



TRAC

Transvaal Rural Action Committee

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MOUTSE, covering some 66 000 fertile and well-tended hectares between Groblersdal and Marble Hall in the north eastern Transvaal, has largely escaped public notice during the last 70 years.

The area had been known simply for its peaceful and integrated farming communities, its predictable and traditional way of life.

All this has been crudely overturned in three short months.

The once conservative, rural community of 120 000 inhabitants is experiencing a complete dislocation of everything previously known and relied on. Long-established patterns of trust and harmony have been disrupted; so too the confidence of a landowning people.

An aggressive police presence has undermined not only the tenuous relationship between government and civic officials, but also that of the police and residents of the many villages and farms in the area.

Over forty lives have been lost, and over 400 people injured, in confrontations with police and vigilantes from neighbouring kwaNdebele.

A number of families have moved from the area to bleak, tented camps at Tweefontein, Saliesloot (Immerpan) and Kwaggasfontein. Fear, and extravagant promises from government officials appear to have motivated the removals.

INCORPORATION INTO KWANDEBELE

This destructive upheaval is the result of the December 31st, 1985 Proclamation R227 incorporating Moutse into kwaNdebele.

Despite five years of protest, the South African government has resolutely finalised its plan to incorporate the predominantly Sotho-speaking region of Moutse into kwaNdebele. KwaNdebele is set for 'independence' in early December 1986.

The plan is completely illogical in terms of government strategy, as kwaNdebele cannot be justified on the grounds of separate ethnic development.

The population of kwaNdebele numbers some 200 000, only 50% of which is Ndebele. The addition of a Sotho majority from Moutse will mean that the appropriate ethnic population in government terms in kwaNdebele forms an absurd minority third.

The bitter irony of the situation for the Moutse people is that Ndebeles under Chief Mapoch came into the area for the first time only in 1954 — requesting refuge and settlement under Chief Mathebe. This was granted. Now the hosts stand to lose vast tracts of privately-owned land, and their citizenship, to the very people they granted protection to thirty years before.

Moutse was excised from Lebowa in 1980, and placed under central government control. Dr Piet Koornhof, Minister of Co-operation and Development at the time, assured Dr Cedric Pathudi, Chief Minister of Lebowa, that the excision was not a prelude to incorporation into kwaNdebele.

In 1981, kwaNdebele was granted self-governing status, but needed fertile land and community facilities to render it viable for independence. In February 1983, the Van der Walt Commission on consolidation of the bantustans recommended that the districts of Moutse be included in some 230 000 ha of land to be incorporated into kwaNdebele.

Three hundred white farmers affected by the proposals vigorously opposed them. The government backed down for fear of losing votes from marginal rural constituencies. The Moutse people were equally strong in their protest, but voteless, and their opposition was overruled.

Protest meetings calling for a referendum to assess the opinion of Moutse people were held subsequent to the recommendations, and in April 1983, a delegation of 100 people, which included Lebowa MP's representing the Moutse districts 1, 2 and 3 and all Moutse's leaders, met with Dr Koornhof. He agreed to suspend the issue pending further discussions.

In May, Dr Phatudi and the local senior chief of the Bantoane, Gibson Mathebe, addressed a public protest meeting in Denilton, attended by thousands of people.

On 2 August, a meeting between Phatudi, P W Botha and Koornhof reached deadlock and a moratorium was declared until further talks could be held.

On 18 November, P W Botha told a 45-member delegation from Lebowa that the matter must be sorted out with kwaNdebele, and appointed a chairperson to direct discussions.

Moutse leaders' only recourse lay in Lebowa representing their interests. Between December 1983 and May 1984, a series of meetings took place between the Lebowa and kwaNdebele cabinets with Dr P S Rautenbach in the chair.

The content of these meetings remains hazy, and it appears that the Moutse community was kept more or less in the dark as to any progress made — or lack of it.

After almost two years of talks, on 12 October 1984, Lebowa consolidation proposals reconfirmed Moutse's incorporation into kwaNdebele.

On 14 August 1985, Lebowa representatives and Moutse leaders met P W Botha, but were again referred back to meetings with kwaNdebele.

On 25 September, final consolidation proposals for Lebowa were announced: Moutse was to be incorporated into kwaNdebele.

Some 6 000 people protested angrily at a general meeting held in Moutse soon after the announcement. Yet, in early November, when a Moutse delegation met the Deputy Ministers of Development Aid and Land Affairs, and Constitutional Affairs in Pretoria, their rejection went unheeded and instead their co-operation was requested in facilitating the transfer.

