. The tendency of the Mpondo chiefdom to absorb large groups of people during the nineteenth century meant that the region of Mpondoland by the late twentieth century was not composed of people of one ‘tribal’ or ‘ethnic’ identity but several.³⁰⁶ Beinart argues that during the second phase of Faku’s paramountcy he played a large role in defining the social composition of the Mpondo chiefdom on the eastern side of the Mzimvubu River.³⁰⁷ In order to protect the Great Place he played a large role in organising settlement patterns so that ‘major Mpondo groups’ – those who fled with Faku across the river during the Mfecane – were placed in a circle formation around Qaukeni and large immigrant groups who had been absorbed into the chiefdom were settled in an outer ring farthest from the Great Place.³⁰⁸ According to Beinart some of the most notable of these immigrant groups were the Nci, Cwera, imiZizi and Cele who each had their own chiefs and more often than not in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were able to maintain a relative level of autonomy from the authority of the paramountcy – an issue which became an important part of chiefly politics during this period.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁵ CMT 3/1475, N. Mgwatyu, ‘Report on Mnyameni Coastal Visit’, 28th January 1960, Ref: C/0.

³⁰⁶ Beinart, W. ‘The Political Economy of Pondoland’, p. 11.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p. 11.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p. 11.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

The political changes brought about by annexation, the demarcation of districts and locations, and the transformation of the chieftaincy into an instrument of indirect rule, all acted so as to blur the lines of consistency between ethnicity and settlement patterns in Mpondoland, but not to destroy them entirely.³¹⁰ Thus by the 1950s locations in Eastern Mpondoland may have been spoken of by the administration as if they were made up of inhabitants of one particular 'clan'; it is unlikely that complete ethnic homogeneity existed in any part of the region. The significance of this for understanding the demographic composition of the crowds of the early stages of the Mpondo revolts is that because these collectives often consisted of inhabitants from more than one location, it is likely that they would have been ethnically diverse. Furthermore, even those crowd gatherings which were attended by the residents of only one location the demographic composition of Mpondoland society itself tells us that it would have been extremely unlikely for these popular political formations to be ethnically homogeneous. In addition to this extrapolation from the general demographics there is also primary evidence in the form of archival material that testifies to the ethnically diverse composition of popular political formations during the Mpondo revolts, which will be discussed further in Chapter Four.³¹¹

The class composition of these crowds during the late-1950s and early-1960 is also a factor worth considering. At first glance the class composition of these crowds could be said to have been made up of members of the poorest homesteads in Mpondoland. This conclusion is easily reached because it was the poorest homesteads which would be most drastically affected by the implementation of Rehabilitation measures under the Bantu Authorities system and it would therefore make sense that they would be the ones to form crowds as part of a resistance campaign.³¹² However, the socio-economic composition of the crowds of the early stages of the Mpondo revolts were not solely made up of the rural poor. The general consensus amongst historians is that the primary participants in the revolts were migrant workers.³¹³ In Mpondoland by the 1950s the vast majority of homesteads were

³¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 12.

³¹¹ See for example Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1478, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 'Unrest Nqabeni and Ntlenzi Locations: Flagstaff District', 16th May 1960, Ref: N1/9/2; and Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, R. A. Midgley to CMT, 'Pondoland Unrest', 20th April 1961, Ref: 42/G.

³¹² Chaskalson, M. 1987. 'Rural resistance in the 1940s and 1950s'. In *Africa Perspective*. Vol. 1, No. 5-6, p. 48.

³¹³ Pieterse, J. 2012. 'Reading and Writing the Mpondo Revolts'. In Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo revolts after fifty years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, pp. 55 – 56.

dependent upon both small-scale subsistence farming as well as cash wages in order to sustain themselves. This meant that it was not just the poor homesteads which needed to send family members to the mines and other industries to earn a wage, but the majority of rural homesteads in Mpondoland.³¹⁴ Beinart argues that as a result of this commonality: '[n]o simple division between rich and poor peasant households, nor between peasant and proletarians, emerged [in Mpondoland] as the process of incorporation became more advanced in the early decades of the twentieth century'.³¹⁵ Although processes of differentiation undoubtedly changed and became more entrenched in Mpondo society as the twentieth century progressed, scholars such as Copelyn have argued that by the time of the revolts in Eastern Mpondoland there was still not much which could meaningfully separate the lived experience, aspirations and grievances of the poorest of inhabitants and those who some historians have classified as part of the 'middle-peasantry'.³¹⁶

In analysing the demographic composition of the crowds of the early stages of the Mpondo revolts it is also important to note that they were often made up of both men and women. This is in contrast to the mountain meetings which emerged at a later stage in the revolts, which most historians consider to have been strictly limited to male participants. What the above discussion regarding the demographic composition of the crowd has attempted to show is that popular politics during the early stages of the Mpondo revolts was spearheaded by diverse groups of people which can be likened to Linebaugh and Redicker's description of the 'motely crews' that inhabited the pirate ships of the Atlantic during the eighteenth century.³¹⁷ However, perhaps the most important insight pertaining to the membership of these crowds was the fact that regardless of any person's social status, political power, economic wealth, and ethnic or religious background, the collective commitment to direct forms of democratic participation and a notion of egalitarianism which defined these crowds politically meant that all participants joined and remained in the collective on equal terms.

Acts of Sabotage

³¹⁴ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 4.

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 4.

³¹⁶ See for example Copelyn, J. A. 1974. *The Mpondo revolts 1960*. Unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand.

³¹⁷ Linebaugh, P. and Redicker, M. 'The Many-Headed Hydra', p. 163.

As stated at the outset of this chapter the gathering of crowds and the co-option of public meetings was a popular political tactic which was usually accompanied by covert acts of sabotage. These acts of sabotage were carried out on government property and infrastructure associated with Betterment schemes and Bantu Authorities. Specific examples include the cutting down of telephone poles and fences, the destruction of dip tanks, and the blockading of roads to name just a few.³¹⁸ Such acts of sabotage had become widespread in all of the former reserves during the twentieth century; however, it was primarily in the early stages of the Mpondo revolts that it became a defining feature of popular political engagement with the state in Eastern Mpondoland.

On the 16th February 1960, almost 20 days after the Xolobeni Trading Store demonstration, two white members of the South African police force were sent to the area in order to collect statements from certain witnesses for the impending trial against the three so-called 'ringleaders' of the demonstration.³¹⁹ The names of the people who informers had told the police were the brains behind the operation at Xolobeni were Saka Matini, Mapindisa Malondo and Ntsakantsaka Masemzimi.³²⁰ Once the police had taken a statement from the coloured shop assistant who worked at the trading store, and who was present on 28th January 1960, the two officers got into their police van and started to make their way back to the station in Mbizana town. However, on the way back to Mbizana the policemen came across an obstacle which would become a common feature of the Eastern Mpondoland landscape for the next two years – a large ditch which had been skilfully dug across the entire width of the road.³²¹ As the police slowed down to approach the ditch a large group of commoners emerged from the surrounding cover and began to encircle the van. As the policemen attempted to manoeuvre the vehicle around the ditch one man, identified as Mzanazo Sqwayana, ran forward and attacked the van with his assegai, throwing it forcefully

³¹⁸ 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

³¹⁹ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT/3 1475, E. M. Warren, 'Complaint Regarding Drift Sands and Illegal Ploughing at Myameni River Mouth: District of Bizana', 19th February 1960, Ref: C. 32.

³²⁰ CMT/3 1475, E. M. Warren, 'Complaint Regarding Drift Sands and Illegal Ploughing at Myameni River Mouth: District of Bizana', 19th February 1960, Ref: C. 32.

³²¹ *Ibid.*

at the outer body work of the car.³²² Neither of the officers in the van was injured and they were able to drive the damaged van back to Mbizana town where they arrived at 6.15 p.m.³²³

An hour after the officers had arrived the police station received a phone call from Mr McClure, the owner of the Mgungu Trading Station situated roughly five kilometres from the Mnyameni River mouth, stating that one of his black staff members had warned him 'to vacate his store immediately because the Natives in the Location were setting everything alight and destroying property'.³²⁴ Upon receiving this report and hearing of the troubles experienced by the two officers earlier that day the station commander at Mbizana frantically tried to contact the district commandant of the South African Police at Kokstad. Recognising the urgency of the situation, particularly the threat to white owned property which seems to have been the primary concern of the apartheid police in the Transkei during this period, the district commandant at Kokstad ordered for the immediate mobilisation of a group of police under the command of Captian Girande to go to Mbizana to quell the potential danger.³²⁵ The police party from Kokstad arrived during the night but all appeared quite in Mbizana town and the surrounding areas.³²⁶

The next day, 17th February 1960, the magistrate accompanied the police to Xolobeni Trading Store expecting to see evidence of the mass destruction Mr McClure warned them about the night before.³²⁷ However, on the way to Xolobeni the magistrate made contact with the trader at Zangotshe Store, situated about 19 kilometres from Xolobeni, who said that he had been going about his usual business both that morning and yesterday and had no inclination that there was any trouble to be expected from the residents of Mbizana.³²⁸ This unexpected state of normality was further confirmed when the magistrate and police convoy passed the stock inspector returning from his duties at a dipping tank roughly eight kilometres from Xolobeni. The stock inspector informed the magistrate that dipping that day had proceeded completely normally and none of the people who had been at the tank told him what had happened with the police the previous day. He only learnt about the incident and

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ *Ibid.*

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

why the police vans were actively roaming the area from people on his walk back from the dipping tank towards Mbizana town. As the magistrate continued his police escorted journey he noted that 'the natives were proceeding about their normal business and there was no evidence that anything untoward had occurred. [T]here was no evidence that anything whatsoever had been burnt'.³²⁹ The convoy proceeded to the Great Place of Chief Gangata, the head of the Amadiba Tribal Authority, however it was discovered that the chief had already left to attend the installation ceremony of Sub-Chief Jongilizwe Ntola. Having failed to make contact with Chief Gangata the magistrate and the police went to the Xolobeni Trading Store where the magistrate had been insulted during the previous month. As was the case with the Zangonthe Store, the white trader at Xolobeni was conducting business as usual and was unaware of any intent on the part of the local residents to interfere with his trading store when the police and magistrate arrived to question him on 17th February 1960.³³⁰

While the white trader knew nothing of the confrontation the police had had after leaving his store the previous day, nor of the rumours of violence reported to the police by Mr McClure, his shop assistant was more aware of what was happening amongst the residents of the area. Without providing any specific details the shop assistant informed the police that 'the Natives at Mnyameni River Mouth had gathered "on the sand" and that they had arranged "to talk nicely to us at first" and that later they would attack us'.³³¹ It is unclear when exactly the people had gathered at Mnyameni River mouth, it may have been prior to the interception of the police van the previous day, during the night time, or on the morning of that very day. By the time the police convoy had arrived at an area near the Mnyameni River mouth there was no sign of a group of people on the sand. The police made contact with a woman at a nearby kraal who said that the men were attending a meeting at the headman's kraal. Upon arrival at the headman's kraal they found Sub-Headman Tyungu addressing a crowd of about 65 men sitting on the ground.³³²

The commanding officer Captian Girande requested three representatives to come forward for a discussion. Sub-Headman Tyungu and two other members of the meeting

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ *Ibid.*

³³² *Ibid.*

stepped forward and told the Captain that they had no knowledge of the occurrences of the previous day and they had only arrived on the spot after it was all over.³³³ The three representatives stated that the reason they had gathered at the headman's kraal was because the people had heard that Price Smith, an employee of the Provincial Roads Department, had recently been prosecuted for ploughing land within 50 yards of the Mzamba River bank.³³⁴ As a result of this prosecution commoners residing near the Mnyameni River mouth became fearful that they too would have their land taken away in the name of government agricultural interventionist projects to maintain the integrity of the river banks. It is reported by the magistrate that Price Smith and Forest Guard Stanley Bauer were the ones who 'whipped up the feelings of the Natives at Mnyameni River Mouth'.³³⁵ In a feeble attempt to address the very serious concerns of the crowd the magistrate took Sub-Headman Tyungu aside and informed him 'that if it was the case that someone had been going amongst them telling them that all their lands would be confiscated, such a story was completely false'.³³⁶ However, less than a year later the magistrate of Mbizana and the CMT begun laying the foundational plans for the forced removal of families from the coastal area of Mbizana.

The narrative of events following the crowd's intervention at the Xolobeni Trading Store on 28th January 1960, as detailed above, holds a number of important insights pertaining to the conceptions and praxes of popular politics during the early stages of the Mpondo revolts. It is important to think of the feature of strategic, and at times impenetrable, barricades on roads throughout the locations of Eastern Mpondoland in terms of the centrality of notions of the commons to popular politics. Drawing on the work of Beinart it was argued in Chapter Two that popular politics in Mpondoland has historically been concerned with the defence of the commons and acts of commoning.³³⁷ By the early stages of the Mpondo revolts meetings and initiatives on the part of the administration aimed at the implementation of Betterment and Rehabilitation measures were often seen as posing a direct threat to the preserve of the commons and the popularly held belief that every homestead had the right to access land and grazing. When the barricade was erected on 16th February it was undoubtedly an attempt by the residents of the Mnyameni River mouth area

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

³³⁷ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p.6.

to prevent the intervention of the state and the threat of forced removal it entailed under the justification of 'saving the soil'.³³⁸ The roadblock was used as a tactic to frustrate and stall the administration's attempts to arrest members of the crowd assumed by the administration to have been the 'ringleaders' as well as to provide a physical defence of homesteads in the coastal areas continued access to land, grazing and productive resources held in common. Efforts to frustrate the administration also manifested in the sabotage of telephone poles and wires throughout both Eastern and Western Mpondoland.

The practice of chopping down telephone poles and the cutting of telephone wires was a tactic taken up in almost every location of Eastern Mpondoland during the year 1960.³³⁹ In the latter half of 1961 the administration estimated that in the Qaza location of Flagstaff alone over R1 034, 48 worth of damage to telephone poles and wires was accumulated during the revolts.³⁴⁰ The residents of Qaza complained that they had collectively been responsible for the sabotage of only 36 poles in total and that the remainder of the damage had been done by residents of the neighbouring Ntlenzi location.³⁴¹ However, such technicalities did not prevent the Bantu Affairs Commissioner from advising them to pay the fine voluntarily, as many other locations had already opted to do, or face the potentially more detrimental consequences of having the collective fine forcefully imposed upon them by the state.³⁴² The sabotage and often destruction of dip tanks by means of burning was another important tactic of the Mpondo revolts which appeared in its early stages and persisted in practice throughout their duration. Recalling Chapter Two, the destruction of dip tanks was another widespread feature of rural resistance throughout the various reserves during the twentieth century.³⁴³ Thus it is unsurprising that it, along with the cutting down of fences, became generalised tactics of sabotage during the Mpondo revolts.³⁴⁴ However, unlike government infrastructure such as dipping tanks and fences which can be seen as directly relating to state socio-

³³⁸ CMT/3 1475, E. M. Warren, 'Complaint Regarding Drift Sands and Illegal Ploughing at Myameni River Mouth: District of Bizana', 19th February 1960, Ref: C. 32.

³³⁹ 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

³⁴⁰ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT/3 1478, 'Minutes of meeting held in Qasa location', 7th August 1961, No. 24/2/2, Ref: Z. 14.

³⁴¹ CMT/3 1478, 'Minutes of meeting held in Qasa location', 7th August 1961, No. 24/2/2, Ref: Z. 14.

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 51.

³⁴⁴ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1-BIZ 6-47, 'Dipping Sheds Destroyed by Fire', Bizana District, 16th November 1960, No. 42/1, Ref: C. 9/6/B.

agricultural interventionist practices, particularly Betterment and Rehabilitation measures, the sabotage of telephone poles and wires was directly related to the ability of the administration to successfully operate as an authority in Mpondoland. The significance of this is that it indicates that the early tactics of engagement, such as public meetings and acts of sabotage, were informed by a popular political subjectivity characterised by a staunch critique of both the state and so-called traditional governance structures as well as state interventions which were believed to increase enclosure and promote racialised private land ownership.

Returning from the issue of sabotage and physical barriers to that of the gathering of crowds it is important to note that autonomous meetings of the people which were happening outside of the presence of state officials were also a widespread feature of the political landscape of Mpondoland during the 1950s.³⁴⁵ While there is not much by way of description of these early autonomous meetings in the state archives there is evidence to suggest that issue of control over meetings and gatherings in the Transkei had become a concern of the Department of Native Affairs in Pretoria since as early as 1953.³⁴⁶ In Mpondoland these autonomous meetings, held at a distance from the state, were important precursors to the mountain meetings which would become a defining feature of the Mpondo revolts during the early-1960s.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to begin to trace the emancipatory political aspects of the Mpondo revolts within the context of the late 1950s and first months of 1960 in Eastern Mpondoland. I have referred to this period as the early stages of the revolts and have argued that during this time popular politics generally took the form of crowd gatherings in which commoners, as opposed to chiefs or headmen, confronted the state and Traditional Authorities directly and collectively. Within the chapter I have argued that it is in these crowd gatherings of the late-1950s and early-1960 that a popular commitment to notions of participatory democracy, self-representation and egalitarianism first come to the fore as defining aspects of the popular political history of the Mpondo revolts. Furthermore, it was shown that it is in these early crowd gatherings that we see initial glimpses of the interesting

³⁴⁵ 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

³⁴⁶ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/61, J. P. Dodds, Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 'Control of Meetings or Gatherings in Native Areas', 4th July 1958, Ref: N. 1/9/2.

nature of 'leadership' within the context of the Mpondo revolts and the ways in which popular politics functioned so as not to reproduce the power structures of the state and Traditional Authorities systems within their own organisational forms.

In addition to the crowd gatherings and public demonstrations of popular disapproval this chapter has also explored the acts of covert sabotage and the use of physical barriers as significant political praxes of the early stages of the Mpondo revolts. It was argued that the roadblock was used as a tactic by commoners to frustrate the administration's attempts to arrest members of the crowd (assumed by the administration to have been the 'ringleaders') as well as to provide a physical defence of commoners' continued access to land, grazing and productive resources held in common. Efforts to frustrate the administration also manifested in the sabotage of telephone poles and wires throughout both Eastern and Western Mpondoland. The defence of the commons and a rejection of autocratic practices by members of the chieftaincy were significant aspects of the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts and have been shown to have had a long history as such in the area (see Chapter Two). However, the central argument of this chapter is that by the late-1950s in Eastern Mpondoland popular politics was being shaped by a popular conception of egalitarianism and direct forms of democratic involvement which stood in opposition to the practices and structures of the chieftaincy. As such chiefs and headmen no longer acted, as they had in the past, as the vehicles for the organisation and expression of popular politics. The examples detailed in this chapter demonstrate that the crowd during the early stages of the Mpondo revolts was a self-conscious political entity which was not dictated to, in either form or political content, by people or institutions outside of itself.

In the following chapter I will seek to show how during March 1960 the mountain movement emerged as a primary driver of popular politics within the context of the Mpondo revolts in Eastern Mpondoland. In so doing I will explore how the mountain movement developed organically out of the crowd gatherings and covert acts of sabotage of the late 1950s and early 1960 and adopted from them the collective commitment to egalitarian and participatory forms of democratic political engagement and used it as a basis to establish itself as autonomous political authority in Eastern Mpondoland.

Chapter Four:

The Mountain Movement: Egalitarianism and Emancipatory Politics

Introduction

As demonstrated in the foregoing chapters popular political formations had developed and begun to challenge state officials and members of the Tribal Authorities system in Mpondoland long before the consolidation of the mountain movement in March 1960. In fact, the practice of meeting on mountains – a defining feature of the mountain movement – can be traced back to the earliest years of the 1900s in the former Transkei and, importantly, can also be seen as carried over by migrant workers all over the country, but most significantly, to the mines on the East Rand during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Labour historian Dunbar Moodie demonstrates how, during the rock drill operator (RDO) strike at Western Deep Mine on the East Rand in 1973, roughly 200 migrant RDOs chose to gather collectively on a hill-top near the mine and demanded to engage directly with the mine management regarding their grievances.³⁴⁷ The decision taken by mine workers and community members at Marikana in 2012 to conduct their strike without trade union representation from the site of a hill-top/koppie just outside Lonmin mines is witness to the fact that the practice of using mountains as a site of subaltern politics has, and continues to be, a salient feature of the political landscape of South Africa. Interestingly, during the strike at Marikana many of the songs sung as part of resistance campaigns and mountain meetings during the Mpondo revolts were also heard amongst the striking mine workers and community members on the koppie in 2012.³⁴⁸

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an exploration of the political form and content of the mountain movement. After the initial public meetings and act of sabotage, the consolidation of the mountain movement marked the next important phase of the Revolt and would prove to be one of the key drivers of the Revolt. By May of 1960 the mountain movement had established multiple branches throughout all the districts of Eastern Mpondoland and is estimated to have had by this stage a membership of over 180 000

³⁴⁷ Moodie, D., 1994, *Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration*, Berkeley, Los Angeles and California: University of California Press, p. 245.

³⁴⁸ Beinart, W. 2014. 'A Century of Migrancy from Mpondoland' in Deluis, Philips and Rankin-Smith (eds.) *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds, 1800-2014*. Wits University Press: Johannesburg, p. 72.

men.³⁴⁹ Although there are no clear statistics it is known that after the Ngquza Hill massacre on 6th June 1960, the mountain movements membership rose even more and further branches were established throughout the region. It appears as though the mountain movement also had a broad support base and following from the majority of women in Eastern Mpondoland in addition to the men who attended mountain meetings directly.³⁵⁰ The extremely popular nature of the mountain movement is evidenced in the effectivity of their campaigns of resistance, such as the mass boycott of November and December 1960 (which will be discussed in Chapter Seven), which would not have been possible without the support or consent of the majority of inhabitants in Eastern Mpondoland. In keeping with the overarching focus of the thesis this chapter is primarily concerned with interrogating those political features of the mountain movement which can be considered as emancipatory. In so doing this chapter shall focus on the egalitarian and inclusive nature of the mountain movement as well as the extent to which it was conditioned by a collective political subjectivity which believed in direct democratic participation and a complete rejection of existing structures of authority.

In Chapter Three it was argued that by the late-1950s in Eastern Mpondoland popular politics was being driven by a self-conscious and collective conception of egalitarianism and direct forms of democratic involvement which stood in opposition to the type of representation practised under the institution of the chieftaincy. The dominant expression of this self-conscious and relatively autonomous popular politics came in the form of crowd gatherings at public meetings in which commoner members of the crowd (as opposed to chiefs and headmen) articulated a collective critique and denouncement of the apartheid state and its associated institutions and agents of indirect rule. I argued that it is in these early crowd gatherings that we see initial glimpses of the emancipatory political aspects of the Mpondo revolts. Within this chapter I argue that during March 1960 the mountain movement emerged and replaced earlier forms of crowd gatherings as the primary driver of the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts. However, the word 'replaced' may be somewhat misleading. It is perhaps more accurate to suggest that the mountain movement developed organically

³⁴⁹ Lodge, T. 1983. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg, p. 279.

³⁵⁰ See for example: Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1475, Contact Article, 'Pondos Sear "No Retreat"', 10th September 1960, Ref: Unknown; and Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/61, Mrs Mary Mpande 'Complaint about Wycliffe Mpande that he has been detained in jail' to E. M. Warren, Magistrate of Bizana, 6th February 1961, Ref: N.1/9/2/1.

out of the crowd gatherings and covert acts of sabotage, which were the drivers of popular politics during earlier stages of the revolts.

From the crowd gatherings of the early stages of the revolts the mountain movement adopted the collective commitment to egalitarian and participatory forms of democratic political engagement and used it as a basis to establish itself as an autonomous political authority in Eastern Mpondoland. However, it is only by understanding the commoners of Eastern Mpondoland as self-conscious agents of their own political participation in the Mpondo revolts that the emancipatory political aspects of this moment of popular politics can be appreciated.

Drawing on what will be discussed in Chapter Eight, it is important to keep in mind that the sources stored in the state archive pertaining to the mountain movement have been carefully constructed to reflect state official's subjectivities and interpretation of both the 'rebel movement' and the revolts more broadly.³⁵¹ It is thus necessary in this chapter to engage in what historians refer to as reading 'against the archival grain' in order to illuminate aspects of the mountain movement's political praxes which can be understood as emancipatory.

Within this chapter I will attempt to draw on both archival sources and secondary literature in order to argue that the emancipatory features of the mountain movement were such that they fundamentally shaped the political form and content of the movement in ways that distinguished it from the state, the chieftaincy, urban-based national liberation organisations and political parties. Historians have acknowledged that amongst the commoners of Eastern Mpondoland the institution of the chieftaincy had become so fundamentally discredited that they collectively were never likely to reproduce its structures and practices within their own political formations during the revolts.³⁵² As such the members of the mountain movement were compelled to create a movement premised on politics which was different from that of both the state and the chieftaincy. The purpose of this chapter is to interrogate what that politics looked like in the space of the mountain and how it functioned in the context of Eastern Mpondoland during the year 1960. Furthermore, by

³⁵¹ Stoler, A. 2002. 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance' in *Archival Science*. No. 2.

³⁵² Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 279.

emphasising the influence of certain emancipatory principles on the political structure of the mountain movement I intend to contribute to existing analyses put forth by historians and suggest that the mountain movement can be seen as having taken on a relatively decentralised and non-hierarchical form. As such it can be seen as distinct in its form and structures from urban-based national liberation organisations and political parties in addition to both the chieftaincy and the apartheid state.

Mountain Meetings and Peoples Courts

Following the assault of the Tribal Authorities Councillors at chief Mhlabuvelile's Great Place on 9th March 1960, to be discussed further in Chapter Five, the Isikelo location of Mbizana became a site of widespread popular political gatherings and demonstrations which drew in commoners from many locations in the district and some from as far as the Harding district in Natal. During this period in Isikelo, location-popular politics expressed itself in a myriad of different forms and tactics such as mass marches, pickets, acts of sabotage, the erection of defensive barriers on roads, and more. It was within this context in Isikelo location that mountains emerged as the dominant space in which men gathered to conduct a popular politics of resistance and thereby establish a new political authority in Eastern Mpondoland.³⁵³

The practice of holding meetings on mountains is one which has a long and established history dating back to precolonial times, not only in Mpondoland, but in many areas of the former Transkei.³⁵⁴ On a spiritual level, mountains were seen as places with connections to the ancestors and thus were usually used as sites for the performance of certain rituals in rural African societies.³⁵⁵ However, in certain historical periods of social and political unrest in Mpondoland the significance of mountains was altered as they became important sites for the collective conceptualisation and practical development of popular politics at a distance from discredited authorities.³⁵⁶ One example of this was between the years 1918 and 1920 in the district of Bulhoek during which time a mountain called Ntabelanga became the primary

³⁵³ Drew, A. 2012. Govan Mbeki's 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, pp. 75 – 76.

³⁵⁴ Drew, A. 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', p. 76.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 76.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 76.

site of the Israelite movement.³⁵⁷ According to Monica Hunter in the space of Ntabelanga the Israelite movement under the leadership of Enoch Mgijima anticipated the day on which it was believed that God would force the Europeans into the sea and free the African people from colonial domination.³⁵⁸ During the two years spent occupying the mountain the Israelites engaged in a series of confrontations with the police and in May 1920 the movement was broken when the police massacred an estimated 163 people and injured 125 more in the space of the mountain.³⁵⁹ As stated above, during the Mpondo revolts mountains once again appeared on the historical canvas as crucial sites of popular politics in the form of the mountain movement.

After the events of 9th March 1960 the practice of holding mountain meetings took place on a daily basis in Isikelo location. Whilst these mountain meetings initially took place during the day; after the burning of the kraal belonging to the popularly despised chairman of the district authority Saul Mabude on 20th March 1960, the practice of holding mountain meetings commonly took place at night.³⁶⁰ From its inception within the Isikelo location the practice of holding mountain meetings spread throughout the district of Mbizana and into the wider Eastern Mpondoland region and I argue that the mountain movement began to emerge as a kind of decentralised coalition of multiple branches united by commonly held political principles and practices. Sources in the archives suggest that it was not uncommon for regular mountain meetings during the revolts in 1960 to consist of upwards of four or five thousand participants.³⁶¹ I argue that the extremely popular nature of the mountain movement, as seen in its principle mode of mountain meetings, must be attributed in part to the socio-economically and ethnically inclusive nature of the movement.

There is evidence in the archives which suggest that much like the crowd gatherings of the early stages of the Mpondo revolts, the ethnic composition of the mountain movement was far from homogeneous. Often mountain meetings included residents of up to three or four different locations and even those which were comprised of residents from just one

³⁵⁷ Hunter, M. 1961. *Reaction to Conquest*. Oxford University Press: London, p. 563.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 563.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 564.

³⁶⁰ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Bizana, 'Further Report on Isikelo Tribal Authority: District of Bizana', 26th March 1960, Ref: 42/1.

³⁶¹ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1478, Mr. K. H. Wicks, 'Statement on attendance of rebel meeting: District of Flagstaff', 4th January 1961, Ref: 42/5.

location were still extremely unlikely to have been consisting of people from one so-called 'clan' alone. A report sent from the magistrate of Flagstaff to the Chief Magistrate of the Transkei in May 1960 is particularly illuminating in this regard:

I have to inform you that on 22. 4. 1960 the residents of Nqabeni Location caused the Headman MHLABANGULO to flee. They also burnt the kraals of two Bantu in the area. The residents of Nqabeni Location consist of Pondo, Amadela's and a sprinkling of Shangase. The latter were allowed to infiltrate from Shangase Location which now falls in Bizana district...

When the Headman was made to flee all the residents of the location acted in concert...

The Nqabeni Location adjoins the Ntlenzi Location and residents of the Ntlenzi Location residing near the Nqabeni Location were approached by residents of Nqabeni Location and requested to assist in the further burning of kraals as a protest against the Tribal Authorities...

On 12/5/1960 I held a meeting of the residents of Nqabeni Location – about 350 males attended... A surprising feature of the meeting was that both Amadela's and Pondo were intermingled.³⁶²

This extract from the magistrate's report is just one of a number of archival sources which suggest that the mountain movement, and other popular political formations (such as crowds), during the Mpondo revolts were comprised of a diverse membership in terms of 'clan' and 'ethnic' identities.³⁶³

In terms of class the mountain movement once again took on much the same form of earlier crowd gatherings. A large proportion of the members of the mountain movement were from some of the poorest homesteads in Mpondoland, however, the rural poor alone cannot be seen as having constituted the majority of the movement's participants. Most historians agree that in addition to the rural poor the majority of participants in the mountain movement were migrant workers who cannot be easily classified as poor. Recall the argument made by Copelyn that by the time of the revolts there was not much by which to meaningfully separate the experience, aspirations and grievances of the poorest of inhabitants and those whom he classified as part of the 'middle-peasantry'.³⁶⁴ The political commonalities shared between these sections of Eastern Mpondoland society meant that both were equally

³⁶² Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1478, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, 'Unrest Nqabeni and Ntlenzi Locations: Flagstaff District', 16th May 1960, Ref: N1/9/2.

³⁶³ See for example Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, R. A. Midgley to CMT, 'Pondoland Unrest', 20th April 1961, Ref: 42/G.

³⁶⁴ See for example Copelyn, J. A. 1974. *The Mpondo revolts 1960*. Unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand.

invested in the political project of the mountain movement and together they constituted the majority of its participants. However, the levelling aspects of the mountain movement culminating from its commitment to egalitarianism did result in different procedures for gaining membership being applied to participants from different class positions.

It became a general practice throughout Eastern Mpondoland that upon joining a mountain meeting, and by extension a branch of the mountain movement, every person was required to pay an amount of one shilling.³⁶⁵ The total amount of the funds raised would then be collected as a defence fund to hire lawyers for those people arrested in relation to the revolts. While state officials tended to imply that it was *every* person who was required to make said payment a number of witness statements given during the commission of inquiry, as well as a number of statements from police and state informers, insist that those who were from poor and landless homesteads were never required to pay into the defence fund.³⁶⁶ The egalitarianism of the Mpondo revolts and its influence on the form and practices of the mountain movement can be seen in the way the defence fund was used as a levelling tool to manifest equality amongst members as a point of departure in their political project. In this way the defence fund was never used as a means by which to exclude people on the basis of their socio-economic standings. Even those people who had gained social standing and upward class mobility as a result of their engagement with, and support of, the apartheid state and Tribal Authorities system, were included as participants of the mountain movement. However, for these members of the rural political and economic elite who came to mountain meetings the price of admission was £5 which was paid into the defence fund.³⁶⁷

As important as the deferential application of the defence fund payment system was as a levelling tool for the mountain movement it was never seen as enough to guarantee the space of the mountain as being one of equals in and of itself. This is perhaps best illustrated by an observation made by the magistrate of Mbizana that:

Even though a man paid his £5 fine he was informed that this would not prevent his kraal being burned. He was told that he was required to prove his

³⁶⁵ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Bizana, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

³⁶⁶ 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*

loyalty to the Rebel movement by attending every meeting and by burning the kraals of Government supporters when he was told to do so.³⁶⁸

Above all else the egalitarianism of the mountain movement was maintained by the insistence that every person present regardless of wealth, status, ethnic or religious identity be an engaged participant in the decision making processes and practices of the movement. This commitment to the equality of all members of the mountain meeting, demanded as a point of departure for the practice of popular democracy, is reminiscent of Wamba Dia Wamba's analysis of the community palaver 'among the Kongo-speaking people (Zaire, Angola and Congo)'.³⁶⁹ Wamba Dia Wamba explains that in the context of a palaver:

One hears recited the following sayings attributed to the ancestors: "In the clan, there must be no poor, no rich, no chief, no slaves; they all must be chiefs, all philosophers; they all must sleep and wake up together." It is because the organic equality between community members is threatened—that is why the palaver demands its re-installment. As I saw it practiced, the palaver appeared to be a process of mass ideological struggles to prevent the formation and consolidation of classes.³⁷⁰

While not an exact replica of the form and purpose of a palaver, the mountain meetings held during the Mpondo revolts shared in common with this democratic praxis a radical commitment to egalitarianism, a collective space for maximum participation from the community in decision making processes, and a stringent rejection of the hierarchical, bureaucratic and elitist modes of state politics. I argue that further evidence of the egalitarian underpinnings of the mountain movement can be seen in the way members all sat in a large circle to conduct meetings without any positions being reserved for 'leaders' or any other reason of power and/or privilege. There were never any official mountain meetings or political decision-making processes which did not involve calling together every member of the branch to act as a collective. People who were considered to be proficient public speakers with voices that were loud and clear enough to be heard by such large numbers were the ones who were elected by means of democratic consensus to be spokespersons at the various mountain meetings.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ Wamba dia Wamba, E. 1985. 'Experiences of Democracy in Africa: Reflections on Practices of Communalist Palaver as a Method of Resolving Contradictions' in *Philosophy and Social Action*. Vol. XI, No. 3, p. 2.