On 24 November a youth meeting to protest once again against incorporation was broken up by police. On 30 November, two general meetings were planned to report back to the community on the outcome of meetings with Chris Heunis, Minister of Constitutional Affairs. The morning meeting in Moutse 1 was banned, and the afternoon meeting in Moutse 3 was dispersed by police using teargas.

Meetings had previously never been banned in this conservative area, let alone disrupted, and it was with growing concern that Chief Mathebe wrote a letter to the Dennilton magistrate asking for permission to hold a report back meeting on 8 December.

Permission was granted, but with such stringent conditions that adherence would have rendered any meeting meaningless. Permission was then requested for a meeting to be held on 15 December at Toitskraal in Moutse 1. This was granted unconditionally, and 1 000 people again voiced their rejection of incorporation.

However, these continued efforts by Moutse's people to voice their protest were in vain — P W Botha put his signature to Proclamation R227 on 31 December, 1985, incorporating Moutse into kwaNdebele.

His claim of negotiating with 'responsible, moderate black leaders' was again exposed as an empty one, with tragic results.

Meetings organised by the various youth congresses within Moutse were systematically disrupted by police, and reports

began to emerge of several assaults on young leaders and members of the congresses.

Two young men were shot and killed on the 23rd December and 31st December in the villages of Uitvlugt and Keerom respectively; these deaths were reportedly unprovoked.

VIGILANTE ATTACKS

Towards the end of December, 1985, rumours of attacks on the Moutse people mushroomed; Chief Tlokwe Mathebe and Godfrey Mathebe (MP in the Lebowa parliament for Moutse) approached Dennilton police station for protection. After a lengthy discussion, during which Major Malan strongly expressed his reluctance to help, he finally told the two men he would do what he could.

In the early hours of 1 January 1986, three ominous attacks were launched on residents in Moutse 3 from neighbouring kwaNdebele. The first attack was directed at Chief Mathebe's kraal.

A KNA-registered (kwaNdebele) car drove up to the kraal and parked outside it. The five occupants were armed, and began threatening residents. They said that Moutse was now theirs and they had come to take over the chief's kraal.

Fierce fighting broke out and four of the intruders were killed. The fifth man was taken to hospital.

In the next two attacks, vigilantes armed with pangas and axes, and with white crosses painted on their foreheads, attacked the villages of Moteti and Kgobokoane, bordering kwaNdebele. More than 380 men of all ages were abducted, and trucked to the Siyabuswa community hall (in kwaNdebele) where for over 24 hours they were systematically assaulted and tortured.

The men were sjambokked naked. The floor of the hall was covered with soap powder and water, causing the men to slip and fall repeatedly. They experienced considerable pain as the soap penetrated the sjambok wounds.

The men were not fed, and were kept awake during the entire torture period. They were forced to chant Ndebele slogans continuously. Several men fainted from pain and exhaustion, but were kicked until they stood up and resumed chanting. One man is known to have died on arrival at Philadelphia Hospital during the following afternoon when the men were finally released. Many are maimed for life as a result of the assaults.

Chief Minister S Skosana of kwaNdebele, and his Minister of the Interior, Piet Ntuli, were positively identified by those assaulted as overseeing and participating in the torture in the hall. Mr Ntuli was charged with murder in 1984, but was acquitted in late 1985. His alleged victim was Andries Mahlangu, a spokesman against incorporation of nine Lebowa farms into kwaNdebele.

Charges of assault against the two ministers have since been laid by the victims of the abductions.

In both villages people reported property stolen and destroyed, and numbers of women and children fled into the bush for protection.



Resettled ex Moutse residents

During the course of the fighting on New Year's day, about 17 vigilantes are known to have been killed. One Moutse resident died in an attempt to repulse the vigilantes.

The vigilantes identified themselves as members of 'Mbokhoto', a kwaNdebele organisation later launched officially by Chief Minister Skosana on the weekend of 25-26 January 1986.

Mbokhoto has an executive council of 25 members appointed by Skosana. Their job, according to a news statement issued at the launch, is to recruit members and supervise action against 'troublemakers'.

Two days after the vigilante attacks, a brigadier from Pretoria arrived by helicopter at Chief Mathebe's kraal. He declined to identify himself, but assured Chief Mathebe that the vigilante attacks would stop — subject to an undertaking from the chief that Moutse people, and especially the youth of the area, would also halt hostilities.