³⁷⁰ Wamba dia Wamba, E. 'Experiences of Democracy in Africa', p. 4.

³⁷¹ Willie Mpehla, Evidence given to the *Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, 13 July 1960, The Cory Library, Rhodes University, p. 4.

Although there is no clear indication of the timing it is known that by the latter-half of 1960 the various branches of the mountain movement had developed the practice of holding peoples' courts.³⁷² These peoples' courts are extremely important to consider as they were the main vehicle through which the mountain movement usurped the powers and functions of the chieftaincy and the apartheid state and established themselves as an alternative and autonomous political authority. The peoples' courts were held in almost an identical fashion to general mountain meetings. The members of the movement would all be called to the mountain where they would sit in a circle and by means of democratic consensus elect a spokesperson. While some sources suggest that Monday was set aside as the special day on which the mountain movement heard court cases, outside of the Amadiba location of Mbizana where this seems to have been the case, there is no evidence that such standardisation existed amongst all branches of the movement.³⁷³ However, what was common to all of the various peoples' courts of the mountain movement was the way in which they developed new methods of hearing cases and dispensing justice which stood in opposition to the forms and legal processes of the courts belonging to both the chieftaincy and the state.

Unlike in the courts of the chieftaincy in which the chief and his councillors were the elite group who had the power to hear cases and dispense sentences, in the case of peoples' courts, all members of the mountain movement were offered the authority and responsibility to hear cases and dispense justice as a collective of equals.³⁷⁴ Due to the large number of people involved in the hearing of cases within peoples' courts, and the fact that during these, and normal mountain meetings, all decisions had to be reached collectively by means of consensus and not just majority vote, they tended to be lengthy affairs involving much debate before verdicts were reached. These peoples' courts dealt with both criminal and civil cases which would, under normal circumstances, fall under the authority of the chiefs' and magistrates' courts. The collective nature of the decisions reached by the peoples' courts is

³⁷² 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

³⁷³ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/61, Chief Gangata Balehi 'Statement regarding illegal meetings in Amadiba location', 15th November 1960, REF: N.1/9/2.

³⁷⁴ Beinart, W. 2012. 'The Mpondo Revolt Through the Eyes of Leonard Mdingi and Anderson Ganyile' in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 107.

evidenced in an extract from an interview Beinart conducted with Leonard Mdingi recalling his memories of one instance during the revolts in which a decision had to be reached in relation to the issue of stock theft. According to Mdingi:

The meeting decided that stock theft should come to a stop. I remember one time somebody's sheep were stolen – about 11 of them. And then he went to the meeting and the meeting said whoever has stolen these sheep must bring them back or *we* will go out and find out for ourselves, and if *we* find out who did this, then he'll be guilty; he'll be dealt with. And the following day the sheep were grazing just across the river but minus one – then it was clear that they had already slaughtered it.³⁷⁵

What is important about this recollection from Mdingi is his persistent use of the collective pronoun 'we' and his insistence that decisions were taken by 'the meeting' both indicate the collective and principally leaderless nature of the mountain movement, its meetings and its courts. Mdingi goes on in his interview with Beinart to provide another important insight into the politics of the mountain movement in stating that during mountain meetings and peoples' courts 'decisions were reached collectively rather than by vote'.³⁷⁶ This serves to highlight the fact that not only was the mountain movement democratic but it was a popular organisation which practised a form of consensus-based democracy. It is important to note that democracy by consensus is a very different political praxis in comparison to the type of constitutional and parliamentary democracy embodied in the current nation state form in which a citizen's participation is largely reduced to the act of voting every four years. Democracy by consensus, on the other hand, requires a much more sustained and direct involvement of all people in the decision-making processes concerning the collective. Key to this form of popular democracy practised on the mountain was a radical commitment to egalitarianism and a staunch rejection of representative modes of democracy.

One of the most crucial functions of the chiefs' courts taken over by the peoples' courts of the mountain movement was the power and authority to settle land allocation matters. In this way the mountain movement usurped another key chief prerogative. The way in which the mountain movement dealt with the issue of access to land is significant insofar as it represented a new type of politics that did not inaugurate private ownership of land, which is considered as the most progressive and modern form of land tenure by liberal

³⁷⁵ Leonard Mdingi quoted in Beinart, W. 'The Mpondo Revolt', p. 107.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p. 104.

scholars. Nor did they simply replicate the so-called traditional politics of land by choosing for themselves a new chief or leader to establish a court and take up the responsibility of land allocation. Instead, the men on the mountain adopted aspects of the communal land tenure system and reinvented it to fit a process of collective decision making, in the context of participatory democratic movement. Much of the land allocated by the mountain movement was in the coastal areas of Mbizana which were, in comparison to the rest of the district, sparsely populated due to the state's attempts to enclose large areas of land for forest and coastal reserves.³⁷⁷ In direct opposition to the corrupt system of having to pay bribes to chiefs in order to gain access to land, which had become an extremely entrenched practice since the 1950s, the mountain movement de-commodified and collectivised the process of land allocation.

The way in which the people's courts dealt with the issue of land allocation is an important indication of the prescriptive element of the mountain movement's political project. As explained in the introductory chapter of this thesis, considering the 'prescriptive' politics of the mountain movement requires a consideration of what its political struggle was *for* and not just what it was *against*. In taking the politics of land pursued by the mountain movement seriously we can conclude that participants in the Mpondo revolts sought to create a world in which they themselves, as an organised collective, had the authority and responsibility to govern the processes of land allocation and all other facets of their lives. Analysing the land allocation practices of the mountain movement also provides us with an important reminder that although many of the political praxes developed by the mountain movement were informed by a collective opposition to what was perceived as a bastardised version of the chieftaincy; this reactionary narrative was not the defining feature of the political subjectivity of the commoners who participated in the Mpondo revolts.

The mountain movement was pluralist and seemed to contain different perspectives. For instance, in his interviews, with Leonard Mdingi and Anderson Ganyile, Beinart notes the disparity in his two subjects' understanding of the general sentiment and attitude towards chiefs during the Mpondo revolts. While both agreed that 'by 1960 it was not a question of

³⁷⁷ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, R. A. Midgley, 'Minute on Pondoland Unrest', 20th April 1961, REF: 42/G.

Nelson [Sigcawu] being restored. It was just... that now the time had come for the devil to be eliminated' Ganyile's perspective of the commoners' subjective position in regard to the chieftaincy was highly conservative in comparison to that of Mdingi.³⁷⁸ For Ganyile by 1960, 'the people had not come to the stage where they were saying, "away with the chieftaincy" but they were now saying chiefs have now become government stooges'.³⁷⁹ In direct contrast to this Mdingi believed that by this time:

People were attacking the chiefs, there is not one chief who was sided with the people. In most places people were openly saying "the chieftainship must come to an end", and in fact they are government paid and they are only giving orders which they get from the government... They were not working through the chiefs anymore. [They were] going away from the chiefs; turning away from the chiefs.³⁸⁰

It is worth noting, when considering these two perspectives, that Beinart notes clearly that while 'Ganyile was particularly articulate and tended to dominate the joint interviews; Mdingi had a better knowledge of grassroots politics'.³⁸¹ In fact there is archival evidence which suggests that Anderson Ganyile only attended his first mountain meeting in late April 1960 and, prior to this was mostly unaware as to how the mountain meetings worked and for what strategic purposes they were being called. According to a statement taken from a police informer who attended this meeting:

Anderson and Mtotonzima [Ganyile] were the first speakers and they asked Mbambeni how the whole thing worked as they too did not want to support Tribal Authority and they wanted to assist. Mbambeni then replied that there was just one main point which was discussed on the mountain and that is Tribal Authorities and there was also the question of increased taxes. Mbambeni also told them to talk to their Headmen and sub headmen and ask them to come to the mountain and if they refused we would know what to do with them.³⁸²

What this archival extract illustrates, along with the analysis from Beinart, is that Ganyile's experience and memory of the revolt may not be representative and does not necessarily reflect the experiences and subjectivity of the majority of commoners who were the actual protagonists of the Mpondo revolts, at least in comparison to that of Mdingi. Even though a more conservative view may have been present, it is extremely significant that a

³⁷⁸ Beinart, W. 'The Mpondo Revolt', p. 99.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 99.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. 99.

³⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 96.

³⁸² CMT 3/1472, 'Statement of Makenisi Jase', 5th October 1960, Ref: Unknown.

large section of the movement supported, and indeed practised, a radically alternative conception of political organisation. Within this thesis I argue, in line with Mdingi, that the Mpondo revolts were indeed a political event defined by the collective rejection of the Tribal Authorities system as well as the institution and idea of the chieftaincy *entirely*. What this means is that, although many commoners were motivated to political action because of grievances against particular chiefs seen as ‘illegitimately’ placed in power by the apartheid state, there was no collective demand made by the mountain movement for the reinstatement of a system of ‘legitimate’ traditional governance under chiefs who were horizontally accountable to their constituencies. The demands made by the members of the mountain movement were instead for self-governance, radical equality, and participatory democracy, which collectively amounted to a complete rejection of their allotted social location as subjects under the system of Tribal Authorities. I argue that this complete rejection of the type of politics embodied by the chieftaincy, coupled with the aforementioned commitment to a principle of egalitarianism, influenced the mountain movement in such a way that it did not replicate the political structures of the chieftaincy. It is to the political structure and nature of ‘leadership’ under the mountain movement that attention now turns.

Leadership and the Mountain Movement

One of the most important insights provided by Lodge in his analysis of the Mpondo revolts is that it was not just the apartheid state and its variation of in-direct rule in the form of Bantu Authorities which was popularly rejected in Eastern Mpondoland. According to Lodge, and Copelyn, it was in fact the entire ‘traditional’ political structure which had become completely discredited in Mpondoland by 1960.³⁸³ As a result of this widespread and complete discrediting of the chieftaincy, and its associated hierarchical political structure and representative democratic practices – Lodge argues that ‘dissatisfaction was unlikely to cohere around any representative of the old order’.³⁸⁴ It has been shown in this and foregoing chapters that the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts was never centred on any chief, headman or other ‘representative of the old order’.³⁸⁵ However we can also go further than Lodge by arguing that the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts was driven by commoners who self-consciously acted and organised in ways which did not adhere to the political forms

³⁸³ Lodge, T. ‘Black Politics in South Africa’, p. 282.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 282.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 282.

and practices of the 'old order'.³⁸⁶ The significance of this insight lies in the challenge it poses to state officials' perception of the mountain movement and its political structure.

Sources in the state archive provide a very clear and cohesive articulation of state officials' understanding of the mountain movement. Central to this understanding was the assumption that the mountain movement was a strictly hierarchical organisation with a vanguard of leaders monopolising decision making processes from the 'rebel headquarters' at Ndlovu Hill in the Estambeni location of Mbizana.³⁸⁷ According to state officials each cell of the movement had its own individual leader who sent emissaries to Ndlovu Hill in order to receive commands from the highest levels of local leadership based there.³⁸⁸ These individual leaders were accused of acting as 'both Prosecutor and Judge' in the context of peoples' courts and the main speakers at general mountain meetings dictating the political agenda to the masses.³⁸⁹ However, as shall be discussed at length in Chapter Eight, state officials were unwilling to attribute even the supposed leaders of the mountain movement at Ndlovu Hill with having been the political agents and intellectual 'masterminds' of the Mpondo revolts; relying firmly instead on various outside agitator theories. Yet what is of most significance here is the way in which state officials understood the mountain movement as having taken on a political structure which was almost identical to that of the chieftaincy. The vanguard leadership at Ndlovu Hill are depicted as functioning in the same political manner as the paramountcy and the individual leaders of each 'cell' are understood as having the same role as sub-chiefs or headmen.³⁹⁰ This state perception is one which contradicts the observation regarding the complete rejection of the chieftaincy and the implications this had for the way popular politics looked and functioned in the context of the Mpondo revolts.

I argue that by drawing on evidence in the secondary literature, particularly in the form of interviews, as well as by reading sources in the state archive against the grain it is possible to understand the political form and practices of the mountain movement as comparable with that of the Atlantic pirate ship during the eighteenth century as described

³⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 282.

³⁸⁷ 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid*.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid*.

by social historians Peter Linebaugh and Markus Redicker.³⁹¹ According to Linebaugh and Redicker:

The pirate ship was egalitarian in a hierarchical age, as pirates divided their plunder equally, levelling the elaborate structure of pay ranks common to all other maritime employments ... Such egalitarianism flowed from material facts. To merchant captains it was galling that “there is so little Government and Subordination among [pirates], that they are, on Occasion, all Captains, all Leaders.” ... Pirates were class-conscious and justice-seeking, taking revenge against merchant captains who tyrannized the common seaman and against royal officials who upheld their prerogative to do so. Indeed, the “Distribution of Justice” was a specific practice among pirates. After capturing a prize vessel, pirates would “distribute justice” by inquiring about how the ship’s commander treated his crew. They then “whipp’d and pickled” those “against whom Complaint was made.” ... Still, pirates did not punish captains indiscriminately. They often rewarded the “honest Fellow that never abused any Sailors” and even offered to let one decent captain “return with a large sum of Money to London, and bid the Merchants defiance.”³⁹²

Just as in the case of the pirate ship in the context of the mountain movement there was no one leader but all members were, ‘on Occasion, all Captains, all Leaders’. This perspective of the mountain movement as being a kind of ‘leaderless’ – in the orthodox and vanguardist conception of the term – organisation is reiterated in Diana Wylie’s interviews with Nofitshane Tshumane who became an active member of the mountain movement after the government ‘opened bloodshed’ at Ngquza Hill.³⁹³ Wylie quotes Tshumane directly explaining that long before the shootings at Ngquza, at a time when Tshumane identified himself as just ‘a listener’ and not actively involved in the practices of the mountain movement, ‘we said we shouldn’t have a leader or we would be practicing as chiefs’.³⁹⁴ Refusing to replicate the hierarchical structures of the very system of governance they were fighting against the members of the mountain movement decided, ‘[w]e should rather elect *abaququzeleli* [messengers and organizers]’ and not leaders.³⁹⁵

It has already been stated in this chapter that within the context of mountain meetings and peoples’ courts those people who acted as spokespeople were ordinary members of the

³⁹¹ Linebaugh, P. and Redicker, M. 2013. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Beacon Press: Boston, p. 163.

³⁹² Linebaugh, P. and Redicker, M. ‘The Many-Headed Hydra’, p. 163.

³⁹³ Wylie, D. ‘The Shock of the New’, p. 203.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 203.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 203.

mountain movement who were elected by means of democratic consensus due to their ability to relay remarks clearly and loudly to large gatherings. This is seen in the evidence given to the state sponsored *Commission of Inquiry into the unrest in Pondoland* by a man named Willie Mpehla who had been arrested under the accusation of being a rebel leader in the Isikelo location.³⁹⁶ It was in the aftermath of the Ngquza Hill massacre of 6th June 1960, discussed in Chapter Seven, that the state decided to hold an independent Commission of Inquiry into the unrest in Eastern Mpondoland. The commission sat for three days in Lusikisiki, Flagstaff and Mbizana and during the period of its investigations into the causes of the unrest there was a general halt placed on the political demonstrations and praxes of the Mpondo revolts. We read that it was after the findings of the Commission of Inquiry were announced at a public meeting at the Mbizana airfield on 11th October 1960 to a crowd made up of thousands of commoners that the struggle was intensified once again. The accused rebel leader Willie Mpehla explained to the members of the commission that:

While the meetings were being held on the hill-top, I was asked to relay remarks, no matter who spoke, as I had a loud voice. We were arrested because it was alleged that we were the leaders, but we were not...³⁹⁷

It would appear that for the state and anyone aligned with its attempt to crush the mountain movement, the people who were accused of being 'leaders' were those who were prolific public speakers in the context of mountain meetings. The issue of state officials' tendency to conflate the role of public speakers with vanguardist conceptions of leadership is an important one to consider as it is a tendency which seems to have remained prevalent in much of the secondary literature regarding the revolts.³⁹⁸ Even social historian William Beinart whose work has been an invaluable contribution to the historiography of the revolts has tended to accept many of the assumptions implicit within the state's perspective of the revolts. This can be seen in Beinart's chapter in the book *Rural Resistance in South Africa* entitled *The Mpondo Revolt Through the Eyes of Leonard Mdingi and Anderson Ganyile*. In this chapter Beinart acknowledges that there is very little evidence available in the published literature which relates to the 'individual experiences and political trajectories of the leaders of the revolt'.³⁹⁹ However, despite this lack of evidence Beinart still maintains that such a

³⁹⁶ Willie Mpehla, 'Evidence given to the Departmental Committee of Inquiry', p. 4.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 4.

³⁹⁸ See for example Mbeki, G. 1964. *South Africa: the peasants' revolt*. Penguin: Middlesex, p. 125, 128.

³⁹⁹ Beinart, W. 'The Mpondo Revolt', p. 92.

group of leaders existed amongst the Mpondo rebels and seeks to show how the ANC influenced this vanguard during various phases of the revolt. Specifically Beinart argues, based predominantly on interviews done with Leonard Mdingi and Anderson Ganyile, that there were five individual leaders of the mountain movement most of whom were based at 'the national nerve centre ... Ndhlovu Hill'.⁴⁰⁰ Although he mentions five core leaders only two are mentioned by name in his chapter, Theophilus Tshangela and Solomon Madikizela, with the vast majority of attention being placed on Solomon Madikizela.⁴⁰¹ It is necessary to interrogate what, for Beinart, qualified these individuals to be remembered as *the* leaders of the Mpondo revolts. It would appear that for Beinart this qualification stems from the fact that this group of five mountain movement members were the ones directly involved in talks with the ANC in Durban.

While Beinart provides both archival and oral historical evidence confirming that Solomon Madikizela and others maintained strategic links with the ANC and addressed a number of meetings at Ndlovu Hill, this thesis argues that there is insufficient evidence to suggest that this group of individuals can be seen as *the* leaders of the Mpondo revolts. This is because, on one level, when these individuals were detained and arrested by the police there was no breakdown in the organisation or effectivity of the mountain movement or the revolts more broadly. On 1st November 1960, when Mtetunzima Ganyile, Dan Anderson Ganyile, Theophilus Tshangela, Hargreaves Nkosana Mbodla, and Solomon Madikizela willingly accepted their summons and appeared in Mbizana town to be arrested they were accompanied by an estimated three to five thousand commoners who marched on the town in protest.⁴⁰² This indicates that they were definitely part of the mountain movement but it does not suggest that they received such a massive turn-out of supporters because they were leaders. This thesis argues that men like Solomon Madikizela and Hargreaves Nkosana Mbodla were likely targets for the state and the rural elite's attempts to identify leaders within the

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 92.

⁴⁰¹ According to Matoti and Ntsebeza, the five leaders, who '...were not appointed, but emerged naturally as a result of their activism, organisational skills, leadership qualities and experience', were Solomon Madikizela, T Tshangela, H Mbodla, S Mpini and N Ntshangase. See: Matoti, S. and Ntsebeza, L. 2004. 'Rural resistance in Mpondoland and Thembuland, 1960-1963' in SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1 (1960-1970)*. Zebra Press: Cape Town, p. 185.

⁴⁰² Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 281; Also see Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/48, Extract from Natal Mercury, 'Five Pondos Held After Discharge', 16th March 1961, Ref: Z. 15.

mountain movement as both were evangelists from the Methodist church.⁴⁰³ This is significant because there is substantial evidence to suggest that, much like with popular political movements such as Abahlali baseMjondolo (AbM) in South Africa today, mountain meetings were usually opened and closed with a Christian prayer. As a result of this practice it is likely that both Solomon Madikizela and Hargreaves Nkosana Mbodla would have delivered the prayers and thus spoken publically at the mountain meetings they attended.

I am not trying to suggest that people such as Solomon Madikizela and others identified by Beinart were not highly involved in the political decision-making processes of the mountain movement, on the contrary, they definitely were. They may have even been more vocal and opinionated in mountain meetings and peoples' courts than most participants. However, my contention is that to write of them as *the* leaders of the mountain movement is misleading inasmuch as it obfuscates the overarching principle of egalitarianism and praxis of participatory democracy which commoners conceptualised and practiced in the context of the mountain movement and the Mpondo revolts more broadly. It is only by questioning the understanding of the mountain movement constructed by state officials and stored in the archives that we can glimpse traces of the emancipatory political form and praxes of the Mpondo revolts. Nonetheless, in focusing (however problematically) on the role of organic intellectuals such as Solomon Madikizela and others seen as 'leaders' of the revolts Beinart does provide a very useful understanding of the relationship between the mountain movement and the ANC as well as the influence the Mpondo revolts had on the turn to an armed struggle – a theme which will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to provide an analysis of the emancipatory political features of the mountain movement. Central to this analysis was the recognition of a type of democratic praxis which was deeply collective, participatory and consensus driven which defined popular politics in the context of mountain meetings. I have argued that the formation of this type of popular politics in the space of the mountain was in many ways a

⁴⁰³ It is also important to acknowledge that there is a significant history of churches in rural South Africa playing a radical role in regard to resistance against colonialism and apartheid. See for example Bradford's analysis of the way in which the Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (ICU) and the churches often took on a symbiotic relationship in the rural areas. See Bradford, H. 1984. 'Mass Movements and the Petty Bourgeoisie: The Social Origins of ICU leadership, 1924 – 1929'. In *The Journal of African History*, Vo. 25, No. 3, p. 307.

consequence of the collective commitment to egalitarianism as a foundational political principle of the mountain movement and the revolts more broadly. It was suggested that this egalitarianism also translated into the mountain movement being an inclusive political formation in relation to class and ethnic identities. However, a significant point of discussion which has not been dealt with in this chapter is the possible limits of the inclusive, egalitarian, participatory – and thus emancipatory – political character of the mountain movement which arise from the fact that mountain meetings did not usually involve the participation of women. The role of women within the Mpondo revolts and their relationship with the mountain movement is a topic which will be discussed at length in Chapter Six. However, it is important to keep in mind that the political praxes of the mountain movement, both in the space of the mountain and outside of it, could never have functioned without the material and subjective support and autonomous agency of women in Eastern Mpondoland.

Emphasising the emancipatory political aspects of the mountain movement, and particularly its egalitarianism, poses a challenge to interpretations of this historical political formation as a strictly hierarchical movement with a leadership structure and decision-making processes similar to that of the chieftaincy with its councillor system. In contradiction to such tendencies I have argued that the emancipatory features of the mountain movement were such that the political form and content of the movement was shaped in ways that distinguished it from the state, the chieftaincy, urban-based national liberation organisations and political parties. Furthermore, in considering the way in which the peoples' courts dealt with the politics of land I attempted to show that the emancipatory political principles also functioned so as to inform and condition the prescriptive political project of the mountain movement. By decommodifying and collectivising the process of land allocation the participants of the Mpondo revolts can be understood as having self-consciously pursued a prescriptive political project with emancipatory features and potential. In this and other ways the members of the mountain movement created a movement with a political form and content which was distinct from that of the state, chieftaincy and urban-based national liberation organisations such as the ANC.

Chapter Five:

Violence and Dignity: The Kraal Burning Campaign and Emancipatory Politics

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored the political structure of the mountain movement in the context of mountain meetings and peoples' courts. In so doing I highlighted how the political commitment to egalitarianism and the rejection of the type of political structure and democratic practices embodied in the chieftaincy were hugely influential in shaping how politics was practised in the space of the mountain. In this chapter I will seek to provide an analysis of the political praxes deployed by the mountain movement, outside of the space of the mountain, with particular attention paid to the kraal burning campaigns. In so doing the chapter will focus on the themes of violence and dignity as well as the extent to which the latter shaped the instrumental deployment of the former within the context of the Mpondo revolts.

By considering the theme of violence in conjunction with that of human dignity I intend to provide an analysis which challenges perception of the politics of the Mpondo revolts as being conditioned above all else by a violence that was unrestrained and 'terroristic'. Such a reductionist perspective is not only found in the state's understanding of the mountain movement's political tactics but also in certain historians' interpretation of the subjectivity of commoners in Eastern Mpondoland. An apt example of such a perspective is found in Crais' analysis of the Mpondo revolts in which he argued that commoners in Eastern Mpondoland viewed the apartheid state as 'evil' and believed that the only way to challenge the state was to 'engage in terroristic violence to end a world they see as profoundly evil'.⁴⁰⁴

In order to understand the emancipatory political aspects of the mountain movement as a driving force of the Mpondo revolts it is necessary to consider, at least broadly, what the relationship between violence and emancipatory politics is and how violence functions to create the conditions of possibility for the development of political alternatives. According to political philosopher Lewis Gordon violence can be understood as an act of force considered as a violation of some right. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's phenomenological dialectical

⁴⁰⁴ Crais, C. 2002. *The politics of evil: magic, state power, and the political imagination in South Africa*. Cambridge Press: Cambridge, p. 5.

description of the violence involved in the processes of de-colonisation articulated in *The Damned of the Earth* Gordon argues that: '[a]s long as the justice of the *status quo* is presumed, any response that portends real change will take the form of violence'.⁴⁰⁵ Therefore, because the political project of the mountain movement presented a real challenge to the apartheid state and because the state officials' viewed the segregationist and racist policies and institutions of the apartheid regime as both just and right – it was inevitable that they understood the movement, its politics and its supporters as violent. Drawing on Gordon's reading of Fanon, it can be argued that the only forms of political engagement which those state officials which saw themselves as being in the rightful position of protecting the status quo would have accepted as non-violent are those which did not challenge the authority of the state.⁴⁰⁶ I argue that it is for this reason that even the tactic of boycott, which is often considered as a passive act associated with passive forms of resistance, when deployed during the Mpondo revolts was understood and treated by state officials as a key component of a violent and militaristic resistance campaign. While the use of boycotts as a political tactic is an important aspect of the Mpondo revolts which will be discussed later in the thesis for now the themes of violence and dignity brings the attention of this chapter to the mountain movement's deployment of tactical violence in the form of kraal burning campaigns.

The chapter begins with an analysis of the events of 9th March 1960 in Isikelo location and the popular political mobilisations, formations and praxes which developed in the following days and weeks. It is in this period that the mountain movement emerges as one of the key drivers of popular politics and the tactic of kraal burning is deployed for the first time within the context of the Mpondo revolts. Thereafter the chapter explores the tactic of kraal burning and its deployment by the mountain movement throughout the remaining months of 1960. In so doing it focuses specifically on the limitations placed on the use of tactical violence by decisions reached collectively during mountain meetings and the influence this had on the tactic of kraal burning. Within this section I identify three broad limitations that the participants themselves placed on the processes of kraal burning which resulted from a collective political commitment to human dignity and an associated desire to avoid engaging

⁴⁰⁵ Gordon, L. 1995. *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. Routledge: New York and London, p. 77.

⁴⁰⁶ Gordon, L. 1995. 'Fanon and the Crisis of European Man', p. 79.

in unnecessary and terroristic forms of violence. I argue that the collective concern for, and commitment to, a concept of human dignity was a crucial aspect of the emancipatory politics of the Mpondo revolts.

Thereafter, attention turns to the relationship between the mountain movement and the ANC with specific focus on the influence the Mpondo revolts had on the national shift towards armed struggle. Finally, after exploring the significance of the militant political aspects of the Mpondo revolts in relation to the ANC and the broader liberation struggle the chapter will conclude by considering the way in which the deployment of tactical violence was necessary in order to create the conditions of possibility for the mountain movement to establish itself as a new authority of a new political order.

Violence and the Emergence of the Mountain Movement

On 9th March 1960, the system of tribal authority in the Isikelo location of the Mbizana District was due to commence functioning with Sub-Chief Mhlabuvelile Hlamandana acting as its head. In order to prevent the actual functioning of the new system a large group of commoners, residents of the Isikelo Location, gathered at Mhlabuvelile's Great Place on this day and carried out a serious physical assault on three of the newly appointed tribal authority councillors.⁴⁰⁷ This event contained a level of militaristic violence that had until now been absent from the resistance in Mpondoland and as such is a common point of departure for both state officials' and many historians' narrative understandings of the revolts. Prior to 9th March 1960 the Isikelo Tribal Authority was practically non-functional. Sub-chief Mhlabuvelile had, despite orders from the state to do otherwise, continued with the practice of holding civil and criminal court cases without depositing the funds into the Tribal Authority bank account. The state, in its attempts to understand the causes of the events of 9th March 1960, focused intensely on Mhlabuvelile's conduct and reasoned that he was primarily to blame for inciting the residents of Isikelo to assault the Tribal Authority councillors. The Magistrate of Mbizana, E. M. Warren, wrote in March 1960 that:

For the past twelve months I have been urging Chief Mhlabuvelile to call meetings of his Tribal Authority, to get his Tribal Authority functioning and to build up the Tribal Authority funds so that the services for which the Tribal

⁴⁰⁷ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, 'Report on Isikelo Tribal Authority: District of Bizana', 14th March 1960, Ref: 42/1.; Also see Drew, A. 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', p. 75.

Authority is responsible could be commenced. The Chief's attitude has been one of passive resistance.

I consulted Saul Mabude about holding a meeting in Isikelo Location to try and get the Tribal Authority functioning. He advised against this saying that the only result would be that I would suffer indignity at the hands of the Isikelo people.

I have put it to Chief Mhlabuvelile that if he is collecting the fees in civil cases, and if he refuses to pay such fees to Tribal Authority funds, then he is misappropriating money which does not belong to him and, that he runs the risk of being prosecuted.

I understand that the mother of Chief Mhlabuvelile is in fact the Tribal Treasurer and that she refuses to pay any money to Tribal Authority funds. His mother is the widow of the late Tandabantu Hlamandana who was deposed from his position as Headman of Isikelo Location.

The events which occurred at Chief Mhlabuvelile's Great Place on 9th March, 1960 have been reported to you and a copy of a statement made by Chief Mhlabuvelile was forwarded under cover of my Minute dated 12th March, 1960. The statement made by Chief Mhlabuvelile is unsatisfactory. My interpretation of the position is that his mother, with his connivance, was responsible for organising the whole affair. Previously his attitude towards the Tribal Authority system was one of passive resistance. Now it is one of open antagonism.⁴⁰⁸

The reason that the magistrate declared the sub-chief's statement to be unsatisfactory is because it completely contradicted this perception of the events of 9th March 1960 as having been an instance in which chiefs and headmen were the primary agents or vehicles of popular politics. In Mhlabuvelile's statement he not only insists that he had not been at all involved in the organisation or mobilisation of the crowd who appeared at his Great Place but that he in had in fact been also been a target of the crowd that day:

They stood up and came to me and said that I was the person who is responsible for the destruction of Isikelo Location. They said that I am the person accepted the Tribal Authority system. They accused me of selling the soil.

Then I heard a voice from the back saying, "These men must be convicted".

Then another said, "How much shall we fine them?"

Another man said, "Their necks must be cut off".

Then I saw them assaulting Obediah Pinyane. One man hit him on the head and he fell down. They assaulted him with sticks. I stood over and protected him.

⁴⁰⁸ 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, 'Report on Isikelo Tribal Authority: District of Bizana', 14th March 1960, Ref: 42/1.

They hit me with a stick on my thigh. Then they hit me again on my ribs. Then Solendlini protected me. I then went to Ntobolwana Nqakamatye, who had already been injured. I then searched for Robert Godlimpi.⁴⁰⁹

What is extremely clear in the statement taken from Mhlabuvelile is that rather than the people being incited into open resistance by the sub-chief and his mother, it was in fact the other way around. The people of Isikelo had for a long time been placing Mhlabuvelile under huge amounts of pressure to stall the implementation of Tribal Authorities in the location. When collective pressure placed on Mhlabuvelile to 'drag his feet' in implementing the necessary processes and structures for the tribal authority system was no longer effective in preventing its implementation commoners took direct political action by carrying out an assault on its councillors.⁴¹⁰ The significance of this interpretation of the events of 9th March 1960 is that it highlights the fact that although the use of strategic and selective violence as a political tactic was an important feature of the Mpondo revolts it was not *the* defining feature nor the sum-total of the political praxes of the mountain movement or the commoners of Eastern Mpondoland more broadly. This is evidenced further by the fact that the violence of 9th March 1960 did not lead to a generalisation of 'mob violence' during the following days in which the Isikelo location became an epicentre of popular politics. Instead, as commoners from numerous surrounding locations joined the residents of Isikelo after news of the assault had spread beyond the district of Mbizana, they collectively engaged in public meetings, marches and pickets which were concerned with mobilisation and organisation of popular politics and not the deployment of targeted violence against the agents and infrastructure associated with the apartheid state and the tribal authorities system.

It was only on 20th of March 1960 that the decision was taken at a mountain meeting to burn the kraal of Saul Mabude that the use of targeted and selective violence as a popular political tactic of the Mpondo revolts re-emerged – not in the form of physical assault but of kraal burnings. It is of utmost importance to emphasise that this re-emergence of tactical violence in the form of the kraal burning campaigns was subject to the influence of the broader political principles of the mountain movement. In the previous chapter I argued that the mountain movement was influenced in both form and praxis by a collective commitment

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

to a political principle of egalitarianism and participatory, consensus-based democracy. In this chapter I argue that in addition to these the political form and praxes of the mountain movement were also fundamentally shaped by a collective commitment to a universal conception of human dignity and the avoidance of terroristic or dehumanising violence. Attention now turns to the way in which this commitment to human dignity influenced the mountain movement's use of tactical violence in the form of its kraal burning campaigns.

The Kraal Burning Campaigns

In considering the themes of violence and dignity in relation to the mountain movement it is useful to begin with a discussion of the selectivity and regulation of the tactic of kraal burnings. The individuals whose kraals became the targets of the mountain movement were those black people in society who were collectively accused of 'killing the nation', 'selling the soil', and basically, acting as willing agents of the apartheid states mechanisms of in-direct rule.⁴¹¹ Thus, the primary targets were chiefs, headmen and tribal authority councillors. Although state officials' suggested that it was only educated and prominent members of rural society who were threatened by the kraal burning campaigns, it was clearly only chiefs, headmen and tribal authority councillors who were the mountain movement's actual targets. According to Drew, it was after the issue of how to deal with police informers came to the fore of mountain meeting discussions in April 1960 that the selectivity of the kraal burning campaigns was broadened to include the targeting of people outside of the rural governing elite – specifically those found guilty by the peoples' court of having willingly aided in the arrest of commoners associated with the movement.⁴¹² Thus it can be concluded that those against whom the mountain movement directed its praxes of tactical violence were individuals who were collectively perceived by the majority of commoners in Eastern Mpondoland as upholding a system of governance premised on the violation of the will and dignity of the people. However, what is of significance in thinking the themes of violence and dignity, more so than the issue of who the targets of the kraal burning campaigns were, is the way in which a kraal burning campaign took place.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*; Also see Steinburg, J. 2012. 'A Bag of Soil, a Bullet from up High: Some meanings of the Mpondo revolts today'. In Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 232.

⁴¹² Drew, A. 2012. Govan Mbeki's 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 77.

In analysing the processes involved in the kraal burning campaigns of the mountain movement three primary limitations on the deployment of such tactical violence existed. The first of these was that the decision taken by all branches of the mountain movement that 'we should not start burning immediately... we should first go to the chiefs, headmen and Tribal Authority Councillors and invite them to the mountain. We should do this at least twice and if they refuse then we should start burning their kraals'.⁴¹³ The second limitation on violence can be seen in the fact that whenever a kraal site was burnt under the auspices of the mountain movement those doing the burning would always allow the wives and children of the chief, headman, councillor or police informer being targeted to leave the property unviolated. The third primary limitation placed on the violence of the kraal burning campaigns related to the decision taken by the mountain movement that burning parties must do everything they can, shy of being caught by the police, to prevent the fire spreading to the grain stores of a targeted kraal site as it was seen as 'unjust' towards the targeted man's children to leave them without the ability to feed themselves. That the members of the mountain movement were concerned with making sure their use of violent political tactics such as kraal burning did not create suffering for innocent children is evidenced in the statement given by Albert Somadlangathi to the commission of inquiry. Reporting on the burning of Chief Gladwin's kraal Somadlangathi recalls that: 'The procession went on – bugles were sounded across the river towards the kraal of Gladwin – we set his kraal on fire. We burnt four huts and spared the fifth, because it kept the grain for the children and we were not fighting against the children'.⁴¹⁴ These three procedures can be seen as evidence of the way in which a commitment to human dignity and a staunch rejection of random and terroristic violence acted so as to shape the political praxes of the mountain movement.

It was these, amongst other features of the political praxes of the mountain movement, which lead Mbeki to conclude that the movement embodied 'the difference between a people's organized force and a band of thugs collected for the sole purpose of sustaining a tyranny that lives in perpetual fear of its own failure'.⁴¹⁵ Mbeki's understanding of the overarching commitment to human dignity held by commoners during the Mpondo

⁴¹³ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1472, 'Statement of Makenisi Jase', 5th October 1960, Ref: Unknown.

⁴¹⁴ Albert Somadlangathi, Evidence given to the *Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, 18 July 1960, The Cory Library, Rhodes University, p. 136.

⁴¹⁵ Mbeki, G. 'The Peasants' Revolt', p. 131.

revolts is reflected in his observation that ‘even at the height of the hut-burning campaign, those who waged the struggle against Bantu Authorities *did not shed their humanity*’.⁴¹⁶ The height of the kraal burning campaigns is considered to have been during the months of November and December 1960 when, after having been suspended during the investigations of the commission of inquiry, the tactic of kraal burning was re-introduced by branches of the mountain movement in conjunction with a widespread boycott of government institutions and white owned trading stores.⁴¹⁷ This particular period of kraal burning activities is labelled in much of the secondary literature as being of an exceptionally violent character; particularly because it began with a kraal burning operation that resulted in the death of Paramount Chief Botha Sigcawu’s bother, Chief Vukayibambe Sigcawu, and two of his headmen. However, while scholars such as Matoti and Ntsebza as well as Crais use the example of Vukayibambe Sigcawu’s murder in order to emphasise the violence of the mountain movement, Copelyn argues that close consideration of the murder of Vukayibambe Sigcawu actually reveals the deeply held commitment commoners had in regard to the avoidance of unnecessary violence and random terror.⁴¹⁸

Chief Vukayibambe Sigcawu became a target of the kraal burning campaign when he led a strong force of police to a secret mountain meeting at Ngqindilili, near Flagstaff on 19th November 1960.⁴¹⁹ According to Copelyn, Vukayibambe Sigcawu was so isolated from the political landscape in his location that, despite the fact that almost every male member of the location was present at the meeting, he himself had no idea of the whereabouts of this gathering.⁴²⁰ It was only by chance that he led the police to the foot of Ngqindilili Hill where they proceeded to fire rounds of live ammunition into the crowd in an attempt to disperse the meeting.⁴²¹ The crowd dispersed leaving one man dead and four seriously wounded. It was for this reason that Vukayibambe became a target of the mountain movement’s kraal burning campaign. However, it is important to emphasise that even in this case, in which the actions of a chief lead to the murder of a commoner and the severe injury of others,

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid*, p. 131.

⁴¹⁷ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, E.M. Warren, ‘Disturbances in the District of Bizana: Hut Burning’, 26th August 1960, Ref: C9/6/B; Also see Matoti, S. and Ntsebeza, L. ‘Rural resistance in Mpondoland and Thembuland’, p. 187.

⁴¹⁸ Copelyn, J. A. ‘The Mpondo Revolt, 1960’, p. 47.

⁴¹⁹ Matoti, S. and Ntsebeza, L. ‘Rural resistance in Mpondoland and Thembuland’, pp. 187 – 188.

⁴²⁰ Copelyn, J. A. ‘The Mpondo Revolt, 1960’, p. 47.

⁴²¹ *Ibid*, p. 47.

Vukayibambe was still given the warning to leave his home and to publically denounce the Bantu Authorities system or risk his life. Despite receiving the standard warning, 'the horsemen are coming', Vukayibambe chose to remain at his kraal site with a home guard and police protection while his wife and children fled the area. On the night of 20th November 1960 a regiment of between 500 and 1000 commoners marched to Vukayibambe's kraal and demanded that the chief come outside and present himself to the crowd. According to Mdingi's description of the murder of Vukayibambe:

The people realised that the police always left after about 9 pm, thus leaving the chiefs exposed. On the day Vukayibambe was killed, the people saw the police van as it was leaving his place, and they went for him. He fired shots from within the house, but that was not effective against the mob that was advancing. On reaching his house they asked him to get out or they would burn the house. When they began to set it alight, he came out. They bludgeoned him to death and cut him to pieces.⁴²²

In addition to Vukayibambe two of his headmen who were in his home that night were killed, one of which was known by the nickname 'Stalin'.⁴²³ However, once again it is necessary to highlight that this was not an instance of mindless or grotesque mob violence as suggested by the quotation above. In fact, what is not mentioned in Mdingi's description is that upon arrival the commoners made sure that 'a prisoner and two boys were allowed to leave unmolested before Vukayibambe and the two indunas were killed'.⁴²⁴ Thus, drawing on Copelyn, it can be argued that the example of Vukayibambe's murder highlights the serious limitations placed on the use of violence as a necessary political tactic by the members of the mountain movement and how participants in burning parties endeavoured to deploy tactical violence without compromising their own humanity or that of the family members of targeted individuals.⁴²⁵ This once again echoes Mbeki's claim that the mountain movement's actions demonstrated 'the difference between a people's organized force and a band of thugs collected for the sole purpose of sustaining a tyranny that lives in perpetual fear of its own failure'.⁴²⁶ The introduction of fatal violence directed at certain state supporters in the context of the mountain movement's kraal burning campaign was not an occurrence which

⁴²² Leonard Mdingi quoted in Matoti, S. and Ntsebeza, L. 'Rural resistance in Mpondoland and Thembuland', p. 187.

⁴²³ Copelyn, 'The Mpondo Revolt, 1960', p. 47.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 47.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 47.

⁴²⁶ Mbeki, G. 'The Peassants' Revolt', pp. 129-131.

spontaneously emerged in the last two months of 1960. Rather it was one which was intensely discussed and debated at mountain meetings for months before the death of Vukayibambe. On 19th July 1960 a police informer reported that the commoners meeting at Hlontlota Hill in Kanyayo Location had, since the findings of the commission of inquiry, been saying:

We are not going to stop what we are doing. We were told in Bizana Village that we must stop holding illegal meetings but we are not going to stop. Any person who belongs to the Tribal Authority must be killed instead of being burnt out, because burning a persons' kraal causes hardship to children. If a person is killed the children will remain under a roof.⁴²⁷

This statement is a significant indication of the extent to which debates concerning justice, humanity and violence were at the fore of mountain meetings and political decision making processes concerning the kraal burning campaign. Furthermore, it is also another example of how in the context of the mountain movement even those members who advocated for the tactical use of murder instead of kraal burnings justified their suggestion by making reference to the infringement of children's human dignity and lived experience. However, despite these discussions at mountain meetings and the inclusion of murder in a few kraal burning campaigns, killing was never a principle modality amongst the mountain movement or the Mpondo revolts more broadly. In fact during the entire period of the revolts the total number of murders which resulted from the political praxes of the mountain movement was 22.⁴²⁸ Only five of these victims were police informers and the rest were headmen, chiefs and some of their home-guards. With this statistic in mind it is clear that the depiction of the mountain movement as engaged in terroristic violence – as implied by state officials and certain historians – is a troubling formulation which does much to negate the intellectual and political agency of the movements' participants as well as their collective concern for humanity and human dignity.

In addition to stressing the political principles conditioning the deployment of tactical violence by the mountain movement it is also important to keep in mind that the violence of the Mpondo revolts was in no way one-directional. Not only was the state sponsored repression meted out on thousands of commoners during this period of an exceptionally violent character, but in some cases, chiefs and sub-chiefs deployed a counter-revolutionary

⁴²⁷ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/48, 'Statement of Makehlane Nganani', 19th July 1960, Ref: Unknown.

⁴²⁸ Copelyn, J. 'The Mpondo Revolts, 1960', p. 41.

campaign of hut and kraal burning against those identified as being anti-state and anti-Bantu Authorities. Evidence to this effect is found in the statement given to the Commission of Inquiry by Enoch Mbele, an Isikelo resident recently back from labour centres in Natal. Enoch Mbele was one of five speakers who had been elected to act as spokesperson for the approximately 5 000 Mbizana commoners, identified by the chairman of the commission Van Heerden as 'the rebels', who had gathered to be part of the proceedings at the Mbizana Aerodrome on 13th July 1960.⁴²⁹ According to Enoch's statement:

The Minister of Defence had gone overseas and had praised the South African Police. He had stated that they were a very efficient force in preserving law and order. If the Minister in question had been present today they would take him to the Amadiba area to see what members of the Police force had done. Tshangela – Theophilus Tshangela – had been burnt out and the culprit was a Chief. He had been seen as he had set the huts alight in broad daylight. The matter had been reported to the Police, yet the same Chief had been in the Police van which arrested Tshangela. He had accompanied the Police who had effected the arrest of Tshangela and no action had been taken against the Chief. When arrests are effected by the Police they assault the accused person. They also assault women and children and help themselves to the kraal owners fruit.⁴³⁰

That chiefs had, in certain locations, mustered a group of supporters and deployed their own counter-revolutionary violent tactics against the members of the mountain movement, as suggested by Enoch Mbele's statement, is reiterated by Matoti and Ntsebeza in their discussion of the killing of Sub-Chief Stanford Nomagwetekana on 2nd December 1960. According to Matoti and Ntsebeza:

[Stanford Nomagwetekana] was a staunch supporter of Botha Sigcawu. Residents had rebelled against Nomagwetekana, accusing him of abusing his authority, robbing kraals and terrorising the people. Both Vukayibambe Sigcawu and Stanford Nomagwetekana are alleged to have participated in the police shootings of 19th November 1960. When their bodyguards, armed with rifles, attempted to evict a resident, "a war cry was raised against Stanford and an impi of 1 000 Pondos marched against the sub-chief, resulting in his death and that of his four henchmen".⁴³¹

⁴²⁹ Van Heerden, *Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, 13 July 1960, The Cory Library, Rhodes University, p. 22.

⁴³⁰ Enoch Mbele, Evidence given to the *Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, 13 July 1960, The Cory Library, Rhodes University, p. 22.

⁴³¹ Matoti, S. and Ntsebeza, L. 'Rural resistance in Mpondoland and Thembuland', p. 188.

Returning to the statement made by Enoch Mbele's it is apparent that not only did members of the tribal authorities system embark upon kraal burning campaigns, and other acts such as robbery, with impunity from the law but that police officers began to use intimidation and brutal violence on commoners in their attempts to repress the revolts. The various forms of violence with which the state repressed the Mpondo revolts were of a drastic and unparalleled character and will be discussed at length in Chapter Nine. What is of importance for this current discussion is the fact that the mountain movement during the year 1960 placed limitations upon itself which created the conditions in which violence was tactically deployed in such a way that it was unlikely to become gratuitous. Furthermore, it appears that violence was only carried out when the political situation in various areas of Eastern Mpondoland was such that it was collectively agreed that the inhumanity which would result from not deploying tactical violence would be greater than if it was. However, it is important to emphasise that the mountain movement and the Mpondo revolts more broadly *did* take on a militaristic form of direct political engagement with the apartheid state and tribal authority system at a time when the national shift to armed struggle was still being kept in the realm of theory and debate amongst the leadership of the ANC.

The Mountain Movement and the Armed Struggle

The theme of violence is central to understanding the featuring of the Mpondo revolts as part of the elite nationalist historiography of the liberation struggle. In chapter two of the first volume of SADET's project, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, entitled 'The Turn to Armed Struggle' Denis Goldberg is quoted as stating:

There were some real turning points [on the road to armed struggle]. I think the Mountain Committees of Mpondoland, they were decisive. You know there was a sense in the jargon, these were soviets, these were a people prepared to take responsibility for their own future. They were levying taxes, they were setting up an embryonic state and embryonic armed forces were able to function.⁴³²

Denis Goldberg was one of a number of high-ranking members of the South African Communist Party (SACP) and ANC for whom the endorsement of tactical violence by rural communities inspired a rethinking of the national liberation struggle's axiomatic commitment to non-violence. Perhaps the most influenced by the Mpondo revolts in his thinking of the

⁴³² Denis Goldberg quoted in Magubane, B. et al. 2004. 'The turn to armed struggle'. In *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*. Zebra Press: Cape Town, p. 58.

national liberation struggle was Govan Mbeki. There is hardly any contestation amongst historians that Mbeki's analysis of the Mpondo revolts, which is actually the specific focus of only one chapter in his book *The Peasants' Revolt*, was a hugely significant influence on his strategising of the armed struggle and his contributions with Joe Slovo to the first strategic plan of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), Operation Mayibuye.

Although it is clear that the politics of the Mpondo revolts influenced certain members of the national liberation organisations in the urban areas many historians have criticised Mbeki's work for overestimating the influence of the Congress on the Mpondo revolts. In his work Mbeki claimed that:

Towards the end the [mountain] movement adopted the full programme of the African National Congress and its allies as embodied in the Freedom Charter. Consequently the struggle in Pondoland became linked with the national struggle for liberation.⁴³³

As Beinart highlights this claim made by Mbeki, which is also reiterated by Anderson Ganyile, is not supported by subsequent writing on the revolts and he concludes that both Mbeki and Ganyile overemphasised the extent to which the mountain movement adopted the programme of the ANC and its allies.⁴³⁴ My own reading of the secondary literature and archival sources confirms the above conclusion reached by Beinart. In addition to this I argue that the political project spearheaded by the mountain movement in 1960, as well as the broader context of rural resistance during the 1950s, did much to cause an epistemic rupture in the axiomatic commitment to non-violence held by high-ranking members of the ANC and SACP who, as part of hierarchical organisations, monopolised political decision-making processes regarding the liberation struggle. The ANC and its allies, on the other hand, did not seem to have had as significant an influence on the politics of the mountain movement and the thoughts and actions of commoners in Eastern Mpondoland during the revolts.

The links the mountain movement held to the ANC were based on the inclusion of junior and middle ranking ANC members, such as Leonard Mdingi and Anderson Ganyile, as part of the membership of the mountain movement during the revolts. The ANC attempted to use Ganyile as a means by which to distribute ANC newsletters and propaganda amongst

⁴³³ Mbeki, G. 'The Peasants' Revolt', pp. 128-129.

⁴³⁴ Beinart, W. 'The Mpondo Revolt', p. 112

the people of Mpondoland and to broaden the demands of the 'rebel movement' in line with those of the nationalist struggle. However, Ganyile recalled that while the ANC did have a general influence amongst the people of Eastern Mpondoland his efforts to influence the demands and political agenda of the mountain movement to fully internalise the programme of the ANC was, in his opinion, largely unsuccessful. The mountain movement, on the other hand, made use of these ANC members within its own ranks in order to put pressure on the ANC leadership in Durban to provide the movement with both legal support and firearms. Under the collective authority of the mountain movement members from various branches drew upon links with the ANC in June 1960 in order to gain the services of lawyers such as Rowley Arenstein because the local lawyers who had been defending the movement's arrested members were denounced and rejected for charging exorbitant prices for their services. In this way the ANC did provide an important role as the mountain movement tapped into its networks.

It is interesting to note that Arenstein stated his frustration with the leadership of the ANC who consistently 'talked down' to the members of the mountain movement that were sent as emissaries to the organisation's headquarters in both Durban and Johannesburg.⁴³⁵ Arenstein later distanced himself from the ANC, however, in as much as the ANC could provide the mountain movement with free legal services through lawyers such as Arenstein, and later Albie Sachs, Michael Mitchell and George Horrocks, the organisation did prove itself useful to the mountain movement. In particular the success these lawyers had in relation to forcing the police to admit fault in the use of excessive force at the Ngquza Hill massacre in June 1960 was an important victory for the mountain movement and according to Beinart was 'critical in winning broader support'.⁴³⁶ However, the willingness of the ANC to support the mountain movement evaporated when pressure was put on the leadership in Durban to supply it with firearms. The Mpondo revolts were not the first instance in which rural commoners put pressure on the ANC to provide arms. A similar demand was made by participants in the Sekhukhuniland revolts during the 1950s. However, in both instances the ANC was unable, or unwilling, to provide the requested arms to these rural communities. This blatant indication of the ANC's hesitance to adopt a programme of armed struggle, when such

⁴³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 110.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 110.

a programme was already being put into practice by commoners in the rural areas, resulted in many of its high-ranking members, such as Curnick Ndlovu, feeling as though 'we as leaders were becoming irrelevant in the face of these rural explosions'.⁴³⁷

Beinart argues that while it was clearly the case that the Mpondo revolts 'was one of a number of episodes that affirmed the move towards armed struggle' he insists that 'the ANC did not explicitly encourage violence in the Mpondo revolts'.⁴³⁸ There is much significance to be found in considering the relationship between the politics of the Mpondo revolts and that of the ANC and its allies. However, what is perhaps most significant is the fact that such a discussion highlights the extent to which narratives of South African resistance history which focus narrowly on urban based national liberation organisations and their leaders as the drivers of anti-apartheid politics are unable to account for the politics of the Mpondo revolts and many other instances of rural resistance.

Conclusion

Within this chapter I have made the argument that the political principle of human dignity upheld by the members of the mountain movement functioned so as to condition the praxis of kraal burnings and in so doing ensure that they did not 'shed their humanity' or become involved in the perpetuation of violence that is unnecessary and terroristic. Implied in this argument is the notion that certain forms of violence were seen as necessary by the participants in the Mpondo revolts. Indeed it is clear that the tactic of kraal burnings, and in a few very rare instances murder, was considered a necessary political mechanism with which to challenge the authority of the state and the chieftaincy and in so doing prevent the functioning of a system which threatened commoners' access to natural resources and ability to control and dictate their own lives and futures. The effectivity of the mountain movement's deployment of tactical violence in rendering the majority of locations in Eastern Mpondoland 'ungovernable' by state officials and members of the chieftaincy is illustrated in the magistrate of Mbizana's observation that at the height of the kraal burning campaign:

The Rebel movement now assumed the form of a full scale Rebellion against the Government although, apparently, the South African Police did not recognise it as such. Law and order did not exist anymore and the Rebels assumed control of most of the district. The Police, apparently, were powerless

⁴³⁷ Magubane, B. et al. 2004. 'The turn to armed struggle', p. 59.

⁴³⁸ Beinart, W. 'The Mpondo Revolt', p. 111.

to protect the law abiding Natives and the Rebels continues to do exactly as they pleased. They assumed control of a large part of the district and there was a very real danger that the whole district would join the rebels.⁴³⁹

The significance of this quotation is that it speaks to the way in which tactical violence was used as a mechanism to create the conditions of possibility in which the mountain movement was able to establish itself as an alternative political authority. Not only did the kraal burnings effectively prevent the state and the chieftaincy from functioning as an authority in the majority of locations in Eastern Mpondoland but, in so doing, the kraal burnings also allowed for the peoples' courts of the mountain movement to become a vehicle for the manifestation of a prescriptive politics which adopted and adapted certain functions and powers of the state and the chieftaincy and reconfigured them in line with the political principles and collective democratic practices of the mountain movement. Had it not been for the deployment of tactical violence the mountain movement may never have been able to maintain the necessary conditions of popular support and distance from the state which allowed for it to establish itself as an alternative political authority.

Considering the significance of violence in relation to prefiguring the conditions of possibility for prescriptive politics brings up many interesting and important questions regarding the relationship between violence and emancipatory politics. Within this chapter I have sought to demonstrate how the deployment of tactical violence in the context of the Mpondo revolts was mediated by a collective commitment to a conception of human dignity. Moreover, I argued that this commitment to human dignity was a defining aspect of the emancipatory politics of both the mountain movement and the revolts more broadly. In this final section what I am trying to highlight is that the tactical violence of the mountain movement was a necessary praxis or mechanism by which to foster the conditions of possibility for the manifestation of a prescriptive politics which, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, can itself be seen as holding many emancipatory political features.

⁴³⁹ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Bizana, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

Chapter Six:

Women, Gender and the Mpondo Revolts

Introduction

In the previous two chapters I focused explicitly on the political principles and practices of the mountain movement as a primary driver of popular politics during the Mpondo revolts. I argued that a number of these principles and practices can and should be seen as politically emancipatory. In particular I highlighted the ethnically and socio-economically inclusive nature of the mountain movement, the egalitarianism of its political form and praxes, as well as its commitment to a universal conception of human dignity. However, both chapters are notably silent on the issue of gender and lack serious consideration of the ways in which gender defined the subjects and praxes of the mountain movement as well as the emancipatory politics of the Mpondo revolts more broadly. The purpose of this chapter is to provide such a serious consideration of the theme of gender and the political role of women during the Mpondo revolts.

The importance of taking the issue of gender seriously is related directly to understanding emancipatory politics and its historical manifestations within the context of the Mpondo revolts. The exclusion of women from mountain meetings, although a debatable topic, may appear to have been an aspect of the mountain movement which did not conform to the conception of emancipatory politics adopted within this thesis. However, as this chapter will suggest, it appears that the role of women was much more complicated. First, it is important to keep in mind that the mountain meetings and participants in the mountain movement were not the only political formations and actors driving popular, and in some but certainly not all cases, emancipatory politics during the revolts. Second, not only did women sometimes organise themselves autonomously from men in public and militaristic forms during the revolts, but the mountain movement would never have been able to function without the political involvement of women. The central argument of this chapter then is that to focus exclusively on the politics of men in the history of the Mpondo revolts can only provide a theoretically limited and historically inaccurate understanding of emancipatory politics within the context of the Mpondo revolts.

The chapter begins with a discussion of Helen Bradford's invaluable critique of Colin Bundy's 'classic text' *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* and its relevance for understanding the androcentric tendencies within the historiography of the Mpondo revolts.⁴⁴⁰ Drawing theoretically from Bradford I argue that, like Bundy's *The Rise and Fall*, a generalised 'insensitivity' to the issue of gender within the historiography of the Mpondo revolts has resulted in the near complete erasure of women from the political history of the revolts.⁴⁴¹ Thereafter attention turns to an analysis of some, but by no means many, archival sources which challenge the apolitical role assigned to women within the historiography of the revolts. Within this section I will attempt to bring to the fore instances in which women were at the centre of political resistance praxes which were public, sometimes militaristic, and which brought women into direct confrontation with the apartheid state and police. In addition to this I will also consider certain sources which speak to the theme of gender more broadly and not just instances in which women can be seen as engaged in forms of politics usually considered as masculine. Finally, in the concluding section of this thesis I will discuss the importance of adopting a historical analysis which takes seriously the issue of gender for the task of thinking emancipatory politics within the context of the Mpondo revolts.

The Pitfalls of Androcentric Perspectives of the Mpondo revolts

One of the most obvious and detrimental limitations of the existing historiography of the Mpondo revolts is its androcentrism and related marginalisation of women. Yet, this androcentrism is evident not only in the primary sources and secondary literature of the Mpondo revolts but also in some of the texts which are considered foundational within the broader historiography of the state, capital, power and resistance in the Eastern Cape and the rural areas of South Africa more broadly. Helen Bradford provides a convincing critique of Colin Bundy's classic text *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* in which she shows how Bundy's self-proclaimed 'insensitivity' to the issue of gender not only resulted in the erasure of women (and men who did not conform to elite Victorian masculinity) from history; but it also resulted in his entire 'rise and fall thesis' of the African peasantry in South Africa being historically inaccurate.⁴⁴² Bradford argues that it is through 'a selective use of sources'

⁴⁴⁰ Bradford, H. 2000. 'Peasants, Historians, and Gender: A South African Case Study Revisited, 1850–1886'. In *History and Theory*, 39, p. 88; Also see Bundy, C. 1988. *The Rise & Fall of the South African Peasantry*, 2nd ed. David Philip: Cape Town.

⁴⁴¹ Bradford, H. 'Peasants, Historians, and Gender', p. 88.

⁴⁴² *Ibid*, p. 110.

and a problematic imposition of an Eurocentric notion of 'a male breadwinner' upon African gender relations that Bundy produces an analysis of class formation and historical change in rural South Africa in which 'the invisibility of wives is maintained'.⁴⁴³ By bringing the politics of gender and the experience of women to the fore of her analysis of this so-called 'seminal' text, Bradford has done more than just throw a spanner in the works of Bundy's 'rise and fall thesis'.⁴⁴⁴ The significance of her work lies in its articulation of a critique which is applicable to all scholars whose androcentric historical perspectives have contributed to bodies of literature in which 'an undifferentiated *male reality*' is portrayed as the totality of '*peasants reality*'.⁴⁴⁵ As a result all androcentric interpretations of so-called 'peasant' societies in South Africa suffer not only from a conceptual 'tunnel vision' in their analyses but also of being 'incorrect' in their conclusions precisely because they are false and do not apply for women.⁴⁴⁶

It is not hard to consider the historiography of the Mpondo revolts as a body of literature which is prone to presenting the experience of men as the sum total of experience and reality. Some historians such as Ntsebeza and Kepe should be credited for their critical self-reflexivity in acknowledging their neglect of gender and women.⁴⁴⁷ However, as Bradford suggests, the failure to take women and gender seriously is not simply a bias that is easily corrected, it may compromise our understanding of the Revolt itself as well as emancipatory politics more generally.⁴⁴⁸

Perhaps the most obvious way in which women have been excluded from the narratives and historical analyses of the Mpondo revolts is by scholars who present the politics and participants of the mountain movement as the only drivers of popular politics during the Mpondo revolts.⁴⁴⁹ As stated at the outset of this chapter it is widely agreed that the mountain movement was an exclusively male organisation. Women, it is said, were not

⁴⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 89.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 90.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 90; also see Isaacman, A. 1990. 'Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa'. In *African Studies Review*, 33, p. 11.

⁴⁴⁶ Bradford, H. 1996. 'Women, Gender and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and Its Frontier Zones, C. 1806–70'. In *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 37, No. 3, p. 355.

⁴⁴⁷ Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. 'Introduction', p. 16.

⁴⁴⁸ Bradford, H. 'Women, Gender and Colonialism', p. 355.

⁴⁴⁹ I argue that exclusive focus on the mountain movement to the neglect of other popular political formations can be found within many scholarly works on the Mpondo revolts. For example see Lodge, T. 1983. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. Raven Press: Johannesburg; Beinart, W. 2001. *Twentieth-Century South Africa*. Oxford University Press: New York, p. 165.

allowed to attend mountain meetings and did not participate in the kraal burning campaigns.⁴⁵⁰ As a result of this, the most significant role afforded to women is as the necessary invisible labourers of social reproduction as they walked up the mountain sides to bring food, water and other supplies to the men. While this was definitely an important function served by women that enabled the development of political praxes in the space of the mountain, I argue that it alone is insufficient in accounting for the extent and significance of women's political involvement in the Mpondo revolts as well as the relationship between women and the mountain movement. It is to the significance of gender and women in relation to the mountain movement and the Mpondo revolts more broadly that attention now turns.

Gender, Women and the Mountain Movement

The significance of women in relation to the mountain movement was much more than as the proverbial 'hewers of wood and drawers of water'.⁴⁵¹ As indicated in Chapter Three the crowd gatherings and public demonstrations of popular political opinion which defined the early stages of the Mpondo revolts were made up of both men and women. Similarly in Chapter Three it was shown that women were often involved in the covert acts of sabotage, such as the destruction of fences and telephone poles, as well as the construction of defensive barriers against the state and police through the erection of multiple roadblocks. In fact, in the case of these roadblocks it appears that it was the hard labour of women and children which facilitated this extremely effective political tactic most of the time independent of any contribution from adult men whose time was monopolised on the mountain.⁴⁵² It can also be argued that the conditions in which the mountain movement emerged in Mbizana during March 1960 were all conditioned by the self-conscious agency of women as important mobilizers, organisers and defenders of popular politics. Furthermore, I argue that the significant political role played by women persisted right throughout the Mpondo revolts even after the consolidation of the mountain movement as a formation

⁴⁵⁰ Beinart, W. 2012. 'The Mpondo Revolt Through the Eyes of Leonard Mdingi and Anderson Ganyile' in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 104.

⁴⁵¹ Linebaugh, P. and Redicker, M. 2013. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Beacon Press: Boston.

⁴⁵² Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/61, Donovan Alexander Ayliffe, 'Statement on Road Obstruction: Lusikisiki', 23rd March 1960, Ref: N.1/9/2.

despite excluding women from participating in political decision-making processes on the mountains.⁴⁵³

One of the key arguments made by Bradford in her critique of Bundy is that the invisibility of women is maintained not only by the imposition of gender biases (against women); but also through the selective use of archival sources.⁴⁵⁴ Following from this insight I have attempted to bring to the fore a number of sources which speak to the political involvement of women during the Mpondo revolts which have not been taken seriously in regard to the gender insights they hold within the existing historiography. Although my own research and interpretation of the Mpondo revolts doesn't completely contradict the widespread claim that women were not involved in mountain meetings or the kraal burning campaigns; it does argue that these assumptions should be open to questioning and never taken for granted.

Diana Wylie's discovery of the inpatient records of the Holy Cross Hospital at the time of the Ngquza Hill Massacre in June 1960 is one primary source which brings up interesting questions regarding the exclusively male composition of mountain meetings.⁴⁵⁵ According to Wylie in addition to the 11 men who were admitted to the hospital with serious gunshot wounds in the days immediately following the joint police and military raid on a mountain meeting at Ngquza Hill on 6th June 1960 was a woman named Ntsonyana Nigi who had also been admitted with gunshot wounds similar to those of the other male patients.⁴⁵⁶ All available evidence suggests that on 6th June 1960 and the days immediately following the Ngquza Hill massacre the police were not firing live ammunition in the fields and villages near Ngquza but rather at the mountain meeting on the ridges and in the valley of the mountain alone.⁴⁵⁷ Although there are accounts of the police having (in this and many other instances) physically assaulted, verbally degraded, raped and robbed women during homestead raids in search of male rebels; there is no indication that the police ever shot a woman during such

⁴⁵³ Beinart, W. 2012. 'The Mpondo Revolt', p. 104.

⁴⁵⁴ Bradford, H. 'Peasants, Historians, and Gender', p. 89.

⁴⁵⁵ Wylie, D. 2012. 'The Shock of the New: Ngquza Hill 1960'. In Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town.

⁴⁵⁶ Wylie, D. 'The Shock of the New', p. 205.

⁴⁵⁷ See for example Steinburg, J. 2012. 'A Bag of Soil, a Bullet from up High: Some meanings of the Mpondo revolts today'. In Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo revolts after fifty years*. UCT Press: Cape Town; Churchill, R. 1962. *White Man's God*. Hodder & Stoughton: London, p. 64.

instances.⁴⁵⁸ How then can we account for Ntsonyana Nigi's gunshot wounds recorded in the hospital's inpatient records? One possible explanation is that once the shootings began a group of women, as was often the case during the revolts, came out to challenge the police and Nigi was shot during the confrontation. Yet, another possibility is that Nigi could have received the gunshot wounds because she was present amongst the men at the mountain meeting during the moments in which the police began their assault. Although I was unable to locate any further archival evidence or secondary literature, including that of Wylie's own analysis, which can provide further detail about Ntsonyana Nigi's experience, the record of her injury does alert us to the possibility that the male composition of the mountain movement may not have been as rigid and inflexible as the historiography of the revolts suggests.⁴⁵⁹ While these aforementioned 'possibilities' remain speculative what is clear from the above discussion is that the role of women is still largely not understood in regard to the Mpondo revolts and it requires much further investigation and theoretical consideration by scholars.

However, while primary sources such as the abovementioned inpatient records do raise important and valid questions regarding the extent to which the mountain movement was at all times and in all places an exclusively male political formation – I argue that there is not enough available evidence to dismiss historians' understanding of the mountain movement as exclusionary of women from political decision making processes in the space of the mountain. Yet, what I argue needs to be emphasised. It is the fact that the political praxes of the mountain movement, both in the space of the mountain and outside of it, could never have functioned without the material and subjective support it received from self-consciously political women in Eastern Mpondoland. Furthermore, it needs to be acknowledged that the significance of the relationship of women to the mountain movement was as much more than just the bringers of food and water to men on the mountains and in the forests as well as the people who kept the homestead functioning during the revolts.