There were no further attacks in the immediate period following the brigadier's surprise visit. Clearly, the police are effective in controlling vigilantes should they choose to do so.

THE POLICE MOVE IN

A common development currently in rural areas is the replacement of police violence by vigilante violence. In Moutse, this trend appears to have been reversed, with residents reporting sinister attacks by unidentified police as an increasing phenomenon.

On 1 January, meetings to discuss resistance to incorporation were held at the villages of Keerom, Klopper and Uitvlugt in Moutse 1.

Early in the afternoon, two policemen driving a van with KNA number plates arrived in Keerom and attempted to break up the meeting. They allegedly taunted residents repeatedly, and then, without warning, opened fire. Two residents were hit, and the others retaliated. The police fled Keerom, and drove towards nearby Klopper, where they were killed.

The two Keerom victims were taken to hospital; the man who had been shot in the head died soon afterwards.

The same day, a plain clothes CID officer was chased from the village after residents confiscated his gun.

Large contingents of police arrived to investigate on 2 January, and began house to house searches. The searches continued until 6 January. Residents were severely beaten, and in some instances allegedly tortured.

A young man, who could prove he was in Pretoria on 1 January, reported how he was taken to Siyabuswa prison by police despite his protestations that he had not been in the area.

He described a particularly vicious physical assault made on him there, and how subsequently his hands were bound with cord, a stick was looped between his knees, and he was hung by the stick upside down between two chairs. His feet were then beaten with batons, while he was repeatedly asked

questions about the deaths of the two policemen. For two days after the torture he was unable to walk. The following day he was again beaten, and then released. No charges had been laid against him.

During the searches, doors and windows were broken, possessions and money were stolen and residents alleged that several policemen carrying out the raids were clearly intoxicated. Many people, terrified, left the villages and took to the bush.

The villages were occupied by police and army, and bush area around the two was patrolled day and night by men in hippos and landrovers. Village cars were reportedly commandeered by police, and driven around the villages and the bush paths, in an attempt to lure the residents out of hiding.

Police besieged the fugitives until 5 January when the cordon tightened and relatives could no longer get food to them. Police with loudhailers coaxed the people out of the bush, promising that the trouble was now over. The men were marched to where a group of army and police were standing. With the police was a group of villagers, masked and wearing blankets to hide their identities, who were made to identify the men who had been present at the meetings on 1 January.

Some 89 men were arrested.

During this period, dozens of Moutse residents were detained. On 10 January, Godfrey Mathebe, MP, the spokesperson and co-ordinator from the Chief's kraal, was held under Section 50 of the Internal Security Act. He was released 14 days later without charges.

Since that first week in January, the almost daily presence of police in Moutse 1 and 3 has given rise to reports describing an alarming extent of unprovoked harassment.

It appears that SAP from Dennenilton, Tuinplaas, Nylstroom and a large camp 3 km from Kgobokoane are involved. The kwaNdebele policemen are based at Siyabuswa.

Nylstroom is some 80 km from Moutse, yet police from that station were identified by one resident as allegedly ransacking his home, and setting fire to another in the small northern village of Uitvlugt after 10 pm.

Residents from Moutse 1 and 3 report frequent assaults, random shootings and killings, ransacking of homes and teargassings.

Four men from Kwarrielaagte have been shot in the back, or back of the neck in reportedly unprovoked incidents. In these cases, police used a local farmers' truck and a KNA taxi for the alleged attacks. Numbers of residents have reported severe assaults; a busload of people were attacked outside Malebitsa after a meeting and eleven men and women were subsequently admitted to hospital.

Most recently, people have been allegedly shot at, and in one instance killed, by police travelling either in vehicles owned by local white farmers, or a combi taxi bearing KNA registration.

Bizarre attacks on residents have continued, despite representations from concerned organisations and lawyers.

Residents' appeals for restraint and investigation have seemingly fallen on deaf ears.

By the end of February, three more residents had been fatally shot. Simon Mogadima, 76, a tribal elder from Toitskraal; Jacob Malaka, 28, of Toitskraal; and Johannes Mariba, 17, a Kgobokoane pupil.

The schoolboy, Johannes Mariba, was shot by police during an informal meeting concerning removals. No warning to disperse was given.

Simon Mogadima was shot at from a hippo while quietly seated beneath the elders' meeting tree in Toitskraal. According to a witness, no warning was given prior to the shooting.

Concerning Jacob Malaka's death, police from Dennenilton were seen driving to the river below the village of Toitskraal in a hippo. From there they commandeered a local farmer's truck, drove into the village, and according to a statement made by Tribal Secretary Thomas Matlala, they randomly opened fire from the truck as they careened down the main street.

Two young men who stepped out onto the street from a restaurant were the victims of this particular sortie.

Jacob was killed instantly; his friend Jacob Maronga, 28, was critically injured in the shooting. Mr Malaka reports that both bodies were thrown into the truck, which was then driven back to the river's edge, where it was abandoned. The bodies were transferred to the hippo, which was driven back to Dennenilton.

The following day Mr Matlala made two abortive telephonic attempts to make a statement with the Dennenilton police concerning the shootings.

At 4 pm he drove to the police station. He described what he was told by the station commander: 'I cannot investigate the case, as I don't understand what is going on. The matter is now beyond me'.

The commander referred Mr Matlala to 'higher sources'.

REMOVALS

Against this debilitating background of imposed violence, some residents have signed valuation papers requesting removal from Moutse.

On 8 January, subsequent to the violence of the New Year, Ndebeles living in Kwarrielaagte began moving from the area to Tweefontein in kwaNdebele.

For the first time in Moutse's history, ethnic tensions had emerged, with very distressing results. Transport was coordinated from Dennenilton police station and South African government removal squad trucks were involved. Reporters visiting Tweefontein two days subsequent to the removal described a pitiful scene; a bleak, infertile, waterless zone scattered with tents housing hungry, bewildered and depressed people.

On 6 February, several Sotho families living in Kwarrielaagte were reportedly moved at gunpoint at 5 am. Hippos

transported the families involved to Kwaggafontein in kwaNdebele.

On 7 February, 22 families from Uitvlugt — an area adjacent to white farms — were moved by SA government removal trucks to Saliesloot under a heavily armed police presence. None of these households had visited the bleak, lime area, where tin toilets and tents awaited them. The conditions surrounding this 'voluntary' removal were more than questionable.

From villagers' reports it appeared that three unpopular residents had requested removal. They were apparently told that a minimum of 20 names was required before the removals could be approved. Owners of homes in Uitvlugt are mainly migrant workers, and it was reported that ailing old women and men were approached by the three men in the early hours of the previous morning to sign over the homes they were looking after.

The papers to be signed, shown to TRAC fieldworkers in the next few days, were simply valuation estimate papers.

The old people were told in several instances that 'everyone else has signed and all the houses will be bulldozed'. They were apparently warned that unless they signed, they would be left behind with nowhere to live. They were also offered amounts upwards of R20 000 for their landlords' homes. No papers were proffered detailing these extravagant offers.

Hippos drove up and down the streets of Uitvlugt as 22 households were packed up from 8.30 am the following day. Soldiers prohibited any discussion between residents and houses were immediately demolished once all possessions had been loaded onto removal trucks.

Theoretically, the residents were to be moved subject to their request. Yet valuation papers were distributed to over 300 households for signing.

A further 140 households moved from Uitvlugt over the next few days. Urgent meetings were held in the surrounding villages to discuss the removals, and over seventy families cancelled their decision to move.

That weekend, migrant workers returning to their homes in the village found piles of rubble on sites that had been privately owned by their families for almost fifty years.

Saliesloot is serviced daily by trucks from Marble Hall delivering mealie meal and water. How long these handouts will continue is debatable; the soil is infertile, and there are no accessible water areas of any description. The area is 60 km from any likely employment. There is no public transport to or from Marble Hall.

The area is excessively bleak at a time when rains have been good. Given a year or two of drought and existence there becomes unthinkable. Predictable consequences include malnutrition and high infant mortality — for starters.



Even old people have been attacked by vigilantes

WHAT INCORPORATION MEANS FOR MOUTSE RESIDENTS

- **Loss of South African citizenship.**
- **Questionable tenure** on 66 000 hectares of fertile land that has been privately owned or designated as trust land since 1921. The danger exists that Skosana, in an 'independent' kwaNdebele, will nationalise private properties without any form of compensation.
- **Alien and violent tribal rule** by Skosana and his vigilantes. Moutse people fear subjection to excesses of tribal control, transfer of sacred grounds and discrimination against non-Ndebeles.
- **Enforced Ndebele education** — to date hundreds of teachers have refused to sign transfer papers on the grounds that they would rather forego their salaries and their jobs than accept incorporation and an Ndebele system of education. An ultimatum from the Department of Education and Training was delivered in December last year, in which it was said that teachers must sign up under the homeland government or quit teaching in the area. Should they choose to stay with the DET, they would be obliged to take a transfer to another area. While teachers' names on slips of paper could be taken as an indication that they 'voluntarily' agreed to serve kwaNdebele, they were not offered any written guarantees of job security in return.