⁴⁵⁸ See for example Enoch Mbele, Evidence given to the *Departmental Committee of Inquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, 13 July 1960, The Cory Library, Rhodes University, p. 22.; Solomon Madikizela, Evidence given to the *Departmental Committee of Inquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, 13 July 1960, The Cory Library, Rhodes University, p. 20; Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1472, K. G. Harvey, 'Report on Position in Lusikisiki', 14th February 1961, Ref: Unknown.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid*, p. 205.

Firstly, the mass march on Mbizana town and the accompanying demonstrations, political rallies, pickets and acts of sabotage which completely disrupted the governance of the Isikelo Location during the days before and after the weekend of 20th March 1960, in which the first kraal burning took place, would not have been possible without the efforts and organisation of women.⁴⁶⁰ A confidential telegram sent by the magistrate of Mbizana to Pretoria on 22nd March 1960 reveals that not only were women active members of the thousands of people who collectively protested against the tribal authorities in Isikelo during this period, but that upon investigation it was found that women were in fact the ones who had 'incited the men to take up arms'.⁴⁶¹ Further example of this is found in a letter sent from a woman to the magistrate of Mbizana in January 1961 concerning her husband's role in the mountain movement and his subsequent arrest:

Dear Sir,

Among the people who are there in goal there is a man called Wycliffe Mpande. He arrived there on Tuesday. He was coming by his self. He is a good man. When he was being asked whether he payed the shillings, he agreed because he was a very good man. Even that shilling he said that he paid, it was not payed by him self. It was paid by me his wife. In the beginning of the mountain, there were many enemies.

When the women cried if the Magistrate and his policemen went to the mountain, I was in a frenzy of terror. The shouting of the women made me very sorry. I tell him to do what other men did, and then he went to the mountain one Saturday. And when he arrived at home, he told me by the rough of the men who were on the mountain.

He always told me about what the Magistrate said. And we found it was true. The day which he was going to the mountain, is the day which the Magistrate asked to the Pondos what they want. When he arrived he said that he would never go to the mountain for the second time.

When he did these things, he was afraid of the Government. Many years ago he was the man who did works of the Government. He was very good to the Government, because he have manners. Even in this location he was a good man. In the special poltax, he sent me because he was afraid of the Pondos. He wanted to do the work of the Government. All that sir, I beg some peace among it. I had done a mistake sire, please give me a peace. I am sorry my Magistrate, please sir give me some peace. The whole-Circuit of Ludeke Mission is very sorry for what I had done. Those who are old and those who are young cried. I do not eat I always drink a cup of tea as long as he went. I do not sleep the whole night. I think that he was put in goal by me. I think about my disease of the heart. Wycliffe has no record even in his chief. The heart of

⁴⁶⁰ See Chapters Three and Five for further discussion of the events in Bizana during March 1960.

⁴⁶¹ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1475, CMT telegram to The Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development, 22nd March 1960, Ref: 42/1.

that man is like a baby. It do not want to do bad thing. This was these reasons which I beg dome peace among them. All that I collect it in peace. Please sir, give the servant of God some peace. I married in the year 1933 I have never quarrel with him.

Even his chief, Chief Sigwinta shall never tell you a bad thing about Wycliffe. Please sir give us some peace in our mistake. He agreed that shilling because he wanted to talk truth. Others said they do not know the shillings. But they paid them. The only thing I beg to you sir, is peace.

Yours faithfully,
Mary Mpande⁴⁶²

There are a number of insights which should be singled out in analysing the significance of this letter. Firstly, it can be deduced that Wycliffe Mpande was arrested by the police after he admitted to paying an amount of one shilling into the mountain meetings defence fund and attending mountain meetings. Yet, importantly it was his wife Mary Mpande who, having been influenced by the political opinion amongst the majority of women in her location, instructed her husband to join the men at the mountain. When Wycliffe expressed his fears, as a former government employee and supporter, of being involved in the mountain movement to his wife she was the one who paid 'the shillings' into the defence fund of the mountain movement.⁴⁶³ It is for these reasons that she blames herself for the arrest of her husband as it was she who made him get involved with the movement despite his own hesitance to do so. Both this letter and the aforementioned telegram concerning the events of March 1960 are useful indications of the importance of women in influencing men to organise themselves politically in the context of the Mpondo revolts. However, that both of these sources pivot around the idea that women influenced or 'incited' men into forming or participating in the mountain movement is not enough to dispel the myth that rural women's political agency and praxes were always secondary in comparison to their male counterparts during the Mpondo revolts.

Even the word 'incite' can give one the impression that, if we are to concede that women played a political role in the Mpondo revolts, it was a role which took place predominantly behind the closed doors of the home and it was a politics which was whispered into the ears of husbands and other menfolk to interpret and act upon according their own

⁴⁶² Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/61, Mrs Mary Mpande 'Complaint about Wycliffe Mpande that he has been detained in jail' to E. M. Warren, Magistrate of Bizana, 6th February 1961, Ref: N.1/9/2/1.

⁴⁶³ 1/BIZ 6/61, Mrs Mary Mpande 'Complaint about Wycliffe Mpande that he has been detained in jail' to E. M. Warren, Magistrate of Bizana, 6th February 1961, Ref: N.1/9/2/1.

male agency as protagonists of the struggle. I am not trying to suggest that the political decision making processes which took place in individual households and homesteads, particularly between husbands and wives, were of no significance in shaping the political landscape of the Mpondo revolts – they definitely were. What I am trying to suggest is that the political role of women during the Mpondo revolts cannot be confined to the conceptual categories of private domesticity and the social location of the home. In my research I have come across a few, but by no means many, archival sources which reveal instances in which women were key agents in political formations and praxes which were public, militaristic, and which brought women into direct confrontation with the apartheid state and police.

The first of these sources in which reference is made to the involvement of women in direct confrontation with police is a statement taken from a mountain movement member, Makenisi Jase, following the series of successful kraal burnings in Emonti location of Mbizana during April and May 1960.⁴⁶⁴ During the short period of just a few days the members of the mountain movement in Emonti successfully burnt out the kraals of three prominent members of the tribal authorities system. The first was Headman Mngqongwa Nijikazi; the second was Cromwell Madikizela, father of Winnie Madikizela, and councillor to Paramount Chief Botha Sigcawu; and the third was Sub-Chief Mbungwa.⁴⁶⁵ In the aftermath of the last of these three burning campaigns a member of the mountain movement called Mbodla told his fellow members that his children had informed him that the police had come looking for him at his kraal during the day and would be returning early tomorrow morning. With two men already having been arrested by police during the previous day in connection with the burnings the men of the mountain decided that Mbodla should remain in hiding and that a group of mountain movement members would go to his kraal in the morning and wait in anticipation of the police's arrival.⁴⁶⁶

Whilst the group of men crouched down in the veld and waited it was decided, for fear of being shot or arrested, that the group would make no politically charged statements or threats of violence and would instead merely ask the police what they wanted at Mbodla's

⁴⁶⁴ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1472, 'Statement of Makenisi Jase', 5th October 1960, Ref: Unknown.

⁴⁶⁵ CMT 3/1472, 'Statement of Makenisi Jase', 5th October 1960, Ref: Unknown.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

kraal.⁴⁶⁷ When the police vans finally arrived the men watched on anxiously from the plantation as they searched Mbodla's kraal and after discovering he was nowhere to be found got back into their vehicles and drove towards Mbizana town. At this stage the group of men stood up and waved a white flag to indicate to the police that they wanted to engage in a peaceful discussion with them. The police stopped and allowed the group of men to approach the convoy. A white police officer looked out from the top of the Saracen and asked the group of men what they were doing and if they were looking for a fight. One of the men replied hastily and said (if the white flag wasn't obvious enough) that they were not looking for a fight with the police and simply wanted to enquire why it was that they had come to Mdobla's kraal.⁴⁶⁸ The white police officer said that they were looking for the people who had been burning kraals and that if the group of men wanted to fight he was more than prepared to do so. The same member then reiterated that they were in no way prepared to fight with the government and were merely asking a question. The white police officer then disappeared back into the Saracen without saying another word.⁴⁶⁹

The crowd of men continued to stand facing the convoy of police until all of a sudden the pipe of the Saracen began to turn towards their direction. The group of men, recognising the danger of the situation, all began to run away towards the Mzamba River to find hiding places as the police officer shouted sarcastically from behind that they should not run away and should rather 'come and talk and discuss things'.⁴⁷⁰ The men heard the police officer's comment but the crowd would not return for fear of their own safety. There were a small number of men from the group who did not, or in the case of some of the older men, could not, run away further than to some of the bushes on the side of the road. A white officer got out of one of the three police vans and approached the remaining men with a loaded revolver pointed at the head of an old man, who was the father of a mountain movement member named Mlandolwa, and took both his shield and assegai away.⁴⁷¹ Had the public politics of the Mpondo revolts been confined to the efforts of male protagonists this would perhaps have

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

been the end of this confrontation between police and the dissident commoners of Eastern Mpondoland. However, this was not the case.

Shortly after the white police officer had confiscated the old man's weapons a sudden wave of sound came bursting into the air as a large group of women who had gone unnoticed until this point descended from multiple angles onto the police convoy signing a war cry and shouting at the police.⁴⁷² Constable du Toit, without leaving the safety of his vehicle, shouted to the group of women asking them what they wanted. Unlike the men who had taken the decision to be extremely cautious in what they said to the police, the women were uncompromising in their political principles and at great risk to their own safety bravely shouted back to the Constable that they were fundamentally against Tribal Authorities and did not want anything to do with it. The Constable replied saying that 'they must not stand and shout on the mountains they must go and talk to the Magistrate'.⁴⁷³ There is no further evidence available to suggest what might have happened after this point because it was at this stage that the male informant, Makenisi Jase, who gave the police a detailed description of the events ran away from the police convoy and the women and returned to his kraal.⁴⁷⁴

The sworn statement from Makenisi Jase, one of the men of the mountain movement present during these events, is one of a limited amount of documents stored in the Cape Town Archives which makes reference to the significance of women's political praxes during the Mpondo revolts.⁴⁷⁵ Another important archival source which makes reference to women organising themselves in politically militant ways is a police report regarding the events of 21st March 1960 in the Isikelo location.⁴⁷⁶ According to this report, on the morning of the 21st the deputy commissioner and Chief Magistrate of the Transkei arrived in Mbizana and joined a police convoy, accompanied by two Saracens, going into the Isikelo location. The police had received information from Saul Mabude and one other unnamed informant that the residents of Isikelo had taken a decision 'to stage a demonstration on Monday 21st March, 1960 when the District Authority meeting or on Wednesday 23rd March, 1960 when the tribal authority

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1475, Ebersohn, District Comandant, Kokstad to the Deputy Commissioner, Umtata, 'Police Report', 28th March 1960, Ref: 24/13/60.

meeting was to be held at the Magistrate's office, by marching on the town'.⁴⁷⁷ This information, coupled with a further report from Mr Bircher on the Harding border stating that 'the Maci tribe were arriving with shields, assegais and sharpened knives' to join the Isikelo residents, made it both urgent and necessary for the police to infiltrate the Isikelo location in order to prevent the march from taking place.⁴⁷⁸ According to the police report on this morning in the Isikelo Location:

Three separate groups of Bantus were addressed. The first group numbered 75 and the second group of some 25 elderly Bantus, the final group of approximately 350 women in battle paint and armed with pangas and some 650 men all fully armed were met on a hill. They were addressed by the Deputy Commissioner and Chief Magistrate. It was plain that the functioning of Tribal Authorities had not been understood by them.

They made it clear that they had no question or grievance against the Europeans. The Chief Magistrate informed them that steps would be made for a meeting to be called in order to offer the tribesmen an opportunity of having the functioning of Tribal Authorities fully explained to them. They were then allowed to disperse.

It was during this last meeting that a Bantu female, subsequently arrested and sentenced to a fine of £50 or 3 months, on two occasions lifted her dress and turning and bending exposed her behind to the persons addressing the meeting. This is by Bantu custom regarded as the worst insult a native can show to any person.⁴⁷⁹

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of what information pertaining to women's politics is available within the state archives. However, there exists at least a handful of sworn statements, police and military reports, as well as administrative documents stored in the Chief Magistrate of the Transkeian Territories (CMT) files of the Cape Town Archives, which are not hard to find and which throw an initial beam of light onto the otherwise neglected issue of the role of women during the Mpondo revolts. Another important example of one of these sources is an article from the *Contact* newspaper published on 10th September 1960 entitled 'Pondos Swear "No Retreat"' which stated that:

Men in Pondoland have gone into the mountains to train and prepare for their struggle against the Bantu Authorities. Those who have done are known as abafana basentabeni (the boys in the mountains).⁴⁸⁰ Their wives send them food and keep them supplied with whatever they need.

⁴⁷⁷ CMT 3/1475, 'Police Report', 28th March 1960, Ref: 24/13/60.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁰ The correct translation of the term 'abafana basentabeni' is in fact 'the young men of the mountain'.

Many women too are being enrolled in special women's brigades, which are taking to the hills to assist their menfolk more actively. These women of the mountain are called abafazi basentabeni. In a short time every man, woman and youth who is fit and well will be united in one organization against the government.⁴⁸¹

This quotation taken from the *Contact* article as well as the previous extract taken from the district commandant's report both hold important implications for our understanding of the gender dynamics of the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts. Not only do they suggest that mountains were not necessarily only important political sites for the development and maintenance of masculine forms of resistance politics participated in by men alone; they also indicate that the politics of women during the Mpondo revolts was, in some ways and at certain times, organised and practiced autonomously or at a distance from the mountain movement and its gendered limitations placed on mountain meetings. Aside from the *Contact* article I have not yet come across any other sources in the archive which refer to 'abafazi basentabeni' and a single source of this nature is not enough in and of itself to illuminate what the political form and praxes of such a mountain based women's origination may have been.⁴⁸²

Women may not have been involved in the meetings of the mountain movement but what is clear is that the implementation of decisions taken by men on the mountain was dependent of the self-conscious political agency of women, both individually and collectively, seeking their own emancipation in the context of the Mpondo revolts. Furthermore, women may not have been the ones who literally set fire to a homestead in the context of a kraal burning, archival sources testify to the fact that they were still intimately involved in the deployment of this tactical violence.⁴⁸³ Not only did they, through the means of war cries, provided an important form of mobilisation for burning parties, but they also fulfilled the important role of keeping watch and alerting the burners whenever police vans approached.⁴⁸⁴ A similar argument can be made in relation to the role of women in the tactical deployment of boycotts during the last months of 1960, a political praxis which will be

⁴⁸¹ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1475, Contact Article, 'Pondos Sear "No Retreat"', 10th September 1960, Ref: Unknown.

⁴⁸² CMT 3/1475, Contact Article, 'Pondos Sear "No Retreat"', 10th September 1960, Ref: Unknown.

⁴⁸³ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/14725, 'Regina vs Mjongeni Hlamandane, Tanana Haqzumane, Tekwini Ngqibelo', 30th April 1960, Ref: 138/60.

⁴⁸⁴ CMT 3/14725, 'Regina vs Mjongeni Hlamandane, Tanana Haqzumane, Tekwini Ngqibelo', 30th April 1960, Ref: 138/60.

discussed in detail within the following chapter. Thus it is clear that the relationship between women and the mountain movement during the Mpondo revolts can be seen as one which reflects the observations of missionary Arthur Brigg, quoted by Bradford, who lamented that in 'heathen' society 'it was not so much the man that supported his wives as the wives that supported him'.⁴⁸⁵

Gender Beyond the Mountain Movement

So far this chapter has focused rather modestly on the gender-corrective task of exposing aspects of women's political contribution to the Mpondo revolts which have hitherto been marginalised within the historiography of the revolts. By bringing to the fore instances in which women were involved in public and armed confrontation with the apartheid police I have attempted to take a step in the right direction in terms of inserting the political agency of black rural women back into the narrative and historiography of the revolts. However, it must be noted that taking this first step is only a point of departure and one which must be supplemented with a much more nuanced gender perspective of the Mpondo revolts. For the danger of what this thesis has presented here is that it could be interpreted as still essentially holding onto an epistemological criteria which dictates that what counts as *meaningful* resistance politics is public, militaristic and masculine in form. I am aware that my own argument and analysis presented above is not theoretically or empirically nuanced enough to counterbalance the dominant mode of masculine analysis within the existing historiography. However, I have tried to demonstrate that the idea that masculine modes of analysis and the self-conscious exclusion of women as unimportant subjects within the history of the Mpondo revolts are not justifiable. Following from Bradford I argue that 'if gender and half the adult populace are marginalised in this way, the price is frequently interpretations which have limited purchase on the past'.⁴⁸⁶ Yet in many ways the theoretical aims of this chapter have been modest. First it was to merely bring the women of the Mpondo revolts out of the footnotes and brief caveats into which they have thus far been confined by the existing secondary literature, and to place them on an equal footing with the men of the mountain in the telling of the history of the Mpondo revolts. Second, it has been to expose questions and

⁴⁸⁵ Arthur Brigg quoted in Bradford, H. 'Peasants, Historians, and Gender', p. 92.

⁴⁸⁶ Bradford, H. 'Women, Gender and Colonialism', p. 370.

contradictions relating to the theme of gender which arise when considering the political history of the Mpondo revolts.

One of the most interesting of these gender-related questions which arose during my research pertains to a military report sent from the base in Mbizana to the headquarters in Natal which included the statement: 'SAP report that Bantu males dressed in female attire were found hoeing the lands on 9 Jan 1961 in Flagstaff district'.⁴⁸⁷ Unfortunately I could not find the police report to which the military official is referring within the documents stored in the CMT files of the Cape Town Archives. Yet on its own this military report is still hugely significant for thinking about gender in the context of the Mpondo revolts and in South Africa's rural areas in the twentieth century more broadly. In fact the idea of men dressing in women's clothing and engaging in female agricultural labour practices speaks directly to one of the main observations made within Bundy's *The Rise* and Bradford's associated critique.⁴⁸⁸ One of the defining arguments of Bundy's study is that the British Cape Colony underwent a gender revolution during the latter-half of the nineteenth century in which African patriarchs adopted Victorian gender attributes, took over women's agricultural labour, and became a class of prosperous 'black English' peasants.⁴⁸⁹ Central to this argument is Bundy's conviction that it was as a result of favourable or prosperous conditions 'that patriarchs "rose" into women's work and colonial masculine scripts'.⁴⁹⁰ In complete contradiction with Bundy's analysis Bradford demonstrates that: 'Only when severe pressure was placed on older masculine scripts, only when land shortage and impoverishment were acute, did men, *en masse*, start turning what had been womanly or white into new ways of being a black man' as such she argues that 'If *Rise & Fall's* overarching metaphor is to retain any purchase, it is perhaps necessary to reverse and to gender it'.⁴⁹¹ Therefore, it can be surmised, that from the gender-sensitive perspective of Bradford, African men did not 'rise' into women's work and colonial masculinities; instead they 'fell' into them during periods of increasing social, political and economic crisis.⁴⁹²

⁴⁸⁷ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, HQ Battle Gp ALPHA to Army HQ, E P Comd, HQ Natal Comd, HQ SAP Bizana, 1 mob watch, 2 mob watch, Battke Gp ALPHA Air Det Staff, 11th January 1961, Ref: 102210 B.

⁴⁸⁸ Bradford, H. 'Peasants, Historians, and Gender', p. 86.

⁴⁸⁹ Bundy, C. *The Rise*, p. 11.

⁴⁹⁰ Bradford, H. 'Peasants, Historians, and Gender', p. 86.

⁴⁹¹ *Ibid*, p. 110.

⁴⁹² *Ibid*, p. 110.

The military report dated 9th January 1961 suggests that at the point of the Mpondo revolts in which the repression meted out by the state and its security forces was at its peak African men once again can be seen to be adopting the agricultural work and attire of women.⁴⁹³ The timing of the report does much to confirm Bradford's understanding of rural men falling into women's work as a response to social crises. Yet, unfortunately with no further documentation relating to this phenomenon having been located in the archives my own analysis as to why men chose to dress as women and hoe lands in Flagstaff during January 1961, is at best speculative. Perhaps it was the case that rural men had decided that in order to avoid detection and potential arrest during this phase of regular police raids they would completely invert the traditional gendered division of labour and take on the typically female burden of insuring the social reproduction of the homestead. Furthermore, without additional information we can only speculate as to what the women who were being impersonated by the men were doing at this time. This once again acts so as to reaffirm the fact that much more research needs to be done on the gender politics and role of women during the Mpondo revolts.

Conclusion

It was stated at the outset of this chapter that the exclusion of women from the political decision making processes of the mountain meetings must be seen as a limitation on the movement as an embodiment of universal emancipatory politics. One could argue that the egalitarianism of the mountain movement was such that its prescriptive politics would allow for women to be emancipated alongside men in the future. However, the understanding of emancipation adopted in this thesis (in line with the theorisations of Jacques Rancière, Frantz Fanon and Steven Biko) insists that without providing the conditions under which women could be the self-conscious agents of their own emancipation, the mountain movement, on its own, was insufficient.⁴⁹⁴ This is not to say that the Mpondo revolts (as an event) were necessarily liable to the same limitations of the mountain movement. It is important that we do not allow the mountain movement to be seen as the *only* formation

⁴⁹³ 1/BIZ 6/47, HQ Battle Gp ALPHA to Army HQ, E P Comd, HQ Natal Comd, HQ SAP Bizana, 1 mob watch, 2 mob watch, Battke Gp ALPHA Air Det Staff, 11th January 1961, Ref: 102210 B.

⁴⁹⁴ Rancière, J. 2010. 'Communists Without Communism' in Douzinas, C. and Zizek, S. (eds.) *The Idea of Communism*. Verso: London; Fanon, F. 1967. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press: New York; Mngxitama, A., Alexander, A. and Gibson, N. 2008. *Biko Lives!* Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

through which emancipatory politics was conceived and practiced during the Mpondo revolts. Women in Eastern Mpondoland were also fighting for their emancipation and they did not wait for permission from the mountain movement when they, for example, placed themselves in direct confrontation with the state and its police force.

In connection with this, I have also sought to demonstrate that the exclusively male character of the mountain movement only pertained to certain aspects of its political praxes. Women were not involved as participants in the decision-making processes of mountain meetings or the actual act of setting fire to another woman's homestead as a result of her status as wife or relative of a targeted government supporting man. Without the labour and political agency of women, both individually and as collectives, neither the mountain meetings, kraal campaigns nor any other political praxis in which the mountain movement was a key driver would have been possible. Yet the political role of women was not always formed in relation to the praxes of the mountain movement. The suggestion that women began to form their own 'brigades' on the mountains indicates that during the Mpondo revolts women often organised themselves politically in spaces and ways which were relatively autonomous from men.⁴⁹⁵

In considering such a situation an important question arose: to what extent could women's role in the Mpondo revolts be understood as yet another example of autonomous matriarchal systems working in a dialectical relationship with patriarchal systems in Africa? Such a dialectical relationship has already been explored by Ifi Amadiume in relation to the pre-colonial history of the rural town of Nnobi in Nigeria in her work entitled *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*.⁴⁹⁶ What I am arguing here is not that the gender dynamics of the Mpondo revolts are the same as those discussed by Amadiume. Rather I am arguing that her theorisation of the dialectical power relations between men and women in Nnobi society is just one of a number of important gender-related perspectives which historians would do well to take seriously when considering the nature of popular politics in the context of the Mpondo revolts.

⁴⁹⁵ CMT 3/1475, Contact Article, 'Pondos Sear "No Retreat"', 10th September 1960, Ref: Unknown.

⁴⁹⁶ Amadiume, I. 1987. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.

Chapter Seven:

Slaying a Head of the Hydra: The Ngquza Hill Massacre and Mass Boycotts

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an analysis of the Ngquza Hill massacre and the deployment of a campaign of mass boycott which developed during its aftermath. By June 1960 the state, having overlooked or been unable to respond to a number of incidents in which commoners publically denounced the authority of their chiefs and state officials, decided to employ unprecedented levels of force in order to bring an end to mountain meetings. This decision by the state manifested itself most dramatically on 6th June 1960 when the police conducted a raid on a mountain meeting at Ngquza Hill. The state decided to target Ngquza Hill which was strategically located on the district boundary between Lusikisiki and Flagstaff and was one of the largest branches of the mountain movement in Eastern Mpondoland.⁴⁹⁷ The mountain meetings at Ngquza Hill had been drawing in large numbers of commoners from both districts since the practice of holding mountain meetings had spread to the area from Mbizana in March 1960. On this day, like so many others before it, hundreds of commoners from all around the Flagstaff and Lusikisiki Districts came on horseback and foot to the valley below Ngquza Hill to decide upon a way forward for the struggle in the area. According to both archival sources and much of the secondary literature, the primary issue being discussed by the men of the mountain at Ngquza Hill on 6th June 1960 was the plan to burn the kraal of Paramount Chief Botha Sigcau.⁴⁹⁸

That the paramount became a direct target of the mountain movement's kraal burning campaign during the Mpondo revolts is unsurprising. However, the actual decision to target the paramount chief himself was fuelled by much more than just an abstract rejection of the chieftaincy and the system of Tribal Authorities. Specifically, I argue, that commoners' deeply held anti-enclosure sentiments and their rejection of the paramount's attempts to inaugurate private land ownership were key factors in the Ngquza Hill mountain movement branch's decision to target the seat of the paramountcy directly. In making this argument the

⁴⁹⁷ Drew, A. 2012. Govan Mbeki's 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 77.

⁴⁹⁸ Churchill, R. 1962. *White Man's God*. Hodder & Stoughton: London, p. 64; Lodge, T. 1983. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. Raven Press: Johannesburg, p. 280.

chapter begins with a consideration of the local political context in the Lusikisiki area just prior to the Ngquza Hill massacre and the significance of increasing attempts by the state to enforce the enclosure of the commons under the guise of Betterment Schemes in influencing the politics of the mountain movement.

Thereafter, attention turns to the aftermath of the massacre and the intensification and broadening of the revolts which came in its wake. In order to understand the phenomenal growth of the mountain movement and the associated deployment of new political praxes which followed the devastating event of a massacre, the chapter draws on the work of historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker and specifically their many-headed Hydra model as an analytical tool for understanding the revolts.⁴⁹⁹ Put briefly, I argue that Linebaugh and Rediker's many-headed Hydra model is a useful conceptual tool for understanding the political formation of the mountain movement as well as the relationship between the Mpondo revolts and other instances of popular resistance politics, both past and present. In addition to this Linebaugh and Rediker's work is extremely useful for its emphasis on the theme of egalitarianism and the way in which this political principle was a significant component of the shared body which connects the various heads of the many-headed Hydra over time and space. As a result of this I argue that the idea of the many-headed Hydra proposed by Linebaugh and Rediker is compatible with the notion of emancipatory politics developed within this thesis.

The final section of the chapter is dedicated to providing an in-depth consideration of the featuring of boycott as a key aspect of the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts. It details who and what was targeted by the boycotts as well as the way in which traders and state officials perceived and responded to the boycotts. In so doing it will be argued that within the context of the Mpondo revolts the act of boycott was a praxis imbued with the emancipatory political principles of egalitarianism and human dignity. As such I argue that viewing the tactic of boycott as an emancipatory praxis within the context of the Mpondo revolts forces us to consider this tactic as more than just a passive act of resistance, as it is often understood within the academy.

⁴⁹⁹ Linebaugh, P. and Rediker, M. 2013. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Beacon Press: Boston.

Contextualizing the Ngquza Hill Massacre

During the mid-1950s plans were drawn up by the state to convert the 'famously well-watered and grassy land of Lambasi' in the Lusikisiki district into a huge *Phormium tenax*⁵⁰⁰ plantation. The revenues from this cash crop were due to be paid into the Qaukeni Regional Authority treasury. At this time the regional arm of the Bantu Authorities system had no other source of funding, therefore, the project was considered to be crucial in facilitation to the Bantu Authorities system thereby preventing the Bantustan from becoming an economic burden on white South Africa.⁵⁰¹ The Lambasi land had historically been available to the commoners of the area throughout the year for acts of commoning such as grazing cattle, growing crops and collecting resources of thatch and fire wood, and was only used as a royal grazing ground for the paramount chief's cattle during the winter. Peter Linebaugh provides a very useful definition of the term 'commoning':

The activity of commoning is conducted through labor with other resources; it does not make a division between "labor" and "natural resources." On the contrary, it is labor which creates something as a resource, and it is by resources that the collectivity of labor comes to pass. As an action it is thus best understood as a verb rather than as a "common pool resource".⁵⁰²

In addition to being a crucial space of commoning the Lambasi land was also the site of a number of established commoner homesteads. In the months just prior to the Ngquza Hill massacre Botha Sigcau had arrogantly claimed the land as his own private property and given permission to the infamous local magistrate of Lusikisiki, J. Fenwick, to use the land for the state's desired cash crop plantation.⁵⁰³

The paramount claimed 'ownership' over the Lambasi land by distorting and manipulating the so-called 'customary' and 'traditional' rights associated to this royal winter grazing land.⁵⁰⁴ By claiming the Lambasi land as his own private property the paramount chief essentially reduced the commoners who lived in the area to the status of squatters with no rightful claim to the land or its resources. In so doing the paramount created the conditions

⁵⁰⁰ A non-indigenous plant known more commonly as New Zealand flax, see: Wylie, D. 2012. 'The Shock of the New: Ngquza Hill 1960'. In Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 192.

⁵⁰¹ Wylie, D. 'The Shock of the New', p. 192.

⁵⁰² Linebaugh, P. 2014. *Stop, Thief! The Commons, Enclosures, and Resistance*. PM Press: Oakland, p. 13.

⁵⁰³ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, J. Fenwick, 'Disaffection in the Lusikisiki District', 1st June 1960, Ref: unknown.

⁵⁰⁴ 1/BIZ 6/47, J. Fenwick, 'Disaffection in the Lusikisiki District', 1st June 1960, Ref: unknown.

of possibility for the forced removal of those commoners living in Lambasi and the creation of a cash crop plantation to take place without infringing on so-called 'traditional' land-use practices. As a historical royal winter grazing land, 'owned' by the paramount and opened to common access as a 'gift' to the people, it was argued by both the paramount and state officials that Lambasi was exceptional in regard to normal 'tribal' land under communal tenure systems in the Transkei.⁵⁰⁵ However, according to the stipulations surrounding the implementation of Betterment schemes the plans could only be put in place if the people of the location requested for as much. Thus, even with the 'permission' from the paramount, Fenwick was still required to gain the consent of the people before he could proceed with the scheme. Contrary to Fenwick's claims in a report sent to the chief magistrate of the Transkei just five days before the Ngquza Hill massacre there is no trace of evidence in the archives that any meetings were held in which the residents of either the Lambasi or Vlei Locations requested for their lands to undergo betterment planning.⁵⁰⁶ Furthermore, when Fenwick did attend a meeting called by the paramount to address the people of Lambasi the commoners gathered were clear that they did not accept the state's intentions and that to continue with such planning regardless of the people's disapproval would result in resistance.⁵⁰⁷ Yet, clinging onto his unverifiable conviction that meetings had been held in which the Betterment scheme had been requested by the people Fenwick increasingly forced the implementation of the scheme in Lambasi. Fenwick's justification for doing so can be seen in this extract from his report to the Chief Magistrate of the Transkei:

It [the Lambasi Location] is the traditional Royal grazing ground and was set aside for the grazing of the Royal herds and the cattle of the Pondo people residing in Flagstaff, Tabankulu and Lusikisiki Districts. At the request of the Pondo people it was decided to plan the location in order to put it to the use for which it was intended ... The residents were there in the gift of the Paramount Chief and had not the right of tenure of the residents of an ordinary location in the Transkei. Many of them were stock thieves, many of them Zulus, some Basutos, Bacas and Hlubes. Many had obtained rights of residence illegally during Sigwebo's headmanship. The Paramount Chief called a meeting at which I attended, and both of us addressed, of the Lombasi residents, and

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

told them of our intention. The usual explanation was given to them. Subsequently the Headman informed me that we could expect resistance.⁵⁰⁸

Following this report the resistance which the magistrate was warned about took the form of fence cutting and other acts of sabotage, the intimidation of agricultural demonstrators, as well as at least two kraal burnings.⁵⁰⁹ What is particularly interesting is the way in which Fenwick describes the inhabitants of the Lambasi area as being thieves, illegal residents, and of troublesome ethnicities primarily to further de-legitimise their claims to the land. When considering the importance of Fenwick's attempts to cast doubt on the humanity of the Lambasi residents it is important to keep in mind that Fenwick was writing this report for his superior the chief magistrate of the Transkei and needed to provide an explanation for how and why he, as the local magistrate, had allowed for such a situation of unrest to take hold in his area of authority.

In order for the *Phormium tenax* plantation project to be actualised the people living in the Lambasi location and the neighbouring Vlei location would have to be forcibly removed from the areas and relocated to lands which were less productive, and thus of lesser importance to the state. In the 2 000 acres of grazing land, which constituted the Lambasi location would have meant the forced removal of at least 185 kraals along with all the commoners residing in the nearby Vlei location.⁵¹⁰ In addition to this, all commoners would as a result of this Betterment scheme be legally forbidden from retaining access to natural resources and grazing land upon which they were dependent all year round.⁵¹¹ The severity of the strain this would have had on the commoners of the Lambasi and Vlei locations is reflected by the extent to which they fought to prevent its implementation. Yet, despite the intensity of resistance to the project in the area, Fenwick ordered that the planning committee under his chairmanship commence with the necessary examinations and planning of the location.⁵¹² After having been driven out of the location twice by crowds of commoners the planning committee attempted to go about its business in the location with much difficulty. Resistance in the area intensified as local Headman Zifunele and Councillor Julius

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁹ Wylie, D. 'The Shock of the New', p. 194; 1/BIZ 6/47, J. Fenwick, 'Disaffection in the Lusikisiki District', 1st June 1960, Ref: unknown.

⁵¹⁰ 1/BIZ 6/47, J. Fenwick, 'Disaffection in the Lusikisiki District', 1st June 1960, Ref: unknown.

⁵¹¹ Wylie, D. 'The Shock of the New', p. 193.

⁵¹² 1/BIZ 6/47, J. Fenwick, 'Disaffection in the Lusikisiki District', 1st June 1960, Ref: unknown.

Gule received warnings that 'the horsemen are coming' and Fenwick himself received an anonymous letter threatening assassination upon himself and the paramount chief if they continued to ignore the will of the people.⁵¹³ The headman and the councillor's kraals were burnt and the mountain movement at Ngquza Hill decided that it was right to target the kraal of the paramount chief who had 'sold the land' for his own benefit and in so doing betrayed the people to the government.⁵¹⁴

Having never collectively given their consent to the magistrate for the imposition of Betterment planning, the commoners who attended the mountain meeting at Ngquza Hill on 6th of June 1960 were outraged at the audacity of the paramount who dared to claim land held in common as his own private property. It is for these reasons that I argue at the core of the political subjectivity of those commoners who gathered at Ngquza Hill on 6th June 1960 was the collective rejection of the autocratic paramountcy as well as forms of private land ownership and state socio-agricultural interventions which threatened commoner's access to land and resources held in common. That the commoners in Lusikisiki collectively perceived the paramount as having unjustly and without authority taken ownership of the land and handed it over to the apartheid state in exchange for personal enrichment is reiterated in Jonny Steinberg's work on the revolts.⁵¹⁵ Drawing on interviews in which Steinberg analyses the memory of the Mpondo revolts, and its malleability, he identifies a story which commoners repeated to those who were away when the Ngquza Hill massacre took place:

Buyisile spoke of another exchange between Botha Sigcau and white people. This time, the white person was the District Commissioner. 'The Commissioner,' Buyisile said, 'held two bags in front of Botha Sigcau. The one was filled with soil, the other with money. The Commissioner said to Botha Sigcau: "One of these bags is for you, the other is for us. It is for you to decide who takes the soil and who the money." Botha Sigcau thought for a while, and then he took the bag of money, leaving the bag of soil with the whites. The problem is that the soil was not his to sell; it was the land of his people'.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁴ Steinburg, J. 2012. 'A Bag of Soil, a Bullet from up High: Some meanings of the Mpondo revolts today'. In Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo revolts after fifty years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 233.

⁵¹⁵ Steinburg, J. 'A Bag of Soil, a Bullet from up High'.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

Cutting off a head of the Many-Headed Hydra

By noon on 6th June 1960 roughly 400 commoners had gathered in the valley at the foot of Ngquza Hill and waited for the meeting to commence.⁵¹⁷ According to Rhona Churchill, a British liberal journalist who visited Holy Cross Hospital roughly two months after the incident at Ngquza Hill, none of the commoners who had gathered that day had suspected that the police would be staging an intervention let alone a state sponsored massacre:

The Pondos were not expecting any police trouble, and they went to the valley unarmed. They knew the law forbade them to meet and discuss their own affairs without the permission of their stooge chiefs or of the police. But the police had for three weeks been watching their meetings and had neither taken action nor given warning that action would be taken.⁵¹⁸

From as early as 9.00 am the commoners gathered in the valley where being watched by no less than eighteen police vehicles with over 100 police officers stationed roughly five kilometres away.⁵¹⁹ Despite this heavy police presence more and more commoners continued to arrive and gather at the foot of Ngquza Hill. At roughly 1.00 pm the police struck without warning. It began with a helicopter followed by two Harvard aircrafts which dropped tear-gas bombs amongst the gathering of unarmed commoners. Although the state, and even some of the existing secondary literature (such as Leonard Nikani's edited autobiography) maintain that one or two shots were fired at these aircrafts by the gathering of commoners in the valley, the majority of secondary sources and archival evidence suggests that the police attack was unprovoked.⁵²⁰ As people tried escape the tear-gas filled valley they were met by the police officers extensively armed with revolvers and sten guns who were strategically positioned on the hillside above. As the police began to descend into the valley a group of commoners emerged from the screen of tear-gas and hosted a white flag, which had been fashioned out of an old pillow case and a long stick, and waved it furiously as a sign to the police that they were unarmed and unwilling to engage in a violent confrontation. The raising of the white flag did nothing to deter the onslaught of live ammunition that ripped through

⁵¹⁷ Churchill, R. 'White Man's God', p. 64.

⁵¹⁸ Churchill, R. *White Man's God*, p. 64.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 64.

⁵²⁰ Although some of the existing secondary literature, such as Leonard Nikani's *My Life Under White Supremacy and in Exile*, accept the state's version of events in which it was claimed that the crowd gathered at Ngquza Hill fired two shots at the helicopter, and thus provoked the confrontation, the overwhelming consensus within the archival material and secondary literature consulted is that the violence was instigated by the police. See Nikani, L. 2009. *My Life Under White Supremacy and in Exile*. Socialist Resistance: London.

the valley as people ran to try and find some kind of shelter amongst the bushes and crevices of the mountain side. In an almost identical fashion to the footage of the Marikana massacre of 2012 the police at Ngquza Hill moved strategically so as to create a virtual fence of force which surrounded the commoners and progressively enclosed them within a small area rendering many of them easy targets for bullets yet unable to avoid arrest.⁵²¹ According to an eye witness account sent in the form of a private letter to researcher M. H. Draper of the South African Institute of Race Relations:

The spot was in flames. Over 200 police well-armed combed the bush, shooting everyone they came across. Those who tried to surrender themselves were without mercy shot. The women who made war-cries were thrashed, kicked and assaulted in the huts. The arrested were about 23, and were taken to the charge office where they still are kept.⁵²²

By the time the police stopped firing at least eleven commoners lay dead in the valley. Although, numerous accounts in both the archive and secondary literature suggest that upwards of 20 commoners died as a result of the police shootings at Ngquza Hill. Many of the wounded commoners were carried or dragged to a nearby forest but dozens of severely injured people could do no more than lay on the ground at the foot of Ngquza Hill and wait to be arrested as no ambulances or any other form of emergency services were called by the state. The church's role is well remembered and during a research trip taken in 2013 I was told by members of the Holy Cross church that following the massacre the Reverend stood at the pulpit and conducted mass with a number of commoners hiding at his feet in order to deter the police from searching the church thoroughly.

From interviews conducted by Churchill with employees at the Holy Cross hospital, located just a few kilometres away from Ngquza Hill, we are provided with a harrowing account of the night of 6th June 1960 and the immediate aftermath of the massacre.⁵²³ The medical staff at Holy Cross hospital described the extreme damage caused by the bullets used by the police – the type that twist on entering the body thus causing wounds that seemed to have been inflicted by a small but powerful explosion. In the days following the massacre

⁵²¹ Ledwaba, L. 2013. 'We Are Ending This Today'. In de Villiers, R. (ed.) *We Are Going to Kill Each Other Today: The Marikana Story*. Tafelberg: Cape Town, pp. 54 – 55.

⁵²² Private letter cited by Draper, M. H. 1960. 'Report on Unrest in Pondoland'. *South African Institute of Race Relations*: Johannesburg, p. 3.

⁵²³ Churchill, R. 1962. *White Man's God*, pp. 64-65.

more wounded commoners made their way from the forest to the hospital to receive treatment for gunshot wounds and sicknesses caused as a result of having to spend several nights sleeping outside in the mountains and forests in the freezing conditions of mid-winter.

Jonny Steinberg's interviews with Sizwe and Buyisile Magadla⁵²⁴, quoted earlier, provide an interesting insight into the way in which the people of Lusikisiki narrated the events of 6th June 1960. Buyisile Magadla was 19 years old and away at the mines for the first time during the majority of 1960. He recalls that when he returned to his village in Lusikisiki in December of 1960:

I asked my mother where all the men were and she said they were hiding in the forest. She said the soldiers had come through all of the villages to punish the men; the soldiers were saying that all the men had participated in the rebellion and so they were all guilty. I asked whether this was true: did all the men participate? She said, yes, for many months the men had all attended special meetings in the forests, and that some of the Chiefs had been chased away.⁵²⁵

Talking to his mother and other people in the village Buyisile soon heard how the commoners of Lusikisiki had understood the events of 6th June 1960 and who was responsible for the bloodshed:

The rebels had gathered at Ngquza... It was the middle of winter. I was not there. I was at the mines. What I am telling you now is what I myself was told. The whites took Botha Sigcau, king of Eastern Mpondoland, up in a helicopter. They flew him to Ngquza, and there the helicopter stopped, hovering just over the rebels. Then the white commander put a rifle in Botha Sigcau's hands, and he said: 'Whether we end this rebellion is your decision to make. We can do nothing if you do not fire the first shot. The choice is in your hands, not ours.' Botha Sigcau thought for a little while, took the rifle from the white man, aimed at the rebels below, and fired the first shot. It hit a man in the chest and killed him. This is how the massacre began.⁵²⁶

As Steinberg suggests, this narrative of the Ngquza Hill massacre is perhaps more accurate as an indication of what the revolts and came to mean for commoners of Eastern Mpondoland and the centrality of the role of the paramount in 'selling the soil' and 'killing the people' in the collective subjectivity of commoners.⁵²⁷ Thus, although it cannot be proven that Botha

⁵²⁴ These are both pseudonyms used by Steinberg to maintain the anonymity of this father and son from the Lusikisiki district. See Steinberg, J. 'A Bag of Soil, a Bullet from up High', p. 231.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 232.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 233.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 233.

Sigcau was the one who fired the first shot on 6th June 1960 this passage does justify my argument that a defence of common land and communal resources was critical to the popular politics and subjectivities of the Mpondo revolts. It is important to consider how the defence of the commons and the collective resilience it stimulated in the face of violent repression relates to emancipatory politics.

The Ngquza Hill massacre, like all massacres, was a devastating event that resulted in immeasurable amounts of pain and suffering as the state deployed terroristic violence in order to crush one of the largest branches of the mountain movements. According to the state eleven people were killed on 6th June 1960, however accounts within the archive and secondary literature suggest that up to 30 people died and 60 were seriously injured.⁵²⁸

Yet, the brutality of the police and special security forces meted out on 6th June 1960 had the opposite effect of what the state had intended. Far from leading to a repression of the mountain movement and the revolts more broadly, the massacre at Ngquza ‘strengthened and broadened resistance’ throughout Eastern Mpondoland.⁵²⁹ In the wake of the massacre more branches of the mountain movement emerged in locations across Eastern Mpondoland and erection of defensive barriers and acts of sabotage continued to escalate. In considering the significance of this phenomenon, and its relation to thinking emancipatory politics, it is useful to draw on the many-headed Hydra model developed by historians Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker.

As stated in the Introduction, in their work the authors invoke the myth of the many-headed Hydra as an analytical tool for understanding and writing the history of the working class⁵³⁰ (broadly defined) in the Atlantic during the eighteenth century.⁵³¹ According to the Greek version of the myth, the slaying of the many-headed Hydra, a water-snake with between nine and a hundred heads, was the second of Hercules twelve labours.⁵³² The

⁵²⁸ Drew, A. ‘The Peasants’ Revolt: A Critical Examination’, p. 77.

⁵²⁹ Wylie, D., ‘The Shock of the New’, p. 205.

⁵³⁰ It is important to note that Linebaugh and Rediker have an extremely inclusionary understanding and use of the term ‘working class’. For them the term includes, but is not limited to: slaves, sailors, commoners, and others. This is an important departure from orthodox Marxist approaches which tend to narrowly focus on workers in factories, mines and other capitalist centres of production to the neglect of the poor, unemployed and all those subsumed under the category of *lumpenproletariat*.

⁵³¹ Linebaugh, P. and Rediker, M. 1990. ‘The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, and the Atlantic Working Class in the Eighteenth Century’. In *Journal of Historical Sociology*, Vol. 3, No. 3.

⁵³² Linebaugh, P. and Rediker, M. ‘The Many-Headed Hydra’, p. 227.

defining characteristic of the many-headed Hydra was that as soon as Hercules cut off one of its heads, two grew back in its place. In order to defeat the Hydra Hercules employed the help of his nephew who taught him how to 'use a firebrand to cauterize the stump of the beast's neck' and in so doing kill the Hydra.⁵³³ In their work Linebaugh and Rediker explain that during the eighteenth century Atlantic state officials, slave owners, merchant capitalists and other elites often compared the uprisings and resistance of the working class with the many-headed Hydra. The popularity of the analogy between the many-headed Hydra and slaves, sailors, commoners and the broader Atlantic working class amongst Europe's conquering elites was fuelled by ontological dehumanisations of these people, and their struggles, as monstrous. Relatedly these elites saw themselves as fulfilling the noble and progressive role of Hercules whose intensive labours against the evils of the world (such as the many-headed Hydra) when completed would usher in the revolutionary rise of capitalism.⁵³⁴

In using the idea of the many-headed Hydra the authors identify moments of working class resistance during the eighteenth century and the ways in which they were politically connected despite differences in time and space. As such Linebaugh and Rediker argue that:

By looking at the revolts of the many-headed Hydra – labourers black and white, Irish and English, free and enslaved, waged and unwaged – we can begin to see how the events of 1747, 1768, 1776, and 1780 were part of a broad cycle of rebellion in the eighteenth-century Atlantic world, in which continuities and connections informed a huge number and variety of popular struggles.⁵³⁵

For the authors it is the multiple continuities and connections borne of the lived experience of oppression and exploitation related to the rise of a capitalist system of enclosure, imperialism, colonialism and slavery, which forms the most important subjective link between the multifaceted forms of popular resistance politics embodying the various heads of the Hydra. The metaphor of the hydra can be extended to the Mpondo revolts. Put simply, the actions of the police and military at Ngquza Hill on 6th June 1960 can be seen as an attempt by the state to cut off one of the heads of the monster, which was the mountain movement. However, just as in the case of Hercules' first attempts, the act of slaying one head of the mountain movement led to even more heads appearing throughout Eastern

⁵³³ *Ibid*, p. 227.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 227–228.

⁵³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 244.

Mpondoland. And rather than cauterise resistance, after the massacre there was a general increase in the resistance which took the form of a mass boycott.

How does this resilience of popular political forms such as the mountain movement, always with its broader support base, in the face of violent state repression, relate to our conception of emancipatory politics? Recall chapter three in which it was argued that the emancipatory political principles of egalitarianism and participatory democracy shaped the political form of the mountain movement as a non-hierarchical and kind of leaderless movement. It can therefore be argued that it was the manifestation of these emancipatory political principles which prevented the decision-making processes and intellectual work of the revolts from being confined to one branch of the mountain movement or one group of individuals. It was these emancipatory principles which allowed each branch of the movement to be autonomous – able to dictate their own decisions, actions and futures – but also intimately connected to each other through shared political tactics and experiences of oppression, exploitation and injustice under the chieftaincy and the apartheid state.

In response to the heightened mobilisation and resistance which took place in the aftermath of the Ngquza Hill massacre, the state announced its intentions to hold an independent Commission of Inquiry into the unrest in the hope that it would stall the growing resistance.⁵³⁶ The Commission had exactly that desired effect and during its investigations and deliberations there was a general hold placed on the political demonstrations and praxes of the mountain movement and the broader populace of Eastern Mpondoland. During this period mountain meetings and crowd gatherings continued to take place on a regular basis and whilst many branches of the mountain movement chose to boycott the Commission of Inquiry, an estimated 15,000 people came to the Mbizana airfield the 11th October 1960 to hear the findings of the Commission.⁵³⁷

It was after the magistrate of Mbizana publically read the findings of the Commission that the intensification of the struggle which occurred after the massacre was resumed.⁵³⁸ People felt frustrated and insulted by the findings of the Commission which refused to engage

⁵³⁶ Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 280.

⁵³⁷ Drew, A. 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', p. 79; A fuller description of the Van Heerden Commission of Inquiry is provided in Chapter Eight.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 79.

with the murders at Ngquza Hill and which showed no genuine attempt to understand the grievances of the commoners.⁵³⁹ It was after this that a new tactic of resistance was introduced into the Mpondo revolts – mass boycott.

Mass Boycotts: A crisis for state and capital

It is in the aftermath of the massacre and the Commission that we see the development of one of the most important political praxes of the Mpondo revolts in the form of a sustained and effective boycott of certain business, hospitals, and other government institutions, in Eastern Mpondoland. The boycott tactic was initially deployed by commoners against certain, but not all, local trading stations in the months following the Ngquza Hill massacre and the wave of police raids and arrests which followed it. Beinart argues that the targeting of trading stations by the mountain movement can be explained by two reasons.⁵⁴⁰ The first is that it was widely believed amongst commoners that these traders were providing the state with vital information leading to the arrest and prosecution of so-called ‘rebels’.⁵⁴¹ Second, the unparalleled wave of police raids on mountain meetings and homesteads which took place at an increasingly frequent rate after the Ngquza Hill massacre required that contributions to the mountain movements’ defence funds had to be found from outside of its own membership.⁵⁴² By threatening individual traders with the prospect of a complete and ruinous boycott of their business certain branches of the mountain movement were able to pressure a number of traders into paying large sums into their defence fund. According to Leonard Mdingi:

There were whites who, when we approached them for money – money for defence – did pay. Some refused but others did pay – Mr Lewis at the big store. We decided that those shops where they did not pay would be boycotted – just telling the people at the meeting and of course bush telegram, very effective. There was no picketing, but the boycott was the best there has ever been.⁵⁴³

These instances of boycotts being threatened and or deployed upon certain trading stations in the weeks and months immediately following the Ngquza Hill massacre are largely played

⁵³⁹ Lodge, T. ‘Black Politics in South Africa’, p. 280.

⁵⁴⁰ Beinart, W. 2012. ‘The Mpondo Revolt Through the Eyes of Leonard Mdingi and Anderson Ganyile’ in Kepe, T. and Ntsebza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 106.

⁵⁴¹ Beinart, W. ‘The Mpondo Revolt’, p. 106.

⁵⁴² *Ibid*, p. 106.

⁵⁴³ Leonard Mdingi quoted in Beinart, W. ‘The Mpondo Revolt’, p. 106.

down in the archival sources and much of the secondary literature. It appears that for a number of state officials the boycott only started on 2nd November 1960.⁵⁴⁴ While such a perspective is, as illustrated above, historically incorrect the events of 2nd November 1960 did represent a significant shift in the tactical deployment of boycott in regard to both scale and intensity.

On 1st November 1960 between three and five thousand commoners, both men and women, marched collectively to Mbizana town to witness and protest the arrest of five members of the mountain movement.⁵⁴⁵ It was this mass march into Mbizana town, and the social outrage provoked by the actual arrest of the five men, which was considered by state officials and certain historians to have been the spark which ignited the deployment of boycott on a mass and crippling scale in Eastern Mpondoland.⁵⁴⁶ The 2nd November 1960 marked the beginning of a complete boycott of Mbizana town as well as an extension of the boycott of traders to all white owned (and some black owned) trading stations and businesses throughout the locations of Mbizana.⁵⁴⁷ Copelyn argues that it was at a meeting attended by no less than 12,000 people on 5th November 1960 that the decision to extend the boycott to the traders based in Flagstaff, Lusikisiki, Tabankulu and Mount Ayliff, was taken.⁵⁴⁸ In addition to boycotting trading stores, commoners also extended this tactic to hospitals and labour recruitment bureaus for the mines and other industries of white South Africa. However, before analysing the meaning and significance of the boycott of government institutions and labour recruiting bureaus, attention must be given to the ambivalent relationship between white traders and the resistant commoners of Eastern Mpondoland during the revolts.

In Chapter Two it was argued that historically, in Mpondoland, settled white traders often held a somewhat ambivalent position in the political engagements between commoners, members of the chieftaincy, and colonial state officials, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Considering the example of Mhlangaso's struggle

⁵⁴⁴ Cape Town Archive Repository, CMT 3/1472, Tanskeian Territories Civic Association, 'Boycott of Bizana Village and Traders', 25 November, 1960. Ref: Unknown.

⁵⁴⁵ Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 281

⁵⁴⁶ See for example: Lodge, T. 'Black Politics in South Africa', p. 281; and CMT 3/1472, Tanskeian Territories Civic Association, 'Boycott of Bizana Village and Traders', 25 November, 1960. Ref: Unknown.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 281.

⁵⁴⁸ Copelyn, J. A. 1974. *The Mpondo revolts 1960*. Unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand.

for power in the decades just prior to annexation we saw that sometimes when chiefs promised traders larger profit margins, concessions, and market monopolies, they could be brought into direct confrontation with the authority of the colonial state. While it was certainly not all settled traders who gave support to Mhlangaso against the British Cape Colony and the paramountcy under Sigcau (Botha's grandfather) it appears that historically traders in Mpondoland generally put the security of their business and profits above their political allegiances to the state and other established forms of authority.⁵⁴⁹ During the latter half of 1960 the first selective and then nearly complete boycott of trading stations in Eastern Mpondoland had the effect of financially crippling these politically ambivalent white traders and placing many of them in serious debt with their wholesale suppliers. As illustrated in the quotation taken from Beinart's interview with Leonard Mdingi (noted above) the way in which traders responded to the imposition of boycott varied between each targeted individual. According to Mdingi some chose to pay to have the boycott lifted whilst others refused.⁵⁵⁰

I argue that the evidence suggests that prior to the intensification and diversification of the boycott tactic, which took place in the earliest days of November the response of traders and other white professionals was generally to appeal to the state to meet certain demands made by the 'rebels' in order to thwart the popular unrest. For example, on 4th December 1960 the magistrate of Mbizana wrote that:

There were some ... members of the European public who held the view that the Government should announce to the Pondos of Eastern Pondoland that it is prepared to suspend the operation of the Bantu Authorities system of Administration as provided for in Proclamation 180 of 1956 provided law and order was restored and the people negotiated about their grievances through the proper channels. This course may possibly have been adopted without loss of face by the Government at the very onset of the disturbances but I am afraid it is no longer a possible solution at this stage. There is now a state of insurrection and anarchy in Eastern Pondoland and the subversive machine has won so much support and is so well organised that I do not believe anything short of complete capitulation by the Government to all their demands, however extravagant, would bring about any truce to pave the way for negotiation.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁹ Beinart, W. 1982. *The Political Economy of Pondoland*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney, pp. 34–35.

⁵⁵⁰ Beinart, W. 'The Mpondo Revolt', p. 106.

⁵⁵¹ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1472, R. A. Midgley, 'Bantu Unrest', 4th December 1960, Ref: Z. 14.

On 18th November 1960, after experiencing a fortnight of complete shutdown of their businesses, the Mbizana traders requested an interview with the chief magistrate in order to urge the state to find a solution to the crippling effects of the boycott.⁵⁵² It appears that the initial response from the majority of affected traders was to make urgent requests to the state for massive financial aid as well as to make certain concessions in relation to the demands made by the mountain movement.⁵⁵³ Specifically the request was for the state to allow the for the commoners to hold a mass ‘illegal’ meeting at Ndlovu Hill without fear of being raided and arrested by police forces – as had become the norm since the effective action of March that year.⁵⁵⁴ In the minutes of the meeting of 18th November 1960, as well as a number of subsequent correspondences between the chief magistrate and the Secretary for Bantu Affairs and Development in Pretoria, it is clear that both the traders and the state officials were aware of the fact that as much as the boycott was crippling them it was also having devastating consequences for the commoners of Eastern Mpondoland.⁵⁵⁵ Thus the traders believed that if such a mass meeting was allowed to take place there was a very good chance that the rebel movement would take the collective decision to end their boycott. However, when this idea was suggested to the magistrate of Mbizana he stated that:

This I refused to do and I have made it quite clear to the people that only when [the rebels] are prepared to respect law and order will I meet them. They must fully understand that I am not prepared to negotiate with [the rebels] until they appreciate that the Government will not tolerate the people taking the law into their own hands.⁵⁵⁶

With the state unwilling to compromise, the traders were unable to have the mass boycotts of their businesses lifted until the imposition of draconian measures of Proclamation R400 of 1960 that made the act of engaging in *any* kind of boycott an illegal offence.⁵⁵⁷ It appears that the practise of allowing for certain traders to buy their way out of the boycott by making a donation to the defence fund of a mountain movement branch, which was sometimes the case pre-November 1960, was no longer a reality by mid-November.

⁵⁵² Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, CMT, ‘Bizana Unrest and Bizana European Business Houses’, 19th November 1960, Ref: 42/1.

⁵⁵³ 1/BIZ 6/47, CMT, ‘Bizana Unrest and Bizana European Business Houses’, 19th November 1960, Ref: 42/1.

⁵⁵⁴ CMT 3/1472, R. A. Midgley, ‘Bantu Unrest’, 4th December 1960, Ref: Z. 14.

⁵⁵⁵ 1/BIZ 6/47, CMT, ‘Bizana Unrest and Bizana European Business Houses’, 19th November 1960, Ref: 42/1.

⁵⁵⁶ CMT 3/1472, R. A. Midgley, ‘Bantu Unrest’, 4th December 1960, Ref: Z. 14.

⁵⁵⁷ Drew, A. ‘The Peasants’ Revolt: A Critical Examination’, p. 76.

The only known instance of a trader having the boycott lifted on his store during this period is that of Keith Wicks in the Flagstaff district.⁵⁵⁸ However, in order to have the boycott lifted he was not required to simply make a cash payment to the members of the movement who came to his store to collect as had been the case for some other traders in previous months. Rather, in this instance the trader was made to attend a hearing of the peoples' court at the mountain at which he needed to make his case and receive the collective judgement of the movement. It is worth fully quoting the Rand Daily Mail article which appeared on 30th November 1960 entitled 'Trader gets boycott lifted' and is accompanied by the subtitle 'First white man to attend meeting on "The Hill"':

FLAGSTAFF. – The story of the first and only known white man ever to attend a meeting of "The Hill" – the power-wielding Pondoland secret rebel society – was told to me here yesterday by the man himself, 23-year-old Mr. Keith Wicks. Mr. Wicks' strange tale demonstrated clearly the remarkable influence "The Hill" wields over the Pondo tribesmen and White traders in Pondoland. Mr. Wicks now successfully runs a lonely trading store in the hills of the Flagstaff district. But his business has not always prospered.

The Afrikaans person from whom he bought the store was forced out of business by a ruinous Pondo boycott. When Mr. Wicks tried to re-open the store he found that he was being boycotted too. He talked to Pondos who lived nearby and was told that if he wanted his business to succeed he must attend a meeting of "The Hill" and submit to its judgment.

'I arrived with eight Pondo representatives from the area in which my store is. We left my vehicle,' and walked a mile up the hill. 'At the top, in a great circle, sat 4,000 Pondos. I waited on the fringe of the circle until it was my turn to appear before "The Hill". Then I was called to the centre of the circle. I had my hands in my pockets. One tribesman rose and said. Even a White man must take his hands out of his pockets when he comes here. I placed my hands behind my back. They seemed to consider the place as holy. The meeting had opened with a Christian prayer. They asked me many questions, but the two main ones were: 'Are you Afrikaans or English-speaking? And are you now the owner of the store or managing for the last owner?'

Mr. Wicks assured them he owned the store and spoke English, not Afrikaans. At last he was told to leave the circle and await the verdict at his car. After the three-hour wait in the rain, Pondos came to tell him: "You may open your store. The boycott will be lifted." Since that day Pondos have flocked to Mr. Wicks' store to buy.⁵⁵⁹

⁵⁵⁸ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1472, Rand Daily Mail Article, 'Trader Gets Boycott Lifted', 30th November 1960, Ref: 49/5/16.

⁵⁵⁹ CMT 3/1472, Rand Daily Mail Article, 'Trader Gets Boycott Lifted', 30th November 1960, Ref: 49/5/16.

This incident shows that in spite of the massacre and the illegal nature of the mountain meetings, these meetings continued. That over three hours was needed for the peoples' court to reach a consensus regarding this single issue is evidence of the enormous amount of thought, time and careful consideration which characterised the political decision-making processes of a movement committed to the principle and practice of egalitarianism and participatory democracy. Furthermore, that the commoners were willing to lift the boycott on Wick's store is an important point to consider. It would be a crass economic reductionism – of a spasmodic growth historian kind of variety – to suggest that the severe toll that maintaining the mass boycott had on the commoners of Eastern Mpondoland, and particularly the ability of women (as household heads) to meet the subsistence needs of their families, was the only or most important factor behind the lifting of the boycott in this case. Although we must not downplay just how economically crippling the boycott was for commoners, I argue, that it was primarily for political reasons that the store was lifted and the economic suffering of both trader and people could be eased. Furthermore, the fact that the boycott entailed serious hardship and placed commoners under strain indicates just how disciplined and committed the agents of the boycott were.

The newspaper article above reveals that Wicks was new to the district of Flagstaff and as such he had yet to reveal his character and his politics to the local residents who would be his customers. I argue that, just as in the case with the kraal burning tactic, the humanity and dignity of the targeted individual was always acknowledged by the men of the mountain. In acknowledging Wick's humanity the mountain movement followed political procedures standard within their other praxes and gave the trader an opportunity to come to the mountain and, as an equal amongst other equals (regardless of race), prove that he would not act so as to undermine or 'sell-out' the movement. In what is quoted in the newspaper article as well as in what information Wick's provided to the police following the publishing of the article, there is little to show that the trader had to say very much to prove his trustworthiness and passive alliance with the movement. However, as the only known white trader to ever attend a mountain meeting – at which he was levelled of all power and authority bestowed upon him as a white man by the white supremacist state – I argue that it was probably the significance of Wick's actions as opposed to his words which resulted in the boycott being lifted on his store.

As previously mentioned other than this one instance involving Kieth Wicks, the rest of the traders in Mpondoland never sought to bypass the state entirely and negotiate with the mountain movement directly. Numerous reports written by state officials during the last months of 1960 lamented over the extent to which the people of Mpondoland and the 'rebel organisation' had 'taken the law into their own hands'.⁵⁶⁰ This is a significant reminder that it was not just traders who were the targets of the commoners' mass boycott but the apartheid state as well.

At the same time as the boycott of Mbizana town was initiated a collective decision was taken by the branches of the mountain movement that all those resisting the government would refuse to pay their taxes or participate in the government census which was taking place at the time.⁵⁶¹ In relation to this hospitals were also boycotted because it was widely believed that the additional hospital levy of ten shillings per person 'did not go to the Hospital but went to the Paramount Chief Botha'.⁵⁶² Thus it can be seen that the tactic of boycott was being selectively deployed in such a way that it would fundamentally undermine both the institution of the chieftaincy as well as the financial stability of the local state administration. However, it was not just the local administration which came under the direct threat of financial ruin and dysfunctionality by the boycotts of the Mpondo revolts, but the capitalist basis of white South Africa itself.

In addition to the boycott of Mbizana town, trading stations, hospitals and taxes the mountain movement also made the decision to 'bring back all the Pondos working in the mines and to boycott any recruiting agencies for the mines'.⁵⁶³ Put very simply, the essential role that the Transkei and other native reserves served for white South Africa, as argued first by Harold Wolpe, was as the reproductive sites of a cheap black labour force required for the mines and other white owned industries of South Africa.⁵⁶⁴ By calling home all the male Mpondo migrant workers back from their contracts on the mines and by forcing a shutdown of the recruitment bureaus in Eastern Mpondoland, the mountain movement were setting a

⁵⁶⁰ 1/BIZ 6/47, CMT, 'Bizana Unrest and Bizana European Business Houses', 19th November 1960, Ref: 42/1.

⁵⁶¹ Matoti, S. and Ntsebeza, L. 2004. 'Rural resistance in Mpondoland and Thembuland, 1960-1963' in SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 1 (1960-1970)*. Zebra Press: Cape Town, p. 187.

⁵⁶² 1/BIZ 6/64, 'Statement of William Sigola, Mtshayelo location', 29th May 1960, ref unknown.

⁵⁶³ Beinart, W. 'The Mpondo', p. 106.

⁵⁶⁴ Wolpe, H. 1972. 'Capitalism and cheap labour in South Africa: from segregation to apartheid' in *Economy and Society*. Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 433.

precedent which posed a direct challenge to the capitalist foundations of the apartheid state. I argue that it was for these reasons and perceived dangers that the state denounced the act of boycott as a cornerstone of the violence of the Mpondo revolts. Recalling the discussion in Chapter Five, it can be argued that the only forms of political engagement which the state officials, who saw themselves as the custodians of a just system, would have accepted as non-violent are those which did not challenge the authority of the state.⁵⁶⁵ And as indicated above, the significance and effectiveness of the mass boycotts during the Mpondo revolts did challenge the political authority and economic foundations of the apartheid state. It is for this reason that the tactic of boycott, which is often considered as a passive act associated with passive forms of resistance, when deployed during the Mpondo revolts was understood and treated by state officials as an act of violence.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this chapter has been to explore the relationship between the Ngquza Hill massacre and the intensification of the revolts that took place in its wake. Within the discussion of the Ngquza Hill massacre a central theme that arose was the resilience of commoners' collective defence of the commons in the face of increasing attempts by state officials to enclose the commons and implement Betterment schemes. Another, and related, important theme which came to the fore was the popular perception of Paramount Botha Sigcau having 'sold the soil' by wrongfully claiming it as his own private property and handing it over to the apartheid state. It is argued that the role of the paramount in facilitating the commodification of land and the enclosure of the commons was central to the men of the mountain at Ngquza Hill laying plans to burn the paramount's kraal. While the massacre at Ngquza Hill effectively prevented the burning of the paramount's kraal it did not prevent the mountain movement from growing in membership and becoming an even more formidable threat to the authority of the apartheid state in the months to follow.

A defining feature of the period of heightened resistance which followed the Ngquza Hill massacre was the deployment of the tactic of mass boycott in conjunction with the kraal burning campaigns and other political praxes of the mountain movement and wider populace

⁵⁶⁵ Gordon, L. 1995. *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. Routledge: New York and London, p. 79.

of Eastern Mpondoland. By invoking the analogy of the mythical many-headed Hydra, in line with the work of Linebaugh and Rediker, I have argued that it was the egalitarian praxis of the commoners of Eastern Mpondoland which makes it possible for us to consider the political formations of the Mpondo revolts as a manifestation of a many-headed Hydra. Furthermore, I argued that the events at Ngquza can be seen as the state cutting off one of the heads of the mountain movement. The intensification and broadening of the struggle which took place after 6th June 1960 can thus be seen to make sense as a manifestation of even more heads and a strengthening of the Hydra coming in the wake of a Herculean assault on one of its heads. Although, it is important not to forget that the various branches of the mountain movement were not the only heads which constituted the Hydra of the Mpondo revolts. Women were amongst some of the many strong heads of the Mpondo revolts' Hydra and to limit our use of this analytical tool of the many-headed Hydra to just the mountain movement would be to provide an understanding of this political history which is incomplete.