Ndebele education would mean that a two thirds majority population of Sothos would be obliged to accept Ndebele as the tuition medium.

- * **Unemployment** — migrant workers stand to lose their jobs if they refuse issue of Ndebele contract stamps. Local workers may have to give up the luxury of resident job status and accept migrant work; in one instance administrative workers in Dennilton were told that if they chose not to work for kwaNdebele they would have to accept transfers to Soshanguve, some 150 km away, or leave. Workers who accepted the transfers would have to face expensive and exhausting commuting conditions or scant contact with their families.
- * **Debatable access to business licences** — there is ample evidence that these are distributed solely to Skosana's chosen few. Renewal of licences could be subjected to similar constraints.
- * **Questionable medical care** at Philadelphia Hospital under a superintendent, recently appointed Secretary for Health in kwaNdebele, who has lost no time in questioning his entire staff in writing as to their allegiance to the kwaNdebele 'government'. This is a point of great concern in the current resistance to incorporation where casualties of assaults are an almost daily occurrence.
- * **Loss of coal mining rights** at Kwarrielaagte, which includes a negotiated prospecting contract with JCI.

IN CONCLUSION

While P W Botha speaks of a common citizenship for all, the government is proceeding to strip 120 000 South Africans of their citizenship. Those who decide to leave Moutse in order to retain their South African citizenship and to avoid falling under an 'independent' kwaNdebele, will lose their land and all they have built up in Moutse for over a hundred years.

Heunis is obviously aware that the Moutse population rejects the incorporation. Thus his statement that those who do not want to be incorporated can 'voluntarily' move to Saliesloot (Immerpan).

It is instructive to note that long before the kwaNdebele deal was initiated, the government had earmarked bleak Saliesloot as the resettlement area for fertile Moutse. Moutse was to have been moved as a 'black spot'. Now by making Saliesloot the alternative to incorporation, the government is saying that the removal, which has been on the cards for ten years, is 'voluntary'.

In view of the community's desperate and eloquent submissions to the government against the incorporation, the South African government must take full responsibility for the violence and terrible human suffering which will continue if it does not reconsider its decision.

The tragedy is that regardless of who is to blame, it will be the ordinary people of Moutse who will be left stranded; either in a destitute tented landscape incapable of yielding food, or in a hostile territory subject to the whims of violent vigilante rule.

STOP PRESS

Professor John Dugard, of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, was approached by Chief Tlokwe Mathebe, Godfrey Mathebe, MP, and Maredi Chueu, MP, to legally question the incorporation on the basis of its ethnic incompatibility with the Homelands Act.

Pending the discussion of Moutse in the tricameral parliament following the proclamation, the case brought on behalf of the Moutse residents was due to be filed in March, 1986.

However, on 16th March, Dr Cedric Phatudi, Chief Minister of Lebowa, began proceedings questioning the legitimacy of the excision of Moutse in 1980, and hence the incorporation on 1st January, 1986.

These proceedings are sub judice, and were so timed as to preclude further progress of the Moutse legal initiative. Should Phatudi lose his case, he is bound to appeal, and that means at least a year set aside before the local case can continue.

Moutse residents were becoming increasingly dependent on a positive outcome of their case, and Phatudi's intrusion is seen as a demoralising blow. There is no wish whatsoever for reincorporation into Lebowa. Residents are now well aware that Phatudi engineered a 'deal' over Moutse: the Zebediela orange estates, a portion of the Mokoreng district and the railway line between Zebediela and Lebowaqomo were exchanged for the Moutse farms without any prior consultation with the people affected.

Meanwhile, there has been no let up as far as external pressure on the community is concerned. Mass arrests, intimidation, and assaults have become daily occurrences.

In Uitvlugt, on April 8th, removal trucks moved in again. Ten families were moved, once more under highly repressive circumstances. Five youths were severely sjambokked, and people were again prevented from communicating with each other. A heavily armed police presence presided over the day's events.

Legal hopes have faded for the time being, but ongoing violence and disruption have failed to disturb the courageous resolve not to accept incorporation into kwaNdebele, or any homeland rule.

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