Finally in concluding this chapter I argue that the effectivity and strength of the boycotts, coupled with the resumption of the kraal burning campaign, in the last months of 1960 posed a significant threat to the authority and integrity of the apartheid state. So significant was the perception of this threat by the state, even amongst some of its most high-ranking officials, that in order to crush the boycotts and apolitical praxes of the revolts a State of Emergency was declared in the area.⁵⁶⁶ Under this State of Emergency the apartheid state passed laws instituting policies and practices premised on the deployment of collective and terroristic violence on the commoners of Eastern Mpondoland as a means to thwart any and all forms of resistance. These policies and practices which the state deployed during the State of Emergency in December 1960 and the violent repression, that would in fact cauterise the hydra's heads in Eastern Mpondoland, will be discussed at length in Chapter Nine. However, for now attention turns to an analysis of state officials' understandings of and responses to the events and political formations of the Mpondo revolts as well as the insights such a 'view from above' perspective holds in regard to our understanding of the nuances of state subjectivities during the Mpondo revolts.

⁵⁶⁶ Churchill, R. *White Man's God*, p. 64.

Chapter Eight

Unheard of History and Impossible Politics: A 'view from above' of the Mpondo revolts

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an examination of the Mpondo revolt from above. What this means is that I intend to consider the way in which state officials and traders' preconceived ontological assumptions about the inhabitants of Mpondoland shaped their understandings of the revolt. Thus in many ways this chapter attempts to engage in the task which Stoler identifies as reading the archive along the grain.⁵⁶⁷ This involves interrogating the assumptions and anxieties of state officials and traders in order to assess how they understood the world and the people they sought to control and discipline. Furthermore, reading with and along the archival grain also requires recognition of the tensions, fractures, and disconnects amongst different departments and institutions within the state and how these functioned to frustrate and limit the power of the state to understand and control the revolts.

The chapter begins with an analysis of state officials' understandings of and responses to the events and political formations of the Mpondo revolts. It will explore how a significant lack of state intelligence regarding the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts created the conditions of possibility for various outside agitator theories to dominate state officials' understandings of the revolts both during and after the event. However, the lack of state intelligence alone is not enough to account for state officials' unwavering denial of the possibility that the inhabitants of Mpondoland were the self-conscious political agents of the Mpondo revolts. It will be shown that a number of deeply held colonially constructed ontological beliefs regarding the Mpondo people shared in common by state officials and other white residents in Mpondoland were such that they fundamentally prevented them from ever understanding the Mpondo revolts as an autonomous popular political formation driven by the thoughts, actions and agency of commoners in Eastern Mpondoland. Finally, in concluding, it will be argued that although 'a view from above' perspective reveals many interesting insights into the nuances of state subjectivities and political understandings during

⁵⁶⁷ Stoler, A. 2002. 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance' in *Archival Science*. No. 2.

the Mpondo revolts; in isolation from alternative perspectives and additional analyses, it is incapable of shedding light on the issue of emancipatory politics and its functioning within the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts.

State perspectives of the early stages of the revolts

In thinking the state's perspective of the Mpondo revolts it is useful to begin once again, as was the case with Chapter Three, with the co-option and disruption of the quarterly meeting which took place on 30th September 1957 in Mbizana. In his report to the chief magistrate of the Transkei regarding the meeting the magistrate of Mbizana complains that not only did he suspect that Paramount Chief Botha Sigcawu was to blame for spreading the rumour to the commoners that the meeting would be concerning the issues of Bantu Authorities and Betterment schemes but he also lamented over the fact that during this entire meeting the paramount was too afraid to even speak to the crowd. Although there is no indication of what was being said by the crowd at this meeting the report does suggest that 'all the Native Staff were fearful of what the crowd might do' and the magistrate reported that the remarks made by the crowd reflected a 'definite anti-white and anti-government attitude'.⁵⁶⁸ The magistrate goes on to write in the report that:

From my own observations and information gleaned from Native Constables and other members of the staff I am satisfied that the whole affair was organised by Tandabantu and some of the headmen. Chiefly Sigwinta and Nanabesi. It was done as a demonstration of their opposition to Bantu Authorities, Stabilisation and the suggestion that the occupation of land should be regularised.⁵⁶⁹

Although he blames the paramount for spreading rumours (which happen to have been true), the magistrate pinpoints ex-Headman Tandabantu as the primary organiser of the disruption at the meeting and suggests that it is due to the fact that Tandabantu was once a headman of the Isikelo location and was deposed by Paramount Botha in 1953. As a result of this deposition the magistrate believes that Tandabantu 'will go to great lengths to oppose all administrative measures of the Government'. The report goes on to state that:

It is also clear that most of the other headmen after years of laxity in which there was no control over occupation of land resent any suggestion of

⁵⁶⁸ CMT 3/1475, 'Further report on Quarterly meeting: Chiefs, Headmen and People', to CMT, 4th October 1957, Ref: N.1/15/4.

⁵⁶⁹ CMT 3/1475, 'Report on Quarterly meeting: Chiefs, Headmen and People', 2nd October 1957, Ref: N.1/15/4.

interference and propose to resist any attempt to have the law applied. The obvious reason is the lucrative source of income which the farming out of land provides them.⁵⁷⁰

Here we see one of the main pillars of state officials' understanding of the early stages of the Mpondo revolts – the assumption that headmen were the masterminds behind the mobilisation of crowds and the public denouncement of the Bantu Authorities system. The state officials had failed to recognise the fact that the political nature of crowd gatherings at public meetings had fundamentally changed by the early stages of the Mpondo revolts. State officials were still only able to see and understand these crowds as an instrument organised and deployed by headmen seeking economic empowerment. They failed to understand that popular politics had in fact begun to bypass the chieftaincy in both its political form and content. Not only is a headman, or in this specific case an ex-headman, confidently assumed to have been *the* primary agitator and organiser of the crowd at the meeting of 30th September 1957 but by extension it is also assumed that the politics of the crowd was simply one of pushing the economic agenda of headmen. As Chapter Three sought to demonstrate this simply was not the case during the Mpondo revolts even in its earliest stages.

In addition to the aforementioned headmen, the magistrate identifies some supposedly 'anti-white officials and teachers', who were responsible for 'agitating' the commoners of Mbizana against the government in 1957.⁵⁷¹ Specifically Native Clerk Grade II, J.W.L Hulana of the magistrate of Mbizana's office as well as Native Constable Gauzela of the local South African Police were singled out by Midgley as being ardent promoters of 'anti-whitism'.⁵⁷² The significance of Midgley's report lies in its illustration of how the state attempted to understand the initial formation of the politics of the Mpondo revolts from within the conceptual parameters of state subjectivities and elite politics. Midgley's conclusions about the agents and grievances driving this moment of resistance completely contradict his description of the event in which headmen and state officials were the target of a popular critique of apartheid state sponsored rural governance structures articulated by the crowd.⁵⁷³ Even the police investigation which took place in the wake of Midgley's report

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*

⁵⁷³ CMT 3/1475, 'Further report on Quarterly meeting: Chiefs, Headmen and People', to CMT, 4th October 1957, Ref: N.1/15/4.

released on 13th March 1958 confirmed that in this specific case no evidence could be found that ex-Headman Tandabantu, Native Clerk J.W.L Hulana, or Native Constable Gauzela were at all involved in inciting the people against Bantu Authorities.⁵⁷⁴ Importantly, the minute from Deputy Sargent Potgieter of the Kokstad Security Branch, who was the investigating officer, concludes:

There is also no evidence that the A.N.C or A.A.C was influencing the natives in their attitude against Stabilisation. In fact all information gained gives one the impression that the natives in this area have not been sufficiently enlightened regarding the difference of Stabilisation, the Bantu Authorities Act and Rehabilitation.⁵⁷⁵

The above quotation is important because it alludes to a number of important themes to be discussed within this chapter such as outside agitator theories and the understanding of Mpondo people as 'ignorant' and not self-conscious agents of their own political participation in the Mpondo revolts. I argue that within the sources of the archives two slightly different understandings of the people and politics of Mpondoland held by state officials can be identified – both of which do not recognise commoners as self-conscious, independent political agents. The first one is based on a crude ethnic idea of Mpondo people as being incapable of acting politically from outside of the institution of the chieftaincy and through their traditional leaders. It is for this reason that many state officials, particularly during the early stages of the revolts, insisted that chiefs and headmen were the political masterminds and mobilisers of the revolts.⁵⁷⁶ The second narrative which dominated state officials' understanding of the revolts was the outside agitator theory. This outside agitator narrative reflects a different anxiety for the state premised on a recognition that traditional leaders had in fact lost control of their subjects who were, as a result, now open to dangerous outside influence from so-called 'detrified natives', communist agitators and urban-based national liberation organisations such as the ANC.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1475, Offices of the Security Branch, Umtata to CMT, 'Report on Unrest: Bizana', 4th March 1958, Ref: 42/1.

⁵⁷⁵ CMT 3/1475, Offices of the Security Branch, Umtata to CMT, 'Report on Unrest: Bizana', 4th March 1958, Ref: 42/1.

⁵⁷⁶ See for example: CMT 3/1475, 'Further report on Quarterly meeting: Chiefs, Headmen and People', to CMT, 4th October 1957, Ref: N.1/15/4; and Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1475, CMT Minute to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 'Unrest: Bizana', 8th October 1957, Ref: 42/1.

⁵⁷⁷ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, R. A. Midgley to CMT, 'Pondoland Unrest', 20th April 1961, Ref: 42/G.

The Outside Agitator and Mastermind Theories of the State

With the administration having had very little comprehension of the political situation developing in Eastern Mpondoland during the late-1950s its officials very readily jumped to the conclusion that ordinary people were being spurred into resistance by outside agitators and members of urban-based national liberation organisations and the ANC in particular.⁵⁷⁸ The outsider theory was one which dominated state official's understandings of the Mpondo revolts both during and after the event. Interestingly, it is within the findings of the so-called 'independent' administrative commission of inquiry in which the state's understanding of the role of 'agitators', 'subversive elements' and 'communist activists' as the 'masterminds' behind the revolts is revealed.⁵⁷⁹

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in the months following the Ngquza Hill massacre of 6th June 1960 the state decided to hold an independent Commission of Inquiry into the unrest in Eastern Mpondoland. The commission sat for three days in Lusikisiki, Flagstaff and Mbizana and during the period of its investigations into the causes of the unrest there was a general hold placed on the political demonstrations and praxes of the Mpondo revolts. It was after the findings of the Commission of Inquiry we read at a public meeting at the Mbizana airfield on 11th October 1960 to a crowd made up of thousands of commoners that the struggle was intensified once again.⁵⁸⁰ Sources indicate that the majority of participants in the mountain movement boycotted the commission and those who were present at the airfield were both frustrated and insulted by the findings and recommendations of the commission⁵⁸¹. This is a critical indication of the fact that the commission of inquiry, which claimed to have been 'completely impartial' in its investigations into the causes of the unrest, was in fact a means by which the state could consolidate and justify its narrative and understanding of the revolts.⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁸ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Bizana, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

⁵⁷⁹ Van Heerden, *Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, July 1960.

⁵⁸⁰ Drew, A. 2012. Govan Mbeki's 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 79.

⁵⁸¹ Lodge, T. 1983. *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945*. Ravan Press: Johannesburg, p. 280.

⁵⁸² Van Heerden, *Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, July 1960.

Anne Stoler argues that 'Nowhere is the history-making work (of the state) more evident than in the form of the commission of inquiry'.⁵⁸³ Drawing from Stoler the commission of inquiry into the unrest in Mpondoland was much more than just a delay tactic deployed by the state. Like other commissions of inquiry the one in Mpondoland during 1960 was an important means by which the state could consolidate and justify its historical narrative and understanding of the revolts with all the moral authority that a commission claiming to 'scrutinize state practice, reveal bureaucratic mistakes, and produce new truths about the workings of the state itself' could do.⁵⁸⁴ The way in which the concerns and assumptions of state officials' dominated the investigation processes and findings of the commission of inquiry is a stark indication of the usefulness of such documents for revealing state official's conception of the Mpondo revolts. And, as argued above, central to this state conception was the notion of outsider agitators and individual masterminds as the intellectual and political agents of the Mpondo revolts. Leading questions such as 'Will you agree that there must be a master-mind somewhere?' are littered throughout the transcripts of the commission's proceedings.⁵⁸⁵ However, perhaps the most succinct encapsulation of the state's perspective of the causes of the revolts is provided in a series of excerpts from the findings of the commission:

For some years the people in the Bizana district had grievances, either real or imaginary. These grievances were carefully nursed and kept alive, presumably by subversive elements in the Harding District of Natal, which adjoins the Isikelo location in Bizana district. It will be recalled that some years ago, a tent and a quantity of petrol belonging to the Government, were burnt in the Harding District. It is also known that the notorious Oliver Tambo, who holds a high position in the African National Congress movement, is originally from the Isikelo location and actually visited the area shortly before Christmas 1959. The disturbances in Bizana district occurred at approximately the same time as the riots in Cape Town, Sharpeville and Cato Manor, and it is the considered opinion of the law abiding Bantu that the movement was inspired by the African National Congress...

It is also significant that Oliver Tambo, who has visited Accra and Addis Ababa is a great friend of Albert Luthuli, who has a large number of followers in the Harding area of Natal. A further point is that the methods employed by the members of the movement are foreign to the Pondos, and when one studies the evidence of witnesses such as Albert Somadlangati (pages 128 – 146) and

⁵⁸³ Stoler, A. 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', pp. 104-105.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 106.

⁵⁸⁵ *Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, July 1960. The Cory Library, Rhodes University.

Elijah Lande (pages 280 -281) it is clear that the people of Bizana were the victims of the insidious propaganda of the African National Congress and associated organisations...

Your Committee finds that the majority of the ordinary Pondos are at present opposed to rehabilitation, and whilst they may have in certain instances, gained the impression that it is linked with Bantu Authorities, there is in fact no foundation therefor, and it is clear that agitators are exploiting the opposition to rehabilitation to further their own ends.⁵⁸⁶

In the above extracts from the findings of the commission of inquiry we see the two dominant versions of the outside agitator theory referred by the state. The first places the blame for the revolts on 'subversive elements' from the Harding districts of Natal and the second, which is here and in many other cases associated with the first, alludes to members of the ANC as the masterminds behind the mobilisation and political praxes of the revolts.⁵⁸⁷ In the transcripts of the commission's proceedings, as well as in a host of other state documentation stored in the archives, we can identify some other outsider agitator theories espoused by state officials too. Many of these concerned rumours of dark-skinned Africans being seen in the districts of Eastern Mpondoland and state officials were at times convinced that such foreign Africans were the 'master-minds' behind the revolts.⁵⁸⁸ Another prevalent version of outsider agitator theory constructed by state officials identified one or two unknown persons in parts of South Africa outside of the Transkei as the masterminds behind the revolts. A prime example of this is found in an extract from a report from Warren to the chief magistrate of the Transkei detailing the nature of unrest in Mbizana in which he states:

The Rebel leaders are under orders from some other person who has not yet come out into the open. I have made arrangements with the rebel leaders, on one occasion to meet me, and on another occasion to meet Captain Gerardy, in order to discuss the issue of summonses. The Rebel leader has agreed to such meetings. Later on, after he has had an opportunity to contacting the "boss", the Rebel leader has cancelled the arrangements. I believe that the "boss" was responsible for the Rebel ultimatum that the Police vans should be withdrawn from the district and for the demand that the summonses should show the name of the Police informer.⁵⁸⁹

⁵⁸⁶ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1472, Committee of Enquiry into Eastern Pondoland, 'Findings and Recommendations of the Committee', 11th October 1960, Ref: Unknown

⁵⁸⁷ CMT 3/1472, Committee of Enquiry into Eastern Pondoland, 'Findings and Recommendations of the Committee', 11th October 1960, Ref: Unknown

⁵⁸⁸ Daniel Tabelaza, Evidence given to the *Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, 13 July 1960, pp. 203 – 204.

⁵⁸⁹ 1/BIZ 6/47, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

The above quotation not only speaks to the centrality of the outsider agitator theory to state official's understanding of the Mpondo revolts but it also reveals the inability of state officials to even entertain the notion that, instead of some abstract mastermind, these so-called 'rebel leaders' were actually being held accountable by the very members of the popular political movement of which they were a part. This inability to consider the majority of participants in the Mpondo revolts as the primary agents of their own political project is important because it relates directly to the way in which state officials viewed the Mpondo as a 'tribal' people and the implications this had for how they understood the revolts.

Knowing the Native: Tradition, Tribes, and Custom

A key aspect of the argument being made within this chapter is that state officials shared certain ontological assumptions about the Mpondo people as a so-called 'tribe' which had a huge influence in shaping what they believed was possible in terms of resistance politics in Mpondoland. As discussed in Chapter Three the region of Eastern Mpondoland by the time of the revolts was inhabited by people with direct genealogical links to the Mpondo chieftaincy as well as people who formed part of immigrant groups, described by the state officials as 'clans', who became part of the political entity of Mpondoland during and after the paramountcy of Faku.⁵⁹⁰ Although state officials sometimes tended to ascribe specific qualities to particular immigrant 'clans' in general the administration maintained that 'All foreign tribes living in Eastern Pondoland are "naturalised" Pondos by Bantu custom and fall under the Eastern Pondo Paramount Chief'.⁵⁹¹ This is an important indication of the way in which colonial and apartheid state officials understood 'Bantu custom' as the defining feature of Mpondo identity and subjectivity. In order to understand how state officials' ridged colonial conceptions of 'the Native' as defined by custom and tradition shaped their perception and understanding of the political subjectivities and praxes deployed by commoners during the Mpondo revolts it is useful to draw on insights from Mamdani's text *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*.⁵⁹²

⁵⁹⁰ Beinart, W. 1982. *The Political Economy of Pondoland*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, London, New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne, Sydney, p. 9.

⁵⁹¹ 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

⁵⁹² Mamdani, M. 1996. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Princeton University Press: New Jersey.

According to Mamdani, 'European rule in Africa came to be defined by a single-minded and overriding emphasis on the customary'.⁵⁹³ Although the notion of the customary was not unique to the African encounter with Western colonialism what was distinctive about the African encounter was the 'scope of the customary'.⁵⁹⁴ Encompassing both personal relations (marriage, succession, movement) and access to productive resources (land and livestock) the realm of the customary was made into a totality of the African experience. The bearer of custom was said to be the tribe and 'Encased by custom, frozen into so many tribes, each under the fist of its own Native Authority, the subject population was, as it were, containerized'.⁵⁹⁵ Colonial authorities were able to justify indirect rule on the basis that tradition and custom were indigenous forms of social organisation. However, in Mpondoland as in other parts of the continent it was the colonists themselves who selected, manipulated, sculpted and at times outright invented these so-called 'timeless' tribal identities, customs and traditions used to define and rule African populations. What is significant about the colonial constructions of 'tradition' and 'custom' in relation to the inhabitants of Eastern Mpondoland is that they had much to do with why state officials, during the time of the revolts found it impossible to understand the event as one driven by the collective political agency and subjectivity of commoners.

Put simply, state officials' understanding of the Mpondo people was on one level informed by prevailing assumptions about African tribes in general, and on another level by the assumptions implicit within the colonial interpretation of the specific historical experience of colonisation in Mpondoland. It is to this second set of assumptions that attention now turns as they have direct bearing on the state perspective of the Mpondo revolts.

The attributes colonial and apartheid state officials most often ascribed to the Mpondo people are as follows: they are loyal to authority; they are peace-loving; they are a very proud people who view themselves as independent; they are exceptionally conservative and staunchly defensive of their traditional lifestyles; and finally, state officials well into the 1960s consistently refer to the Mpondo people as primitive.⁵⁹⁶ I argue that all of these

⁵⁹³ Mamdani, M. 'Citizen and Subject', p. 50.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 50.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 51.

⁵⁹⁶ See for example: Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/61, CMT to the Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development, Pretoria, 'Bantu Authorities: Bizana', 21st November 1958, Ref: 42/1; and Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, CMT 'Propaganda Campaign', 29th March 1963, Ref: 42/1.

assumptions can be seen as relating to different moments and events in the history of the region as interpreted by colonial officials. The perception of the Mpondo people as being loyal to authority and peace loving can be related directly to the fact that the chiefdom never came into direct militant conflict with the forces of colonialism nor was there the kind of widespread resistance in the early-twentieth century in Mpondoland as in the case of many other parts of the reserves.⁵⁹⁷ The perception of the Mpondo people as conservative and protective, above all else, of their 'traditional' lifestyles relates to the state's interpretation of the particular experience of migrant labour, and the associated resilience of small-scale agricultural practices, as well as the stagnated nature of capitalist penetration into Mpondoland. And finally, the lingering assumption of the 'primitive' nature of Mpondo people espoused by state officials during the Mpondo revolts. While difficult to relate to any one particular historical moment or event, 'primitive' must be seen as the manifestation of an inherently racist and modernist state subjectivity which allowed state officials to conceptually relegate the commoners of Mpondoland to the realm of the pre-modern and pre-political.

These colonial assumptions about the inherent nature of the Mpondo people did not only define the way in which state officials in the region understood and governed the inhabitants of Mpondoland; this colonially constructed identity also followed Mpondo migrant labourers to the mines where they received differential treatment by mining companies in line with their perceived attributes. Dunbar Moodie explains that by the 1940s most machine drillers, also known as rock drill operators (RDOs) working at the various mines on the Rand were from Mpondoland.⁵⁹⁸ It is no coincidence that the RDO job category became increasingly reserved for Mpondo workers.⁵⁹⁹ This can be seen in the fact that machine drillers work tended to be individualistic and done with a relative degree of independence from 'boss boy' supervision.⁶⁰⁰ The colonial depiction of the Mpondo as a people of independent, conservative, traditionalist and loyal character undoubtedly influenced their positions and experiences in the mines during the twentieth century. However, the focus here

⁵⁹⁷ This is in line with the historical analysis of Mpondoland during the twentieth-century found in Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland'.

⁵⁹⁸ Moodie, D. 1994. *Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration*. University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles and California, pp. 105-106.

⁵⁹⁹ Moodie, D. 'Going for Gold', pp. 105-106.

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 106.

is on the way in which these colonial assumptions regarding the customary traits and inherent characteristics of the Mpondo people fundamentally shaped what state officials thought was possible in terms of the Mpondo revolts. This is clearly evidenced in an extract from a report sent from the chief magistrate of the Transkei to the secretary for Bantu Administration in 1958:

The Eastern Pondos are very primitive and of an independent, conservative spirit and they resent any interference with their traditional mode of living. Since annexation there has been no land registration and petty chiefs [of immigrant clans] have fiercely opposed any attempt on behalf of the administration to control their land matters.⁶⁰¹

In this extract from the chief magistrate's report we see how all the aforementioned colonial constructions of the Mpondo, or in this case Eastern Mpondo, as 'primitive' and so on, were a vital component of state officials' understanding of the nature of popular politics in the region during the early stages of the Mpondo revolts. As the majority of people in Eastern Mpondoland were considered 'primitive' when they appeared upon the political scene in the form of large crowds publically denouncing the state and the tribal authorities it was generally assumed by state officials that they had been mobilised as an instrument for the furthering of certain sub-chiefs and headmen's political and economic aspirations. However, the perception of the Mpondo people as loyal to the authority of the chieftaincy did result in state officials such as the chief magistrate of the Transkei being caught completely by surprise when commoners and not chiefs or headmen were the ones who articulated a popular critique and rejection of the state administration, the paramount, and the tribal authorities system within the context of these crowd gatherings. This is seen in the reaction of the chief magistrate to the reports of the meeting of 30th September 1957:

I enclose reports by the Magistrate of Bizana on an incident which occurred at his station on the 30th ultimo.

I have discussed the matter with the Deputy Commissioner of Police, who is most perturbed by the occurrence, as I am. It is unheard of for Eastern Pondos to insult their Paramount Chief who has hitherto been venerated more than any other chief. It is also most unusual for any Transkeian Natives to show disrespect to a Magistrate, however much they may be opposed to a policy.⁶⁰²

⁶⁰¹ CMT to the Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development, Pretoria, 'Bantu Authorities: Bizana', 21st November 1958, Ref: 42/1.

⁶⁰² Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1475, CMT to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 'Unrest: Bizana', 8th October 1957, Ref: 42/1.

As the revolts progressed from their early stages and increasingly bypassed the institution of the chieftaincy as a vehicle for the expression of popular politics so too did state officials' understandings of the revolts increasingly rely on speculations about outside agitators affiliated with national liberation organisations such as the ANC as well as other unknown bosses and masterminds as the intellectual architects and primary agents of the Mpondo revolts. This is an important point which speaks to the way in which state officials' changing perceptions of the revolts fit together in terms of time and content. As previously argued within this chapter I believe that during the early stages of the revolts state officials' narrative understandings assumed that certain sub-chiefs and headmen were the primary agents and masterminds of popular mobilisation and politics. However, during the latter half of 1960 and beyond these state narrative understandings increasingly tended towards outside agitator theories in order to understand the politics of the revolts.

Even when police investigations and security branch intelligence operations failed to identify any substantial evidence of outside agitators, whether from the ANC or not, as having been the driving forces behind the political praxes of the Mpondo revolts, state officials still refused to concede to the possibility that the majority of commoners in Eastern Mpondoland might just have been the agents of their own actions and the intellectual architects of their own political formations and agendas.⁶⁰³ I argue that such an acknowledgement of the ability of 'primitive' Mpondo people to think and act in ways that proved them to be the makers of their own history and the masters of their own politics was simply beyond the conceptual boundaries of state officials' subjectivities. Thus, in understanding the Mpondo revolts those who abided by the parameters of state subjectivities held on dearly to the conviction that, at their height, the revolts could be explained as the result of small groups of 'subversive elements' whipping-up the ignorant masses of Eastern Mpondoland into a full-scale rebellion by taking advantage of their conservative nature and misleading them about the implications of the Bantu Authorities system and its relationship to rehabilitation schemes.⁶⁰⁴ Put very

⁶⁰³ CMT 3/1475, Offices of the Security Branch, Umtata to CMT, 'Report on Unrest: Bizana', 4th March 1958, Ref: 42/1.

⁶⁰⁴ See for example: 1/BIZ 6/47, J. Fenwick, 'Disaffection in the Lusikisiki District', 1st June 1960, Ref: unknown; CMT 3/1472, Committee of Enquiry into Eastern Pondoland, 'Findings and Recommendations of the Committee', 11th October 1960, Ref: Unknown; and 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Bizana, 'Memorandum on Disturbances in the District of Bizana and Eastern Pondoland', 11th July 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/C.

simply, it was only by maintaining the perception that the majority of inhabitants in Eastern Mpondoland were ignorant victims manipulated and intimidated into acts of wrong-doing by sinister masterminds that the state bestowed upon itself the moral authority to crush the revolts with an unprecedented array of state terror whilst still absolving itself and its system of indirect rule from any acknowledgement of fault or contradiction.

As stated at the outset of this section there were some state officials, particularly during the latter stages of the revolts, who used a specific construction of inhabitants of the coastal areas of Mbizana in order to explain the disturbances of 1960 whilst maintaining their colonial perception of the 'true' and 'authentic' Mpondo people as having been without political agency.⁶⁰⁵ In the aftermath of the immediate repression of the mountain movement in early 1961 the magistrate of Mbizana, R. A. Midgley, began taking steps to regain control over the coastal areas of Mbizana in which the mountain movement had allocated much land to commoners during the latter half of 1960.⁶⁰⁶ In justifying his want to have the people and land of these areas regularised the magistrate makes a very significant claim about the nature of the 'detrribalised' inhabitants who reside there and their role in the Mpondo revolts:

The presence of many of these [unauthorised] people in this location is undesirable because of two main reasons. Firstly, a number of them are *not true Pondos*, they are the *detrribalised agitator type* who disregard all laws and will not submit to control of any sort. They were largely responsible for the lawless conduct in January–February, 1960 which sparked off the disturbances which followed later in the year. Secondly, many arable lands and homesteads unlawfully occupied are in sandy soil which is giving rise to serious soil erosion problems.⁶⁰⁷

Here we see a magistrate offering a variant of the agitator theory which does not place political agency or moral blame on a phantom mastermind outside of Mpondoland. Instead drawing on his colonial conceptions of clans and ethnicity in the region, the magistrate identified a whole group of 'detrribalised' and hence inauthentic Mpondo people in these coastal areas as the problem people who caused the Mpondo revolts. Once again we see how almost all of the state officials crafted their explanations of the Mpondo revolts in ways that sometimes varied but always catered to their conviction that the 'true' and 'naturalised' Mpondo people were as a result of their customs, traditions and hence their 'worldview',

⁶⁰⁵ 1/BIZ 6/47, R. A. Midgley to CMT, 'Pondoland Unrest', 20th April 1961, Ref: 42/G.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

ontologically incapable of being the political agents and intellectual architects for the Mpondo revolts.

The above discussion speaks directly to an insight provided by Haitian historian Michel Trouillot which says, 'When reality does not coincide with deeply held beliefs, human beings tend to phrase interpretations that force reality between the scope of these beliefs. They devise formulas to repress the unthinkable and bring it back within the realm of accepted discourse'.⁶⁰⁸ In drawing from Trouillot's work I argue that the Mpondo revolts, much like the Haitian Revolution, was an event which, from a perspective from above so to speak, was unthinkable and impossible when it happened. In many ways the aforementioned quotation taken from the chief magistrate of the Transkei regarding the meeting of 30th September 1957 has much in common with the statements made by white plantation owners in the French slave colony of Saint-Domingue on the eve of the Haitian Revolution: 'There is no movement among our Negroes... They don't even think of it. They are very tranquil and obedient. A revolt among them is impossible'.⁶⁰⁹ These were the words of French colonist La Barre in 1790 who found it inconceivable that in just a few short months he would be proven spectacularly wrong when a large-scale insurrection, driven by the thousands of black slaves in Saint-Domingue, would topple the French colonial administration culminating in the eventual abolishment of slavery and the establishment of the world's first black independent state of Haiti in 1804.⁶¹⁰ I argue that for the chief magistrate of the Transkei who in 1957 believed it to be 'unheard of' for Eastern Mpondo people to question, and even insult, the authority of the paramount and the local magistrate it was similarly inconceivable that these 'primitive' people had already begun to engage in one of the most radical and emancipatory politics of resistance against the institution of traditional authorities as well as the apartheid state itself in twentieth century South Africa.⁶¹¹

White Traders and Social Response of Panic

It is important to note, however, that it was not just the state officials involved within the administration of Mpondoland for whom a rigid conception of the Eastern Mpondo

⁶⁰⁸ Trouillot, M. R. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press: Massachusetts, p. 72.

⁶⁰⁹ Trouillot, M. R. 'Silencing the Past', p. 75.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 73.

⁶¹¹ CMT 3/1475, CMT to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 'Unrest: Bizana', 8th October 1957, Ref: 42/1.

people influenced understandings of the political realities and possibilities of the Mpondo revolts – settled traders and other white residents also shared many of these assumptions. Ben Turok provides a useful analysis of the white traders and professionals residing in Eastern Mpondoland at the time of the revolts who also maintained the impossibility of the revolts:

Recent events have caught the White traders and professional men in Pondoland completely unawares. While some of them did anticipate that the Government's interference with the tribal set up would bring trouble, they, who pride themselves on "knowing the Native", did not anticipate that the Pondo Revolt could take on its present dimensions. Even now, when they have themselves seen the resistance movement unfolding before their very eyes, they are still unable to credit the Pondos they "have grown up with", with the ability to organise so effectively.

And so they spread the story (in whispers), "The Communists are behind it." Or, even more bizarre, in the words of a senior magistrate of Umtata, "Chief Lutuli is organising it all from just over the river in Harding". (One would expect an official of the BAD to know that Chief Lutuli has been either in gaol or in confinement in Groutville, in Northern Natal, during the last year.)⁶¹²

Recalling insights from Chapter Two it is necessary to keep in mind that traders in Mpondoland often held a somewhat ambivalent role in relation to the engagements between the colonial cum apartheid state and popular resistance politics in Mpondoland. During the late-1800s colonial traders were key players in the arena of chiefly politics particularly through their extensive involvement in the bartering of cattle for firearms which had serious implications for the ability of the paramount to exercise control over both the sub-chiefs and homesteads in Mpondoland.⁶¹³ In the years leading up to civil war and colonial annexation some prominent traders in the Eastern Mpondoland area even gave direct backing to Chief Mhlangaso with the hope of securing greater profits under his reign as paramount and in so doing placed themselves into direct conflict with the colonial state.⁶¹⁴ However, this historical moment in which traders placed themselves in direct conflict with the state was an exception rather than a norm in the historical context of Mpondoland. During the Mpondo revolts permanently settled white traders in the administrative centres of each of the districts as well as those based at trading stations throughout the locations of Eastern Mpondoland were significant side players in the unfolding of both popular resistance politics and its repression

⁶¹² Turok, B. [c. 1960]. *The Pondo Revolt*, Congress of Democrats, p. 12.

⁶¹³ Beinart, W. 'The Political Economy of Pondoland', p. 39.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 33.

by the state. However, as suggested by Turok, they too were shocked by the unfolding of popular politics and quickly began to view their black customers – whom they had always understood to be deeply ‘respectful’ and ‘conservative’ by nature – as a threat to their businesses and possibly their lives.⁶¹⁵

Traders’ understandings of the threat posed by the inhabitants of Eastern Mpondoland during the Mpondo revolts was such that at certain moments it tended to generate a social response of panic. An apt example of this was during the period of mass popular demonstrations and meetings in the Isikelo location during March 1960 – in the days after a crowd of commoners prevented the formal implementation of the Tribal Authorities system in Isikelo location by gathering at Sub-Chief Mhlabuvelile’s Great Place and carrying out an assault on the system’s newly appointed councillors. During this period (and others within the year 1960) rumours concerning the anti-white political sentiments of the inhabitants of Eastern Mpondoland stirred deep anxieties amongst white traders. During this first period of open and wide-spread resistance in Isikelo location, which drew inhabitants from all over the district of Mbizana and even from as far as the Harding district of Natal, the response of white traders (despite attempts of state officials and police) to the unfolding political situation was one of social panic.

This is seen clearly in the events of 20th March 1960, in which the magistrate intended to personally manage the telephone exchange at the Post Office in Mbizana so as to prevent traders based throughout the district from acting upon unsubstantiated rumours of impending rebel violence on white people and property.⁶¹⁶ Police orders had been given to the effect that all white residents in Mbizana were to gather at the hospital in case of an armed attack by the people massing in Isikelo location on the town.⁶¹⁷ However, a lack of state intelligence meant that neither state officials nor the police had any idea what the crowds gathered in Isikelo were planning. Upon arrival at the Post Office the magistrate opened the door to the telephone exchange room and to his shock he found a white woman frantically operating the telephone system and contacting all the white traders in the area.⁶¹⁸

⁶¹⁵ Turok, B. ‘The Pondo Revolt’, p. 12.

⁶¹⁶ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Bizana, ‘Report on Isikelo Tribal Authority: District of Bizana’, 4th April 1960, Ref: C.9/6.

⁶¹⁷ 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Bizana, ‘Report on Isikelo Tribal Authority: District of Bizana’, 4th April 1960, Ref: C.9/6.

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The woman was Mrs Blanckenberg, who occupied the position of second telephonist at the exchange, and who was not supposed to be on duty when the magistrate returned from his meeting with Captain Girade. Once inside the telephone exchange room the magistrate was furious as he heard her say: 'You must not come into the village. We are surrounded by Natives' thus arousing the kind of serious panic that he and Dr Riekert had been trying to avoid.⁶¹⁹ As the magistrate stood listening to Mrs Blanckenberg's conversation he deduced that the trader on the line was asking her many questions about the severity of the situation and was desperately trying to find out what was happening. Mrs Blanckenberg, having still not noticed the presence of the magistrate behind her, brushed the trader's questions aside and said that she could not spend time talking to him as she urgently needed to contact all the other trading stores in the area. It was after this that the magistrate made his presence known and sternly said to Mrs Blanckenberg: 'Who authorized you to telephone the Traders? We are not surrounded by Natives and there is no need to panic. Now will you please get yourself to the Hospital?'.⁶²⁰ Mrs Blanckenberg quickly left the Post Office without answering the magistrate's questions. Soon after she left the telephone exchange was besieged with panicked calls from traders asking what was happening; some even calling from neighbouring town such as Kokstad and Port Shepstone.⁶²¹

The rebel violence the police and state officials fearfully anticipated to be meted out on the white residents and infrastructure of Mbizana town never took place. However, the events described above are an important indication of how settled white residents and traders understood and responded to the threat posed by the Mpondo revolts – and how often this resulted in the generation of social panic amongst the white communities of Mpondoland and surrounding areas. In addition to this, it is clear that sections of the settled white population in Mpondoland, and traders based in the locations in particular, shared with state officials the assumption that outside agitators had been the primary agents behind the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts.⁶²² A brief extract from the testimony given by one trader during the commission of enquiry is illustrative of the similar understandings of the Mpondo people shared by state officials and other white settlers in the region: 'The Pondo is

⁶¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*

⁶²² *Ibid.*

a law-abiding decent type of person – that has been my lifetime experience. I was born in Libode and have always found them very peaceful'.⁶²³ Thus we can see that the traders who claimed to 'know the natives' so intimately seemed to have had the same kind of colonially constructed 'knowledge' about the Mpondo people that state officials abided by. Recalling the argument made by Turok quoted at the outset of this section, it was because of their inability to think and understand the political realities of the Mpondo revolts from outside of the narrow confines of this colonial subjectivity that white traders and professionals could never anticipate the political form the revolts took nor could they ever, even retrospectively, 'credit the Pondos they "have grown up with"' as being the agents of their own political project.⁶²⁴

Conclusion

In this way the Mpondo revolts, like the Haitian Revolution, is significant in serving as a reminder that politics need not always carry on as the art of the possible and according to what is deemed thinkable.⁶²⁵ In fact, by taking seriously marginalised historical events such as the Mpondo revolts we can confirm that it is often in the realm of the impossible, from the politically motivated actions of the previously non-existent (or 'those-who-do-not-count' to borrow a term from Neocosmos), that an emancipatory politics based on a radical egalitarianism with the potential to realise the will of the people emerges.⁶²⁶ The purpose of this chapter has been to argue that it was the power of a number of deeply held colonially constructed ontological beliefs regarding the Mpondo people shared in common by state officials and other white residents in Mpondoland which prevented them from ever understanding the Mpondo revolts as an autonomous popular political formation driven by the thoughts, actions and agency of commoners in Eastern Mpondoland. Time has been taken within this chapter to read along and with the archival grain, as Stoler suggests, in order to show how the 'view from above' perspective of the revolts stored in the pages of the state archive is incapable of speaking to the issue of emancipatory politics and its functioning within

⁶²³ Meth Heathcote, Evidence given to the *Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, 18 July 1960, The Cory Library, Rhodes University, p. 236

⁶²⁴ Turok, B. 'The Pondo Revolt', p. 12.

⁶²⁵ Trouillot, M. R. 'Silencing the Past', pp. 72 – 75.

⁶²⁶ Neocosmos, M. 2012. 'Are Those-Who-Do-Not-Count Capable of Reason? Thinking Political Subjectivity in the (Neo-)Colonial World and the Limits of History' in *The Journal of Asian and African Studies*. Vol. 47, No. 5, p. 531.

the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts precisely because those in positions of political and economic power refused to accept that the Mpondo people could be the agents of such a sophisticated, organised and effective moment of resistance.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁷ Stoler, A. 'Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance', pp. 104-105.

Chapter Nine:

State Repression, Emancipatory Politics and Memory

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First it aims to provide an exploration of the repression of the Mpondo revolts by the apartheid state. The state's tools of violence included location raids, mass arrests, torture, robbery, collective fines, public humiliation, and banishment. In so doing I argue that these acts of terroristic violence coupled with the draconian stipulations of Proclamation R400 not only destroyed the popular autonomous authorities created by commoners but also the conditions of possibility for the revival of such a mass and open political resistance movement in the Transkei for many years to come. Although it is not possible to pinpoint any exact dates upon which it would be accurate to suggest the Mpondo revolts ended, it is possible to gain at least a broad idea of when the popular political formations such as the mountain movement and public crowd gatherings, which were key drivers of the Mpondo revolts, were crushed in Eastern Mpondoland. It is fair to suggest that the autonomous political formations driving popular politics during the revolts, in their popular and public form, were effectively repressed in Eastern Mpondoland between December 1960 and 1963. However, the main argument being made in this chapter is that in order to understand the significance of the emancipatory political elements of the Mpondo revolts, we have to look beyond the repression of its primary agents in Eastern Mpondoland during the early-1960s.

This relates directly to the second aim of this chapter which is to bring to the fore what I identify as the echoes and transmissions of the emancipatory politics of the Mpondo revolts (and the political formations and praxes it manifested in) with other instances of popular politics within South Africa's past and present. The second section of this chapter is focused on a number of examples which, drawing once again on Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's analogy of the many-headed Hydra, can be seen to be connected to the Mpondo revolts as part of a shared trajectory of popular politics in South Africa.⁶²⁸ In this way the Mpondo revolts can be seen as part of a living history of popular politics in South Africa.

⁶²⁸ Linebaugh, P. and Redicker, M. 2013. *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic*. Beacon Press: Boston.

The third and final aim of this chapter is to discuss the memory of the Mpondo revolts and its relevance to thinking emancipatory politics. In this section I argue that the 'elitist' memory of the Mpondo revolts, invoked by state officials and traditional leaders, is premised on a silencing or forgetting of the emancipatory aspects of the Mpondo revolts. On the other hand, within this section I discuss the Marikana strike as just one instance in which the popular (as opposed to elitist) memory of the Mpondo revolts, articulated within the subaltern sphere of politics, is shown to be premised on the recognition of emancipatory political principles, praxes and subjectivities as the defining aspects of the Mpondo revolts. As such I argue that the way in which the memory of the Mpondo revolts is invoked in the non-elite or subaltern sphere of politics is far more in line with the interpretation of political history provided within this thesis than it is with the elitist interpretations and memory of the revolts.

Police Brutality, Terroristic Violence and Proclamation R400

On 30th November 1960 as a direct response to the proliferation of mountain meetings, the crippling boycotts, and the ever increasing deployment of popular political praxes against the administration and traditional authorities, the state declared a State of Emergency in Mpondoland.⁶²⁹ The emergency regulations enforced under the auspices of Proclamation R400 were some of the harshest and most draconian polices to be put into practice in South Africa during the mid-twentieth century.⁶³⁰ However, a significant number of the multiple violent tactics by which the Mpondo revolts (in its open and mass-based form) were repressed by the state were deployed prior to the State of Emergency. It is to these tactics of repression deployed by police and military officials prior to December 1960 that attention first turns.

In Chapter Five I argued that it was not the mountain movement and the commoners of Eastern Mpondoland who were responsible for the deployment of terroristic forms of violence during the Mpondo revolts but the state and its security forces. Not only did the apartheid police turn a blind eye when chiefs engaged in counter-revolutionary kraal burning campaigns but they also directly engaged in the brutalisation, assault and harassment of commoners from mid-1960 onward. Police brutality was meted out upon the commoners of

⁶²⁹ Drew, A. 2012. Govan Mbeki's 'The Peasants' Revolt: A Critical Examination', in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 79.

⁶³⁰ Streek, B. and Wicksteed, R. 1981. *Render Unto Kaiser: A Transkei Dossier*, Ravan Press: Johannesburg.

Eastern Mpondoland primarily during mountain meeting and location raids. Recall Enoch Mbele's testimony given to the commission of inquiry on behalf of 'the rebels' in which he complained that:

when arrests are effected by the Police they assault the accused person. They also assault women and children and help themselves to the kraal owner's fruit.⁶³¹

Mbele's testimony is supported by numerous reports during the Mpondo revolts which detail the way in which police deployed a reign of terror on those commoners, predominantly women and children, who were found in the villages during raids when most of the men were at secret meeting locations in the mountains and forests.⁶³² The extent of the police brutality and intimidation faced by commoners in Eastern Mpondoland is further echoed by the statement made by Solomon Madikizela during the commission of inquiry which claimed that:

The Police were also causing trouble by ill treating people when they arrested them. They assaulted people and it was not unusual to return to your kraal and find that the Police had been there in your absence and that your wife and family had been assaulted. You would find your wife with bruises and weals over her body. The people attributed all these things to the Bantu Authorities system. The same applied to their Paramount Chief Botha Sigcau – he was not afraid to give orders to the effect that his people should be shit and the government supported him. The people feared that they were being led into an abyss from which there was no return.⁶³³

Even the magistrate of Lusikisiki in February 1961, K. G. Harvey, wrote in a report to the chief magistrate of the Transkei that:

It is unfortunate that there have been so many allegations of looting, and even one of rape, committed by the [police] forces – particularly when considered with the Ngquza Hill inquest finding.⁶³⁴

That the ANC-aligned lawyers such as Albie Sachs successfully forced the state to hold an inquest in which the police were found to have wrongfully used 'excessive force' at the

⁶³¹ Enoch Mbele, Evidence given to the *Departmental Committee of Enquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, 13 July 1960, The Cory Library, Rhodes University, p. 22.

⁶³² See for example: Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1472, K. G. Harvey, 'Report on Position in Lusikisiki', 14th February 1961, Ref: Unknown; and Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1478, Station Commander, Flagstaff, to District Commandant, Kokstad, 'Bantu Unrest', 28 December 1960, Ref: R.C.I. 2/12/60.

⁶³³ Solomon Madikizela, Evidence given to the *Departmental Committee of Inquiry into Unrest in Eastern Pondoland*, 13 July 1960, The Cory Library, Rhodes University, p. 20.

⁶³⁴ CMT 3/1472, K. G. Harvey, 'Report on Position in Lusikisiki', 14th February 1961, Ref: Unknown.

Ngquza Hill massacre in June 1960 seems to have had little effect on the brutality with which the police treated commoners during the revolts.⁶³⁵

Perhaps it was because of the negative press attention the administration received following the massacre, or because of increased secrecy concerning mountain meeting sites, or a combination of both of these factors, that the police seem to have focused on the tactic of location raids (and the raiding of individual homesteads) more than that of mountain meeting raids in the last months of 1960. As demonstrated above these raids were inherently terroristic as residents were given no forewarning by the state as to when they would take place and had no legal rights to prevent the police from entering and 'searching' their homes. As evidenced in the quotation above, state officials were very aware of the assaults, robberies and rapes which were taking place during the processes of location raids but they did nothing to use their authority to put an end to such violence.

However, the violence and brutality of the police was not just confined to location raids. One of the most extreme examples of police terror came in the form of a detention camp for political prisoners of the revolts, established on the day of the Ngquza Hill massacre, at which many commoners were brutally tortured and detained for long periods.⁶³⁶ During my time conducting interviews at Ngquza Hill in 2013 many people recalled that the main means of torture at the detention camp was to tie a man down, dip his testicles in water and shock them repeatedly with a car battery and jumper cables until he gave names of the supposed rebel leaders in his area.

The massacre at Ngquza Hill and the establishment of the detention camp at the Mkambati Leper institution were merely the first, albeit extreme, indications of the massive wave of repressive state policies and police brutality that were implemented in eastern Mpondoland as means to crush the revolts. As stated earlier, the government declared a State of Emergency on 30th November 1960 in direct response to the growing resistance and crippling boycotts in Eastern Mpondoland. Proclamation R400 was the auspices under which the emergency regulations were enforced, which were some of the harshest and most

⁶³⁵ Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. 2012. 'Introduction' in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 2.

⁶³⁶ Kepe, T. 2012. 'Discontent and Apathy: Post-Apartheid Rural Land Reform in the context of the Mpondo Revolts' in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 249.

draconian policies ever put into practice in South Africa during the mid-twentieth century. According to Barry Streek and Richard Wicksteed:

In terms of the proclamation a Bantu Commissioner, or a commissioned or non-commissioned officer of the South African Police (later Transkei Police) could arrest and detain any person for interrogation for an unlimited period if the officer concerned suspected that such a person had taken part, or intended to take part, in the commission of any offence, or that the person had information about the offence. The detainee could then be interrogated at the place of detention and held until 'the said person has answered fully and truthfully all questions put to him which have bearing upon the said offence or intended offence.' The person could not consult with a legal adviser on any matter unless the Minister of Police authorised it. A detainee could be released at any time by the Minister on conditions he could determine.⁶³⁷

In addition to the above, Proclamation R400 also had provisions which established complete state control over all public meetings in the Transkei.⁶³⁸ What this meant was that any meeting convened by a group of people was illegal unless prior arrangements had been made to obtain written permission from the local Bantu Commissioner who would in turn have complete authority over when and where such a meeting may take place and could enforce any further conditions which he deemed necessary on these meetings. Although, in theory, there were certain specified meeting which were condoned by the state (such as those for religious, educational or official purposes) the power of Proclamation R400 was such that any member of the South African Police, the Defence Force or a Bantu Commissioner could arbitrarily prohibit any gathering of ten or more people with impunity.⁶³⁹ Not only did the provisions of Proclamation R400 place huge constraints on the freedom of movement and association for commoners in the Transkei it also provided chiefs with a brand new arsenal of cohesive powers to be used against those who challenged their authority or that of the state. According to the Proclamation:

Any person who organises (or takes part in) a boycott of an official meeting or who organises a boycott of a person with the object of harming him or who makes any verbal or written statement or does any act which threatens another with boycott, violence, loss, disadvantage or inconvenience, or who refuses or neglects to obey the lawful orders of a chief or headman or who treats a chief or headman disrespectfully or fails to show him respect or

⁶³⁷ Streek, B. and Wicksteed, R. 'Render Unto Kaiser', p. 10.

⁶³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 10.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 10 – 11.

obedience, is guilty of the offence created by the regulation dealing with subversive statements. These prohibitions also impose far-reaching restraints on speech and action. The provision that prohibits statements threatening another with inconvenience or disadvantage appears to render criminal any advice to another person that action taken by him will be followed by unpleasant consequences, for example, an expression of annoyance by his neighbours.⁶⁴⁰

The extremely broad prohibition of 'subversive statements' enshrined in the proclamation gave chiefs the power to severely punish any person who openly questioned their authority or that of the state (including its most junior employees) with the effect of 'exact[ing] from the population the unquestioning obedience to authority that is enforced in military establishments'.⁶⁴¹ In addition to these extremely dictatorial measures Proclamation R400 also conferred onto chiefs the power to order for the banishment of a person, their homestead, and their belongings to distant areas. Furthermore, measures of the proclamation also allowed for the Minister of Police to hold total authority to prevent people from either entering, exiting, or travelling to certain areas of the Transkei. According to Professor A S Mathews:

The most objectionable features of the regulations are their unlimited duration, the arbitrary powers which they place in the hands of minor officials, the confusion of opposition with subversion and, more generally, the virtual destruction of personal and civil liberties they bring about. The abrogation of rights and liberties authorized by the regulations would be extreme even if they were strictly limited to periods of genuine unrest.⁶⁴²

As suggested by Mathews the emergency regulations of Proclamation R400 remained in effect well into the 1970s as a necessary means for the state to maintain the unpopular Bantu Authorities system of governance as well as the façade of moves towards 'independence' in the Transkei.⁶⁴³ Rhona Churchill provides notes on a conversation she had with 'an English-speaking South African who holds a high-ranking position of authority covering the whole of the Transkei' which holds interesting insights into the period of the

⁶⁴⁰ Mathews, A. S. quoted in Streek, B. and Wicksteed, R. 'Render Unto Kaiser', pp. 15-16.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 15.

⁶⁴² *Ibid*, p. 16.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 17.

revolts' repression during the late 1960 and early 1961.⁶⁴⁴ This white official speaking from his offices in Umtata told Churchill that:

We are living in a police state... Phones are tapped here and people are gaoled without trial for passing on unpopular information. I'm not afraid for myself but I do want to continue the work I am doing. The root of the trouble in Pondoland is that the government is trying to inflict on the Pondos, under the title of 'Bantu Authority', the kind of home rule it eventually plans for all the native reserves and townships throughout South Africa... The whole Apartheid system is dependent on the successful establishment of these self-governing Bantustans. That is why this revolt is so important, and why the government is so anxious to play it down.

To the astonishment of everyone who knows them the Pondos have realised that Bantu Authority is a gigantic fraud and have risen up and revolted against those of their chiefs who have accepted it. They claim, and with good reason, that the government has dismissed their best chiefs and turned them the weaker ones into government stooges. What in fact has happened is that Pondoland is now being run rather like a Nazi annexation, with an Afrikaner from Pretoria acting as *gauleiter*, the C.I.D. as gestapo agents, and the chiefs and headmen bulldozed into the position of collaborating civil servants.⁶⁴⁵

In addition to having to live under the state of emergency regulations detailed above, whole locations of commoners in Eastern Mpondoland were further humiliated by being forced to make public apologies to their respective magistrates and Tribal Authority officials as well as to pay hefty fines as a form of collective punishment for the revolts. The order issued by the state which imposed these fines for the residents of Mbizana read as follows:

WHEREAS a number of Natives, residents in the district of Bizana, have been assaulted and seriously injured and damage amounting to £20,091.19.1 has been caused by the wilful destruction of property by fire;

AND WHEREAS His Excellency the Governor-General in his capacity as Supreme Chief of all the Natives in the Union is satisfied that such assault and damage were caused by the Natives and has reason to believe that there is a combination or conspiracy among you to suppress evidence relating to the said assaults and damage or to conceal the identity of the perpetrators thereof;

AND WHERE AS His Excellency in his capacity as aforesaid has, in terms of subsection (1) of section six of the Natal Code of Native Law, (published in the schedule to Proclamation No. 168 of 1932), read with section one of the Native

⁶⁴⁴ It is worth noting that Churchill's analysis of the Mpondo revolts as well as this extract both appear in a chapter problematically entitled *With the Primitives in Pondoland*. See Churchill, R. 1962. *White Man's God*. Hodder & Stoughton: London, p. 59.

⁶⁴⁵ Churchill, R. 'White Man's God', p. 59.

Administration Act 1927 (Act No. 38 Of 1927), as amended, impose upon you a fine of £5 or one beast;

NOW THEREFORE, I, JAMES PRIOR DODDS, Acting Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development, acting on behalf of the Supreme Chief in terms of sub-section (1) of section nine of the said Natal Code of Native Law do hereby order that you shall pay the aforementioned fine to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner of the District in which you may be found.⁶⁴⁶

The imposition of a fine of £5 or one beast on every resident was a huge financial blow for the majority of commoners in Eastern Mpondoland who had already been placed under significant financial stress as a result of the mass boycott of traders.⁶⁴⁷ In addition to the imposition of fines as a form of collective punishment for those communities involved in the revolts; by January 1961 the apartheid state had arrested a staggering total of 4 769 black people, two white people, and two people of so-called 'other races', in connection with the revolts.⁶⁴⁸

Further to this, numerous others had been tortured at the detention camp in the Mkambati Leper institution, some had been banished from the region entirely, and between roughly 20 and 40 commoners in the Eastern Mpondoland region were killed by the state, and at least 21 more had been executed in Pretoria following the Ngquza Hill massacre.⁶⁴⁹ According to Matoti and Ntsebeza, after the killing of Chief Vukayibambe Sigcawu and two of his Headmen, seven men were sentenced to death and executed on 21st March 1961.⁶⁵⁰ A further 29 commoners were put on trial in Kokstad following the killing of Sub-Chief Stanford Nomagwetekana and of this group, 13 were acquitted, 10 were sentenced to eight years imprisonment, and six were sentenced to death and executed in July 1962.⁶⁵¹ In addition to the above, Matoti and Ntsebeza identify at least nine other people in Eastern Mpondoland who received the death sentence and were executed during the Mpondo revolts.⁶⁵²

⁶⁴⁶ Cape Town Archives Repository, CMT 3/1472, Acting Secretary for Bantu Administration and Development, J. P. Dodds, 'Order for Community Fine: Bizana', 4th January 1961, Ref: 42/Q.

⁶⁴⁷ Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, CMT, 'Bizana Unrest and Bizana European Business Houses', 19th November 1960, Ref: 42/1.

⁶⁴⁸ Copelyn, J. A. 1974. *The Mpondo revolts 1960*. Unpublished Honours Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, p. 82.

⁶⁴⁹ Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. 'Introduction', p. 1.

⁶⁵⁰ Matoti, S. and Ntsebeza, L. 'Rural resistance in Mpondoland and Thembuland', p. 199.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 200.

⁶⁵² *Ibid*, p. 200.

The state's chosen instruments of coercion – location raids, arrests, collective fines, public humiliation (in the form of public apologies to the Paramount Chief), banishment, and other forms of punishment – were effective in severing the heads of the mountain movement including what was perhaps its most important, and yet relatively autonomous head, the women of Eastern Mpondoland. These acts of terroristic violence coupled with the draconian stipulations of Proclamation R400 not only destroyed the popular autonomous authority created by commoners, but also the conditions of possibility for the revival of such a mass and open political resistance movement in the Transkei for many years to come. However, having said this, it is important to once again invoke the analogy of the many-headed Hydra and the resilience of emancipatory politics in the face of state repression. For while it may be true that the heads of the Hydra in Eastern Mpondoland were cut off by the terroristic violence deployed by the police, I argue that not all of its remaining neck-stumps were effectively sealed by the firebrand which was the emergency regulations of Proclamation R400. This is evidenced by the fact that the politics of the Mpondo revolts – by which I mean the principles, praxes and formations that I have identified characteristic of the popular politics of the Mpondo revolts – can be seen as rearing its head in contexts outside of Eastern Mpondoland during the late-1950s and early-1960s.

Echoes of Emancipatory Politics: The Mpondo revolts and Popular Politics of the Present

Both Dunbar Moodie and Ari Sitas have argued that there is a direct relationship between the experience and memory of the Mpondo revolts and the trade union struggles of the 1970s and 1980s.⁶⁵³ Sitas in particular argues that instances of rural resistance were important factors influencing and shaping the 'antinomic consciousness in the labour movement' in industrial KwaZulu-Natal. Commenting on the character and role of Alfred Themba Qabula, renown labour poet and cultural activist who is from the area, Sitas states that: 'The rebellion against Bantu Authorities was so deep in his bones that it affected everything, his politics and most importantly his craft'.⁶⁵⁴ He then goes on to quote Qabula directly saying:

⁶⁵³ Moodie, D. 2012. 'Hoyce Phundulu, the Mpondo Revolt, and the Rise of the National Union of Mineworkers'. In Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town; Sitas, A. 2012. 'The Moving Black Forest of Africa: The Mpondo Rebellion, Migrancy and Black Worker Consciousness in Kwa-Zulu Natal'. In Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town.

⁶⁵⁴ Sitas, A. 'The Moving Black Forest of Africa', p. 173.

I reject the idea of praising the kings and rulers because in most instances in the past the kings and chiefs proved themselves most willing to be co-opted by the colonial rulers at the expense of their subjects...”⁶⁵⁵

In *Going for Gold* Moodie explores how amaMpondo people working in the gold mines on the Witwatersrand soon gained a reputation for being physically strong and prideful people who ‘fought so they are not looked down upon’.⁶⁵⁶ While Moodie uses the terms pride and integrity, I argue that it was a staunch commitment to human dignity, just as it was during the Mpondo revolts, which motivated the amaMpondo people on the mines to engage in direct forms of resistance. Moodie challenges the assumption that the period between 1948 and 1982 there was an absence of meaningful political resistance on the mines due to the banning of trade unions for African workers.⁶⁵⁷ He argues that throughout this period migrant workers, particularly those from Mpondoland, did organise themselves politically during this period. It just so happens that the ways in which they organised themselves, the grievances they had, and political praxes they deployed did not conform to orthodox conceptions of workers’ struggles.

For instance, Moodie demonstrates how during the Rock Drill Operator (RDO) strike at Western Deep Mine on the East Rand in 1973 roughly 200 migrant RDOs chose to gather collectively on a hill-top near the mine and demanded to engage directly with the mine management regarding their grievances.⁶⁵⁸ It is interesting to note that the same sorts of practices emerged at the start of the year during the 1973 strike wave, which started in Durban and then quickly spread to other parts of the country. For instance, strikers refused to elect representatives and demanded that employers negotiate with them *en masse*.⁶⁵⁹ It is by situating such urban-based labour actions within a broader tradition of emancipatory politics that allows us to appreciate the way in which mineworkers organised themselves by drawing on political principles, formations and praxes associated with the type of

⁶⁵⁵ Alfred Themba Qabula quoted in Sitas, A. ‘The Moving Black Forest of Africa’, p. 173.

⁶⁵⁶ Moodie, D. 1994. *Going for Gold: Men, Mines and Migration*. University of California Press: Berkeley, Los Angeles and California, p. 184.

⁶⁵⁷ Moodie, D. ‘Going for Gold’, p. 245.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 245.

⁶⁵⁹ Ulrich, N. 2007. ‘Only the Workers Can Free the Workers’: the origins of the workers’ control tradition and the Trade Union Advisory Coordinating Committee, 1970- 1979’, MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, p. 124

autonomous and participatory popular political formations characteristic of rural resistance during the twentieth century.

As already noted, mountains have featured as sites of popular politics in Mpondoland since pre-colonial times and have also appeared as important sites of politics outside of the geographical region itself both before and after the revolts of the early 1960s. Furthermore, it has been argued that during the Mpondo revolts mountains were spaces in which popular politics was conditioned by certain political principles – a number of which can be seen as emancipatory. This is a significant point because it alludes to the fact that mountains do not necessarily feature in urban-based struggles as mere ‘empty’ sites for popular politics to be conducted from at a distance from the state and capital. These are sites with a historical association to a particular type of democratic politics which functions very differently to those forms of democracy practiced by some trade unions⁶⁶⁰, political parties or the state.

Profoundly emancipatory forms of political engagement continued into the 1980s in opposition to apartheid in the form of ‘peoples’ power’ and ‘workers control’ traditions developed by the unions that emerged out of the 1973 strike.⁶⁶¹ On the East Rand, the unions facilitated the creation of broad-based, democratic soviet-type structures that wedded workplace and community concerns.⁶⁶² Yet, perhaps most notable was the way in which people in Alexander township attempted to bypass the illegitimate governance structures established by the apartheid government and governed themselves through democratic street, block, ward committees and civics.⁶⁶³

⁶⁶⁰ This does not include the very democratic union formations that emerged in the 1970s that were part of the ‘workers’ control’ tradition, including the soviet like structures that emerged on the East Rand in the 1980s. See Ulrich, N. ‘Only the Workers Can Free the Workers’, p. 124.

⁶⁶¹ See for example: Byrne, S. and Ulrich, N. (Forthcoming) ‘Prefiguring Democratic Revolution? “Workers’ Control” and “Workerist” Traditions of Radical South African Labour, 1970 – 1985.’ In Webster, E. (ed.) *The Unresolved National Question in Left Thinking*. Wits University Press: Johannesburg; and Neocosmos, M. 1996. ‘From People’s Politics to State Politics: aspects of national liberation in South Africa, 1984 – 1994’. In *Politeia*, No. 15, pp. 73 – 119; and Suttner, R. 2004. ‘The UDF Period and Its Meaning for Contemporary South Africa’. In *The Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3, pp. 691 – 702.

⁶⁶² Baskin, J. 1982. ‘Growth of a New Worker Organ: The Germiston Shop Stewards Council?’ In *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 7, No. 8, pp. 42 – 53.

⁶⁶³ See Mayekiso, M. 1996. *Township Politics: Civic Struggles for a New South Africa*. Monthly Review Press: New York; and Bonner, P. and Nieftagodien, N. 2008. *Alexandra: a History*. Wits University Press: Johannesburg.

There are also examples of emancipatory politics and praxis in the post-apartheid period. Clear connections and parallels can be drawn between the politics of the mountain movement and that of the mineworkers and community members on the koppie during the Marikana strike in 2012.⁶⁶⁴

From the space koppie the mineworkers and community members rejected trade union representation and demanded to engage with the Lonmin mine management directly. This can be related to the commoners' rejection of the institution of the chieftaincy and the use of its officials as a vehicle for the representation of popular political opinion during the Mpondo revolts. Both the rejection of the chieftaincy during the revolts and the rejection of the long standing National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) during the Marikana strike can be understood as a product of a type of popular politics in which corrupted representatives who have been co-opted by the state or capital are discredited and independent democratic political formations are developed.⁶⁶⁵ In Peter Alexander *et al's* book *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and a Case to Answer* there are a number of instances in which mineworkers interviewed just days after the massacre speak to the importance of equality and egalitarianism as central principle of the decision-making processes and praxes of those on the koppie.⁶⁶⁶ According to the testimonies of, the problematically named, Mineworkers 1 and 10 the people gathered on the koppie had collectively agreed not to engage with any figures of authority (be they either police officers, trade unionists, or members of the mine management) who did not approach and engage them *as equals*. This was most evident by the interaction between the president of the majority union NUM, Senzeni Zokwana, and the crowd gathered on the koppie. The president of the discredited NUM failed to comply with the egalitarianism and respect of human dignity demanded by the crowd when he refused to step outside the armoured police vehicle he had arrived in and address the crowd face to face. Mineworker 1 explained that, 'He [Zokwana] was not in a right place to talk to us as a leader, as our president, this thing of him talking to us while he is in a Hippo. We wanted him

⁶⁶⁴ Sections of the discussion on post-apartheid popular politics have been taken from my honours research paper and published article: Bruchhausen, S. 2015. 'Understanding Marikana through the Mpondo revolts'. In *The Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 4, pp. 412 – 426.

⁶⁶⁵ Naicker, C. 2015. 'Worker Struggles as Community Struggles: The Politics of Protest in Nkaneng, Marikana'. In *The Journal of Asian and African Studies*, pp. 1 – 14.

⁶⁶⁶ Alexander, P. Lekgowa, T. Mmope, B. Sinwell, L. and Xezwi, B. 2012. *Marikana: A View from the Mountain and a Case to Answer*. Jacana Media: Auckland Park.

to talk to us straight if he wanted to'.⁶⁶⁷ This is reiterated by the testimony of Mineworker 10 which states that '[h]e was supposed to get off the Hippo, come down and address the people.'⁶⁶⁸ This demand for equality, human dignity and the willingness of ordinary people to risk everything, including their very lives, in order to be the masters of their own lives and destinies can be seen as an echo or transmission of the emancipatory political features of the Mpondo revolts within the Marikana strikes.

Another important parallel between the Mpondo revolts and the Marikana strike which speaks to the connectivity of emancipatory politics over time and space is the featuring and significance of state massacre in each instance. Just as the Ngquza Hill massacre led to a strengthening and broadening of resistance throughout Pondoland in the 1960s, so too did the Marikana massacre result in an intensification of resistance that spread throughout the mining sector, into other South African industries, and areas beyond Rustenburg.

The first example of this was in October 2012 when thousands of farmworkers in the Western Cape, inspired by events at Marikana, collectively went on strike demanding increases in their wages from roughly R 69.00 a day to almost double that figure – which remains nowhere near the amount required for a living wage.⁶⁶⁹ Mazibuko Jara of the Democratic Left Front believes that at the core of the farmworkers' strike is a problem within the South African state's agricultural policy.⁶⁷⁰ However, the farmworkers themselves have demonstrated, by making frequent reference to the struggle for a living wage at Marikana, that although some of the immediate problems may be different, the struggle they were fighting was the same as that fought at Marikana.

A further example can be found in the less well-known resistance carried out by shack dwellers in the Western Cape during May 2013. On 10th July 2013 eNews Channel Africa (eNCA) reported on the struggle being waged between law enforcement officers and shack

⁶⁶⁷ Alexander *et al.*, 'Marikana', p. 32.

⁶⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 164.

⁶⁶⁹ Gerson, J. 2013. 'An Interview with Mazibuko Jara of the South African Democratic Left Front' in *New Politics*, available online at <http://newpol.org/content/south-africa-marikana-massacre-and-new-wave-workers%E2%80%99-struggle>.

⁶⁷⁰ Gerson, J. 'An Interview with Mazibuko Jara'.

dwellers in the township of Phillipi.⁶⁷¹ They showed video footage of shacks being destroyed by anti-land invasion units from Cape Town and then rebuilt by the determined new residents of the land referred to by the shack dwellers themselves as Marikana. An interview with shack dweller Simphiwe Winston reveals that the name was chosen because of its meaning and significance for this community of shack dwellers in their struggle for land:

We say this is Marikana because we believe that some people might die here fighting for this land, like it happened in Marikana where the people, our fathers, were fighting for the mine there, to get money to feed us. That is why we decided to call this place Marikana.⁶⁷²

The third, and final example to be discussed, is the occupation of vacant land in Sherwood, Durban, by people illegally rendered homeless after their shacks in Cato Crest were destroyed by police and city officials in the name of 'delivery'.⁶⁷³ It is a disturbing irony that whilst the struggles waged by the organised poor in South Africa are continuously stripped of their political content and reduced to spasmodic 'service delivery protests' the actual coming of state 'delivery' is 'frequently a tool for assuming control and effecting exclusion rather than meeting people's urgent needs'.⁶⁷⁴ This is most clearly seen when 'delivery' involves the demolition of shacks, under the pretence that residents are given replacement houses by the government or placed in transit camps, but in most cases tenants are left homeless or forcefully removed to peripheral sites referred to as 'dumping grounds'.⁶⁷⁵ When this disastrous process of 'delivery' was experienced in Cato Crest in early march 2013 it spelt mass eviction for tenants whose homes were illegally destroyed. However, roughly two weeks after the mass eviction a number of people who had been rendered homeless occupied vacant land in Sherwood and called it Marikana. In response to the occupation the municipality called upon the police, however, perhaps due to the then relative freshness of the Marikana massacre and the increasing number of publically exposed

⁶⁷¹ Macleod, R. 2013. 'Shack dwellers ready to die for 'Marikana' land' in *eNews Channel Africa*, available online at <http://www.enca.com/south-africa/shack-dwellers-ready-die-marikana-land-cape-town>. Accessed July 10, 2013.

⁶⁷² Macleod, R. 'Shack dwellers ready to die for 'Marikana' land'.

⁶⁷³ Pithouse, R. 2013. 'From Lusaka to Marikana' in *The South African Civil Society Information Service*, available online at <http://sacsis.org.za/site/article/1608>.

⁶⁷⁴ Pithouse, R. 'From Lusaka to Marikana'.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

instances of police brutality which frequented the South African press, they also requested the presence of politicians to try negotiate a solution.⁶⁷⁶ According to Richard Pithouse:

The politicians appear to have done little other than to tell the occupiers that their occupation is illegal and to appeal for them to wait patiently for housing to be 'delivered' rather than taking matters into their own hands. This has not been well received.⁶⁷⁷

The consequence was that on Tuesday 12th March 2013 the home of Mzimuni Ngiba, the local ward councillor, was attacked by a crowd of 500 people armed with pangas and spades, causing the councillor and his family to flee from their home the next day.⁶⁷⁸ While it has become routine for the state to forcefully remove people from their homes in the name of 'delivery', and it is becoming increasingly commonplace for grassroots activists to fear the threat of being assassinated by agents of local party structures to such a degree that they refrain from sleeping in their own homes, what this example demonstrates above all else is that the 'political violence, which has been a top down phenomenon for years, is now starting to move in the other direction too'.⁶⁷⁹

Within all the instances noted above, we can appreciate the extent to which the political history of the Mpondo revolts, as understood within a framework of emancipatory politics, has much to tell us about the nature of popular political formations and praxes as well as the resilience and limitations of emancipatory politics in South Africa both past and present. Furthermore, by considering the 1973 mineworkers' strike and strike wave, 'workers control' and 'people's power' in the 1980s, the Marikana strike of 2012 as well as the farm worker's strike and land occupations which took place in its wake, as all connected in various degrees by way of shared political principles, praxes and formations, the conceptual foundations have been laid for an analogy in which the Mpondo revolts is just one head of a many-headed Hydra of popular politics in South Africa. I argue that using the many-headed Hydra analogy in this way allows us to conceptualise a new historiography in which 'those-who-have-not-counted' as self-conscious and significant agents in mainstream narratives of 'The Struggle', and the politics they conceived and practiced, are viewed accurately as

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

important forces of historical change and shapers of radical tactics, strategies and political alternatives in South Africa.

The Memory of the Mpondo Revolts

The current status of the memory of the Mpondo revolts is intimately related to the contemporary political landscape of South Africa. In the Chapter One I discussed the ways in which academics, politicians, and members of the local elite in Mpondoland, have sought to selectively incorporate the memory of the revolts into an elitist narrative of 'The Struggle' in South African resistance history. Increasingly this has translated into an 'official' memory of the revolts in which headmen, chiefs and officials of the Tribal Authorities system are not portrayed as the targets of the resistance but rather as key agents of popular anti-state politics.⁶⁸⁰ According to Kepe and Ntsebeza this was clearly seen in 2000 when traditional leaders in Mpondoland invoked this distorted elitist memory of the revolts as part of their collective protest against the demarcation of a municipal boundary which would affect their jurisdiction. It is useful to quote directly from Kepe and Ntsebeza's analysis of this episode:

The Daily Dispatch quoted Chief Mwelo Nonkonyana of the Congress of Traditional Leaders in South Africa (Contralesa) as threatening that if the government wanted to see what he termed 'rural revolution', it should go ahead with the proposed demarcation. The Daily Dispatch quoted Chief Nonkonyana in these terms: 'Bit if we want to see peace prevailing in this area, let all the Pondo tribal authorities remain as they are, because Pondos by nature are inseparable from their paramount chief'. In all of this, the various speakers invoked the Mpondo rebellion of the 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁸¹

The twisted irony of this situation is that the memory of the Mpondo revolts is being invoked as a means by which to justify the existence and authority of the Traditional Councils in the former Bantustans of post-apartheid South Africa. As Kepe and Ntsebeza rightly point out these Traditional Councils are not new political formations but are the resurrected Tribal Authorities of the apartheid era – those same Tribal Authorities against which the politics of the Mpondo revolts was most directly targeted.⁶⁸² Thus within this elite political sphere the memory of the revolts is necessarily based on a historically inaccurate interpretation of its

⁶⁸⁰ Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. 'Introduction', p. 10.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 15.

⁶⁸² *Ibid*, p. 15.

politics which is geared towards the protection of the status quo and the entrenchment of the chieftaincy in the present day.

Thus it is within this problematic realm of historical knowledge production and political discourse that the memory of the Mpondo revolts is frequently used to further entrench the powers of the Traditional Councils system as well as the kind of second-class citizenship it implies for the black inhabitants of the former Bantustans. However, this historically inaccurate memory of the revolts does not exist in isolation. It is also extremely important to consider the competing memories of the Mpondo revolts which are invoked within the realm of subaltern politics – that is in spaces and amongst people which are outside of the official domain of the state and civil society. During my research trip to Eastern Mpondoland in 2013 it was made clear to me that the popular memory of the revolts amongst the local people, while by no means homogenous, was far more in line with the interpretation of the history provided in this thesis than it was with the above detailed state engineered memory. Recall for example the discussion in Chapter One in which I described an interview I conducted in which a local woman who felt that the memory of the revolts encapsulated and espoused within the events official commemoration was ‘diluted’ because it no longer represented the revolts as ‘a history about the people’.

In the majority of secondary literature dealing with the memory of the Mpondo revolts there is a consensus amongst scholars regarding the extreme malleability of the revolts.⁶⁸³ Some people invoke the memory of the revolts, and specifically its violent repression by the state, in order to make sense of the hardships, injustices and continuing suffering of commoners at the hand of autocratic and predatory traditional leaders and politicians in the post-apartheid era.⁶⁸⁴ Others who invoke the memory of the revolts stress the bravery, solidarity and moral authority of those who fought against the apartheid state and the system of Tribal Authorities against fatal odds and use this memory as a means by which to inspire themselves and people in the present day to stand up to the injustices of the post-apartheid

⁶⁸³ Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. ‘Introduction’, p. 10.

⁶⁸⁴ Pieterse, J. 2012. ‘Reading and writing the Mpondo Revolts’. In Kepe T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, pp. 62 – 63.

order.⁶⁸⁵ Whether in a defeatist or inspired form it appears that the popular memory of the Mpondo revolts amongst the local residents in present day Mpondoland is based on an understanding of the historical event as one in which ordinary people were the agents of their own popular political resistance against the chieftaincy and the apartheid state.

Therefore, it is the popular memory, as opposed to the state memory, of the revolts which has not yet forgotten the emancipatory political features of the Mpondo revolts. This is evidenced in the case of the Marikana strike in 2012 in which mineworkers and community members on the koppie invoked the memory of the Mpondo revolts and drew upon it for inspiration in forging their own autonomous political authority on the koppie. That the revolts were directly on the minds of a number of participants in the Marikana strike is evidenced by the fact that during the days spent in deep political discussion on the koppie many of the songs which were sung were the same as those sung during the Mpondo revolts.⁶⁸⁶ The significance of the invocation of the memory of the Mpondo revolts at Marikana is particularly important because I have argued that many of the political features of the revolts were transmitted across time and space and manifested within the Marikana strike. What is significant about this is that it suggests that the popular memory of the Mpondo revolts is a powerful source of inspiration and influence for post-apartheid popular political formations and practices developed at a distance from the state.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to provide an analysis of the repression of the Mpondo revolts as well as the echoes and transmissions of the type of emancipatory political aspects which it included in instances of popular politics over time and space in South Africa. Central to this discussion was the conviction that the acts of terroristic violence and the draconian stipulations of Proclamation R400, which repressed the revolts in their public form within Mpondoland, were not effective in preventing the emancipatory political aspects of the revolts from surviving and reemerging to challenge the authority of the state and capital both before and after the collapse of the apartheid regime. The Marikana strike and its

⁶⁸⁵ Kepe, T. 2012. 'Discontent and Apathy: Post-apartheid Rural Land Reform in the Context of the Mpondo Revolts'. In Kepe T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after fifty years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, pp. 255 – 257.

⁶⁸⁶ Beinart, W. 2014. 'A Century of Migrancy from Mpondoland' in Deluis, Philips and Rankin-Smith (eds.) *A Long Way Home: Migrant Worker Worlds, 1800-2014*. Wits University Press: Johannesburg, p. 72.

aftermath has been shown to be a moment in post-apartheid South Africa in which the emancipatory politics identified within the Mpondo revolts can be seen as rearing its head amongst the praxes and formations of the organised poor. This is a direct indication of the importance of historical analyses of the Mpondo revolts and other instances of popular politics in South Africa's rural area for understanding emancipatory politics – and 'alternative' (not meaning African nationalist, marxist, liberal or neoliberal) conceptions of emancipatory politics in particular.

Chapter Ten

The Mpondo Revolts: A History *of* and *for* Emancipatory Politics

Introduction

Within this thesis I have attempted to provide a revised view of the Mpondo revolts with the aim of exposing and interrogating the aspects of this historical moment of popular politics which can be seen as emancipatory. The purpose of this concluding chapter is twofold. First it aims to provide a synopsis of the political aspects of the Mpondo revolts, which within this thesis have been identified as emancipatory. In so doing I attempt to show how certain political principles, praxes and formations of the Mpondo revolts speak directly to the theorisations of emancipatory politics espoused by intellectuals such as Jacques Rancière and Frantz Fanon. In considering the significance of the parallels between theorisations of alternative emancipatory politics and certain empirical realities of the Mpondo revolts I argue that we must consider the history of Mpondo revolts as simultaneously a history *of* and *for* emancipatory politics. Thereafter attention turns to the second aim of this chapter which is to discuss some interesting and important questions and areas of research which have arisen but not been adequately dealt with within this thesis.

Parallels between History and Theory

Within the first chapter of the thesis I explained that providing a single definition for alternative forms of emancipatory politics, such as that which featured in the Mpondo revolts, is no easy task. Neither African nationalist, Marxist nor (neo)liberal mainstream conceptions of emancipation – what it looks like and who its agents are – can account for the political praxes and subjectivities of the commoners of the Mpondo revolts. As a result of this it is necessary to look to those intellectuals whose works concern rethinking the idea of emancipatory politics from outside of the narrow conceptual confines of these mainstream discourses. In thinking the emancipatory politics of the Mpondo revolts this thesis began, in line with the work of historian Paul Landau, with the affirmation of every person's basic rationality.⁶⁸⁷ Connected to this point of departure was the assertion that during the Mpondo revolts, even during their earliest stages, commoners were the self-conscious political agents of their own popular politics. It was argued that by 1957 in Eastern Mpondoland there is

⁶⁸⁷ Landau, P. S. 2010. *Popular Politics in the History of South Africa*. Cambridge Press: New York, p. xii.

evidence that popular politics had bypassed the institution of the chieftaincy as a vehicle for the expression of popular political opinion. The large crowd gatherings and the associated disruption of public meetings was no longer a political phenomenon which took place under the authority or benefit of a chief or headman – as had historically been the case in Mpondoland. During the Mpondo revolts commoners were self-conscious and direct participants within a popular politics which was, to draw on a well-worn cliché, truly of the people and for the people. The significance of this point is that it speaks to what seems to be a foundational premise of alternative theories of emancipatory politics. Put simply, the premise is that emancipation cannot be given to one; it must be taken for oneself. This idea can be found in the works of Steven Biko, Fanon, Rancière, and many other radical intellectuals who give serious attention to thinking alternative emancipatory politics. As the self-conscious agents of their own political project for emancipation, requiring no outside guidance from ‘enlightened’ experts, the commoners of Eastern Mpondoland must be seen as the primary historical subjects of the Mpondo revolts.

Within this thesis I have tried to provide an analysis of the Mpondo revolts which brings to the fore its frequently neglected emancipatory political elements. Yet in so doing I have also sought to highlight some of the limitations of these emancipatory political elements and the broader political context of popular politics in which they existed. It is important to keep in mind the fact that the emancipatory content of the Mpondo revolts must not be misinterpreted as constituting a totality of the popular politics of the event. As such the interpretation of the political history of the Mpondo revolts provided within this thesis gives further credence to Michael Neocosmos’ theorisation of emancipatory politics and specifically the relationship between ‘expressive’ and ‘excessive’ forms of collective political agency. According to Neocosmos collective political agency can be understood as ‘excessive’ when the thoughts and actions of its bearers are not merely ‘reflective’ or ‘expressive’ of their social location.⁶⁸⁸ As Michael Neocosmos explains:

When the oppressed refuse and resist oppression, they place themselves beyond the place of oppression both subjectively and politically and even

⁶⁸⁸ Neocosmos, M. 2014. *Statement of Purpose for UHURU: Unit for the Humanities at Rhodes University*. Unpublished Document, Rhodes University, p. 3.

physically. By doing so they make that oppression visible and force a rethinking of conceptual categories.⁶⁸⁹

I argue that the mass political gatherings in the space of the mountain during the Mpondo revolts and the establishment of an alternative authority there speaks directly to the notion of 'excessive' politics quoted above. At a physical and subjective distance from the state and the chieftaincy the resistant commoners of Eastern Mpondoland thought and acted in ways which completely defied colonial cum apartheid conceptual categories and ontological understandings of the 'primitive', 'loyal' and 'conservative' Mpondo tribesmen (sic). However, the complete rejection of the chieftaincy and the many other aspects of the revolts which can be seen as 'excessive' must not be divorced from the broader 'expressive' political context in which they took place. Put simply, what I am arguing is that to write a history of the Mpondo revolts in which only its emancipatory political aspects are considered would be no more than an incomplete and factually incorrect interpretation of this historical moment of popular politics. By taking seriously the fact that the emancipatory elements of the Mpondo revolts were never a totality of its political reality I have attempted within this thesis to bring hitherto neglected political features to the fore without falling into the trap of historical reductionism or theoretical romanticisation.

In considering the emancipatory aspects of the Mpondo revolts, particularly in relation to the mountain movement, I found many parallels between this history and the theorisations of Rancière. Recall that for Rancière emancipation is:

[T]he way out of a situation of minority. A situation of minority is a situation in which you have to be guided because following the path with your own sense of direction would lead you astray... [E]mancipation can only mean the autonomous growth of the space of the common created by the free association of men and women implementing the egalitarian principle'.⁶⁹⁰

As stated at the outset of the thesis this quotation from Rancière pinpoints a number of the defining characteristics of the kind of alternative emancipatory politics manifested during the Mpondo revolts. Of particular importance is the extent to which Rancière's notion

⁶⁸⁹ Neocosmos, M. 2012. 'Are Those-Who-Do-Not-Count Capable of Reason? Thinking Political Subjectivity in the (Neo-)Colonial World and the Limits of History' in *Journal of Asian and African Studies*. Vol. 47, No. 5, p. 531.

⁶⁹⁰ Rancière, J. 2010. 'Communists Without Communism' in Douzinas, C. and Zizek, S. (eds.) *The Idea of Communism*. Verso: London, pp. 168, 176.

of the implementation of the egalitarian principle speaks to the politics of the Mpondo revolts and the mountain movement in particular. It was shown in Chapter Three that the emancipatory political principle of egalitarianism shaped the political form of the mountain movement into a kind of leaderless movement of equals. In addition it was shown that this egalitarian principle also had direct bearing on, and the political praxes of, the mountain movement within the space of the mountain. In the space of the mountain the implementation of this egalitarian principle resulted in the manifestation of participatory consensus-based democratic decision-making processes in which all men who came *as an equal* were included. The limitations of this inclusivity was discussed in relation to the perceived exclusion of women from the political decision making processes of mountain meetings. This gender bias within the politics of the mountain movement (although under-researched and debatable) can be seen on its own as a limitation on its ability to act as a vehicle for universal human emancipation. However, in Chapter Seven it was argued and shown that the mountain movement never acted in isolation during the revolts. The autonomous collective political formations and praxes developed by women during the revolts in which they too fought for emancipation as the self-conscious agent of their own political thoughts and actions must be seen as an important means through which the emancipatory content of the Mpondo revolts was conceived and manifested in reality.

Outside the space of the mountain, and specifically in the context of kraal burning campaigns and boycotts, I explored the collective commitment commoners (and particularly members of the mountain movement) showed to another political principle which, like that of radical egalitarianism, has been identified as emancipatory and that is universal human dignity. In Chapter Six I identified three broad limitations on the processes of kraal burning which resulted from a collective commitment to a universal conception of human dignity and the avoidance of terroristic or dehumanising violence. The first of these was that every person targeted by the kraal burning campaigns received at least two verbal warnings that the burnings would happen, as well as they were given an invitation to come to the mountain and join the resistance movement. The second limitation on the strategic deployment of violence of the mountain movement was that the wives, children and relatives of a targeted chief, headman, councillor or police informer were - as a rule -allowed to leave the property unviolated. Finally, the third identified limitation placed on the violence of the kraal burning

campaigns was the decision not to burn the grain stores of a targeted kraal site as it was seen as 'unjust' towards the targeted man's children to leave them without the means to feed themselves. These three limitations on the use of tactical violence are evidence of what Govan Mbeki saw as the commoners' unwillingness to 'shed their humanity' in their struggle for emancipation.⁶⁹¹

However, not only were the agents of the Mpondo revolts committed to the preservation of their own dignity but they also displayed a recognition and concern for the human dignity of the people who were the targets of their political praxes. In order to grasp the significance of this in terms of understanding the relationship between violence and emancipatory politics it is useful to draw once again on the work of Fanon. The association between Fanon and the theme of violence within the academy is extensive to say the least. Scholars such as Ato Sekyi-Otu have argued that this widespread association is problematic because it is most often premised on a misreading of Fanon's phenomenological dialectical description of the processes of de-colonisation in *The Damned of the Earth* as a doctrinal prescription of violence.⁶⁹² In line with the interpretation of Fanon's work provided by Ato Sekyi-Out, Homi K. Bhabha, Lewis Gordon, Nigel Gibson and others, I argue that Fanon was actually horrified by violence – the devastating consequences of which he was exposed to as a psychiatrist treating both the torturers and the tortured in the context of colonial Algeria.⁶⁹³ However, despite this Fanon was undeniably of the view that in any colonial situation violence was an inevitable outcome.

As a result of the unfortunately inherently violent nature of a colonial situation Fanon did endorse the use of liberatory violence deployed as part of a project for emancipation from colonialism. What is particularly interesting is the way in which the stipulations Fanon attaches to his endorsement of violence mirror those which commoners collectively attached to the kraal burning campaigns discussed above. For Fanon violence is only liberatory, and thus is only endorsed when those who deploy it do so with the full humanity of the targeted enemy having been recognised.⁶⁹⁴ In this way violence can be a feature of an emancipatory

⁶⁹¹ Mbeki, G. 1964. *South Africa: the peasants' revolt*. Penguin: Middlesex, p. 129.

⁶⁹² Sekyi-Out, A. 1996. *Fanon's Dialectic of Experience*. Harvard University Press: Cambridge, p. 4.

⁶⁹³ Bhabja, H. K. 2004. 'Foreword: Framing Fanon'. In Fanon, F. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press: New York, p. xxxiv.

⁶⁹⁴ Gordon, L. 1995. *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences*. Routledge: New York and London, p. 77.

political project premised on a conception of universal human dignity. The fact that all targeted enemies of the mountain movement were invited to join the mountain movement, as equals, and were given at least two warnings that ‘the horsemen are coming’ before having their kraal burnt is indicative, I argue, of the collective recognition of even an enemies equal humanity within the context of the Mpondo revolts. As such, and in drawing from Fanon, I argue that while the violence of the state was most often terroristic, the violence of the mountain movement was most often (but not always) liberatory or emancipatory.

Another emancipatory characteristic of the Mpondo revolts as presented in this thesis is the featuring of a prescriptive politics in which people, whilst struggling *against* the forces of oppression, also struggle *for* creating an alternative form of political community. According to Rancière the ‘autonomous growth of the space of the common’ – understood here as the development of a new kind of society or political community – is dependent on people choosing, without being coerced or intimidated, to join together and act according to the egalitarian principle.⁶⁹⁵ During the months of widespread open resistance during 1960-1961 in which the participants in the Mpondo revolts rendered most of the region of Eastern Mpondoland ungovernable the mountain movement simultaneously deployed a prescriptive politics which involved the creation of an alternative, autonomous political community. In the existing secondary literature on the revolts much attention is paid to the politics of ungovernability, or in other words the politics *against* the state and traditional authorities, while very serious attention has been given to the prescriptive politics of the Mpondo revolts and the alternative world the commoners had begun to create before the security forces and draconian legislation of the apartheid state repressed the revolts.

In Chapter Six I argued that the peoples’ courts of the mountain movement, with the consent and support of the broader community, acted as a vehicle for the manifestation of a prescriptive politics which adopted and adapted certain functions and powers of the state and the chieftaincy and reconfigured them in line with the political principles and participatory democratic practices of the mountain movement. I identified the way in which people’s courts dealt with the issue of land allocation as an important indication of the prescriptive element of the mountain movement’s political project being shaped by the ability

⁶⁹⁵ Rancière, J. 2010. ‘Communists Without Communism’ in Douzinas, C. and Zizek, S. (eds.) *The Idea of Communism*. Verso: London, pp. 168, 176.

of its participants to think and act beyond that which was extant. The mountain movement has been shown to have practiced a new type of land politics that did not inaugurate private ownership of land, that which is seen as the most progressive and modern form of land tenure by liberal scholars, nor did they simply replicate the so-called traditional politics of land by choosing for themselves a new chief or leader to establish a court and take up the responsibility of land allocation. Instead, the mountain movement adopted aspects of the communal land tenure system and fundamentally reinvented it to fit with a process of collective decision-making, in the context of their participatory democratic movement. Furthermore, in considering the way in which the peoples' courts dealt with the politics of land I argued that the prescriptive politics of the mountain movement was also conditioned by the collective emancipatory political principles committed to by its participants. By decommodifying and collectivising the process of land allocation the participants of the Mpondo revolts can be understood as having self-consciously pursued a prescriptive political project with emancipatory features and potential. In this and other ways the members of the mountain movement created a movement with a political form and content which was new and beyond that which existed or had ever existed in Mpondoland. Thus, recalling the earlier discussion regarding the theorisations of Neocosmos we can argue that the politics of the mountain movement was in many cases 'excessive'.⁶⁹⁶ It was a movement and a politics which was physically and subjectively beyond the state and the chieftaincy.

Therefore, in summary, it is the self-conscious collective commitment to the principles of egalitarianism and universal human dignity within participatory democratic formations and their political praxes which have been identified as the emancipatory political aspects of the Mpondo revolts. As stated in the introductory chapter, by reviewing the history of the Mpondo revolts with the aim of exposing some of its emancipatory features this thesis hopes to make a useful contribution to the task of reviving debates on human emancipation within the humanities and social sciences in South Africa today. In reviving such debates it is important to note the many interesting questions and areas of research have come to the fore and yet have not been dealt with in this thesis. As such focus now turns to some of these questions and areas of research which require the attention of historians and social theorists

⁶⁹⁶ Neocosmos, M. 'Are Those-Who-Do-Not-Count Capable of Reason?', p. 531.

in considering the history of the Mpondo revolts and their significance for thinking popular and emancipatory politics in present day South Africa.

Limitations and Future Areas of Research

The first of these areas requiring future research and theorisation relates to the theme of gender politics and the role of women during the Mpondo revolts. Chapter Five of this thesis explored archival documents which contradicted the commonly held assumption that women's political role within the context of the Mpondo revolts was, aside from facilitating the social reproduction of the mountain movement, insignificant in comparison to their male counterparts. Women in this thesis have been shown to have developed and participated in sophisticated and effective political praxes and modes of organising. However, despite many instances in which lines were blurred, women during the Mpondo revolts often organised themselves politically in spaces and ways which were relatively autonomous from men. In considering such a situation an important question arose: to what extent could women's role in the Mpondo revolts be understood as yet another example of autonomous matriarchal (or woman-centred) systems working in a dialectical relationship with patriarchal systems in Africa? Such a dialectical relationship has already been explored by Ifi Amadiume in relation to the pre-colonial history of the rural town of Nnobi in Nigeria in her work entitled *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*.⁶⁹⁷ Considering the relationship between the politics of men and woman as being one of a dialectical relationship, between collectives which potentially conceive of themselves as equals, is just one of a number of areas of research relating to the theme of gender which historians need to consider if a comprehensive analysis of the Mpondo revolts and rural resistance history more broadly is to be developed.

Another crucial aspect of the history of the Mpondo revolts which requires further consideration is the political role of the youth during the Mpondo revolts. The lack of a serious consideration of the political role played by the youth is one of the most glaring gaps in the literature on the Mpondo revolts and rural resistance history in South Africa more generally. In the course of researching the archives this thesis I came across a number of archival sources which illuminate instances of political resistance by the youth during the Mpondo revolts.

⁶⁹⁷ Amadiume, I. 1987. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*. Palgrave Macmillan: London.

These include sources which demonstrate moments in which certain children in one instance had direct involvement with the mountain movement and its political campaigns as well as sources which reveal autonomous political praxes on the part of the youth – such as the burning down of a school by students in November 1960.⁶⁹⁸

In addition to its silence in relation to the political role of the youth during the revolts this thesis also shares in common with the existing historiography a shortcoming in regard to its silence on the religious aspects of the Mpondo revolts.⁶⁹⁹ Ranajit Guha critiques Indian historians for either ignoring the religious aspects of peasant insurgency or allowing these religious aspects to reduce the significance of these peasant uprisings to the pre-political thesis.⁷⁰⁰ The same could be said of the historiography of the Mpondo revolts. The religious element of the revolts has been a point of analysis which scholars have been unable to deal with satisfactorily thus far. So called ‘culturalist’ historians such as Crais and Redding have made the religious aspects of commoners’ subjectivity a primary focal point in their works. However, in their consideration of those religious aspects these scholars seem to strip the commoners of the Mpondo revolts of all rationality and humanity and portray them as irrational peasants whose subjectivity is completely subsumed by religion, magic, and conceptions of ‘evil’.⁷⁰¹

Unfortunately, this thesis has not been able to make an intervention into the debates surrounding the religious aspects of rural resistance politics in South Africa. However, it does argue that future scholarship into this area of inquiry needs to demonstrate the way in which religious beliefs, idioms and practices were deployed by commoners during the Mpondo revolts in ways which were sensical and effective components of their political project. Thus, although this thesis is limited by its failure to engage satisfactorily with the religious aspects of the Mpondo revolts, I do argue that the existence of these religious aspects does not contradict or discredit the analysis of the emancipatory politics presented within its chapters.

⁶⁹⁸ See for example: Cape Town Archives Repository, 1/BIZ 6/47, E. M. Warren, ‘Nyanisweni Bantu School in Emonti Location: District of Bizana: Damage by Fire’, 16th November 1960, Ref: C. 9/6/8.

⁶⁹⁹ Kepe, T. & Ntsebeza, L., 2012, ‘Introduction’ in *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*, South Africa: UCT Press, p. 15.

⁷⁰⁰ Guha, R. 1988. ‘The Prose of Counter-Insurgency’ in Guha, R. and Spivak, G. (eds.) *Selected Subaltern Studies*. Oxford University Press: New York, pp. 80 – 81.

⁷⁰¹ See: Redding, S. 1996. ‘Government witchcraft: taxation, the supernatural, and the Mpondo revolt in the Transkei, South Africa, 1955-1963’ in *African Affairs*. Vol. 95, No. 381; and Crais, C. 2002. *The politics of evil: magic, state power, and the political imagination in South Africa*. Cambridge Press: Cambridge.

However, a serious engagement with the theme of religion and popular politics within the context of the Mpondo revolts, which does not strip the commoners of their rationality and dignity as most existing studies do, would be an invaluable contribution to our understanding of historical manifestations of emancipatory politics in South Africa. These are just two of a large number of research areas relating to the politics of the youth which a comprehensive subaltern perspective of the Mpondo revolts needs to consider.

A key theoretical insight identified within this thesis is the existence of subjective and political connections between the Mpondo revolts and other instances of subaltern resistance, both past and present. Lungisile Ntsebeza's work encourages the consideration of these subjective and political connections in regard to instances of rural resistance in mid-twentieth century South Africa.⁷⁰² Similarly, Jimmy Pieterse argued that a potentially important comparative study to be done would be one which considers the Mpondo revolts in tandem with the history of the Mau Mau in Kenya.⁷⁰³ Within this thesis, as well as my Honours Research Paper, I have explored the political and subjective connections between the Mpondo revolts and the Marikana strike of 2012 as well as other associated examples of popular political formations and praxes which emerged following the massacre at Marikana on 16th August 2012. In addition to this I have also attempted to draw some initial comparisons and links, both conceptual and material, between the politics of the Mpondo revolts, the historical practice of the community palaver in West Africa, and the Atlantic pirate ships during the seventeenth-century. However, there is much more work which needs to be done in terms of developing comparative perspectives of the Mpondo revolts. I argue that considering the political and subjective connections and commonalities between instances of popular politics in South Africa's past and present is one of the necessary conceptual foundations for a new historiography in which historians use emancipatory politics as the core pivot around which actors and events are selected for inclusion and narrated as part of a common political trajectory.

⁷⁰² Ntsebeza, L. 2012. 'Resistance in the Countryside: The Mpondo Revolts Contextualized' in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 20.

⁷⁰³ Pieterse, J. 2012. 'Reading and Writing the Mpondo Revolts' in Kepe, T. and Ntsebeza, L. (eds.) *Rural Resistance in South Africa: The Mpondo Revolts after Fifty Years*. UCT Press: Cape Town, p. 63.

The above are just some of the potential areas of research historians and social theorists could pursue in order to drive forward a kind of historical knowledge production in South Africa which is geared towards addressing the question of human emancipation.

Conclusion

Within this concluding chapter I have tried to emphasise that the revised view of the Mpondo revolts provided within this thesis, although by no means a comprehensive history, does hold many insights into the parallels between the historical manifestation of emancipatory politics and theorisations of human emancipation articulated by thinkers such as Jacques Rancière, Frantz Fanon, and others. In this way I consider this thesis to be a history *of* emancipatory politics within the context of the Mpondo revolts. Furthermore, by exploring the ways in which mineworkers drew directly on the memory and history of the Mpondo revolts during the Marikana strike I argue that the history of the Mpondo revolts is simultaneously a history *for* emancipatory politics. What I mean by this is that because many of the emancipatory political aspects of the Marikana strike can be seen as transmissions of those developed during the Mpondo revolts it can be argued that the history of the revolts in this, and in a number of other contemporary instances of popular politics, is invoked for the purpose of shaping and inspiring emancipatory politics. Therefore, the history of Mpondo revolts as presented within this thesis is at once a history *of* and *for* emancipatory politics.

By considering the emancipatory political content of the Mpondo revolts this thesis hopes to have made a useful contribution from the field of history to the task of reviving debates on human emancipation within the humanities and social sciences identified by Neocosmos.⁷⁰⁴ One of the greatest values of history and historical analysis is its ability to reveal in the events of the past possibilities for the present and future. Revisiting the history of the Mpondo revolts from an anti-elitist perspective is an important first step in developing new historiographies which contain important insights for those seeking to rethink human emancipation in South Africa today. Furthermore, emphasising the emancipatory politics of the Mpondo revolts poses a direct challenge to those scholars whose work on the revolts have relegated the event to the status of a typical instance of peasant militant resistance whose significance, while stressed in relation to other forms of rural resistance in mid-twentieth

⁷⁰⁴ Neocosmos, M. 'Statement of Purpose for UHURU', p. 3.

century South Africa, is overshadowed by the burgeoning liberation struggle politics in the urban cities and workplaces of South Africa.⁷⁰⁵ Thinking emancipatory politics in the context of the Mpondo revolts requires scholars to grasp that commoners who had been collectively assigned the category of 'primitive tribesmen' (sic) were able to think and act outside of this category in a way that defied some of its fundamental conceptual assumptions – such as inherent conservatism, backwardness, traditionalism, ethnic and regal loyalties. The challenge posed to historians is to consider the Mpondo revolts as an event in which self-conscious men and women organised themselves politically outside of the categories of nation, class and ethnicity. In so doing these men and women force us as scholars to think beyond these conceptual categories which continue to dominate African resistance historiography as well as a number of colonially constructed conceptual assumptions about rural Africans from which from which a disturbing number of scholars have been unable to think beyond.

⁷⁰⁵ See for example: Davenport, T. R. H. and Saunders, C. 2000. *South Africa: a Modern History*. Macmillan Press: Basingstoke, p. 402.

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Box 5: CMT 3/1478

Box 6: CMT 3/1480

Box 7: CMT 3/1481

Box 8: CMT 3/1482

Box 9: 1/BIZ 6/47

Box 10: 1/BIZ 6/48

Box 11: 1/BIZ 6/49

Box 12: 1/BIZ 6/49

Box 13: 1/BIZ 6/61

Box 14: 1/BIZ 6/62

Box 15: 1/BIZ 6/63

Box 16: 1/BIZ 6/64

Box 17: 1/BIZ 6/65

Box 18: 1/BIZ 6/68

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