

**FROM WAR REFUGEES TO SOCIAL PROTESTERS:
TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN LOWVELD 1850-2013¹**

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(Work in progress – not ready for quotation)

Introduction

Between the arrival of several waves of small groups of refugees, fleeing the destruction on the plains of Nchangani in Mozambique from the 1840s onwards, and the protest actions of their descendants in 2013 lies a fascinating history of transformation and continuity. It is of some importance how this history is read from the 'facts' and what is included or excluded in telling this story as an idealized glorification of an autochthonous ethnic identity, or a critical story of suffering and ethnicization in colonial and apartheid times. Taking history to mean both a structural and an agency-based dialectical process, with personal and collective, local and global dimensions, this paper attempts to present an ethnographic history of a part of the Lowveld. With a point of departure in one site and taking the experience and agency of individuals seriously, it aims to:

- Introduce approaches to the history of this part of the Lowveld;
- Present an outline of events within a larger set of contexts; and
- Identify foci of social transformation on micro and macro levels of analysis²

South Africa's rural areas experienced important changes since the start of colonial rule. 'Native reserves' were transformed into 'homelands' in a system of dispossession that was only undone in 1994. However, the long shadow of the past is evident in current 'cooperative governance' by traditional leaders and municipalities. Unpacking the disputed transformations of the last few decades in one rural settlement in the Lowveld of Limpopo Province (based on ethnographic fieldwork in 1986-2013³), brings out the complexity of local experience.⁴

My local point of departure is my research site for 27 years in the northeastern part of South Africa: the Berlyn settlement, situated 12 km south from the town of Letsitele (and east of Tzaneen) in the former Gazankulu Bantustan, a tribal ward in the Nkuna traditional community, and now part of the Tzaneen Municipality in the Mopani District of the Limpopo Province. It was selected for research as an example of a rural settlement on the border of a white commercial farming area and in proximity to an industrial growth point in the Bantustan. The idea was to link my research with the work of my colleagues, Boet Kotzé and At Fischer, on the impact of separate development on rural populations. At the time, in 1986, we were oriented towards exposé anthropology and were just emerging from our break with *volkekunde*, the Afrikaner form of cultural anthropology that had been instrumental in the formulation and implementation of apartheid. It was important for us to get going with participant observation and to use our newly acquired neo-Marxist orientation, leaving behind our reliance on

¹ This paper is work in progress towards an historical chapter for a monograph on transformation in the South African Lowveld. It is my expectation that I will adapt this chapter comprehensively in the light of the other chapters, once they have been written. The other chapters will deal with transformation with regard to livelihoods, gender, generation and administration.

² I started ethnographic fieldwork in Berlyn, a rural Lowveld settlement, in April-September 1986 and returned often throughout the 1980s and 1990s, less so in the last 12 years, due to my relocation from Johannesburg to Stellenbosch. My last fieldwork in the settlement was a four month period in 2013 (July to November). In total, my experience of life in the settlement was about 20 months.

³ My research would not have been possible without the generous research grants over a long period from the Human Sciences Research Council, the Faculty of Arts and Philosophy of Rand Afrikaans University, the National Research Foundation, and the Research Division of Stellenbosch University. I am deeply aware of the privilege and responsibility of spending public funds on this research. All information and interpretation in this ethnographic work is my own responsibility.

⁴ While I have been the principal researcher over the period of 27 years in this long-term research project, I was assisted by very able research collaborators in the field and in Johannesburg. I am deeply indebted to them for their dedication and cooperation. In Berlyn settlement I was mainly assisted by Beauty Zwane, Philip Zitha, Maggy Mavuso, Nicholas Mushwana and Caroline Nkhwashi with their local enquiries and narratives. In Johannesburg Yvonne Bodmer and Paul Erskine provided important administrative assistance.

formal interviews and essentialist understandings. My fieldwork methods have been oriented towards participant observation with a strong emphasis on living in the settlement and the use of the



Map of South Africa with Mopani District Highlighted in the Limpopo Province



Detail of a map of the Swiss Mission station Shiluvane and its environment in 1897 (La Mission Romande)

vernacular. Although much of the local historical record is only accessible in oral form, some records are extremely valuable, such as family photographs and minute books kept by the civic organisation and the headman. Core themes that will be discussed in this paper in terms of transformation and continuity are those of land, labour, gender, generation and governance in a history of loss, exclusion, survival and adaptation. The people who have been moving about on the land without ever owning it have a use as labour and voters. It makes political sense for leaders in the new South Africa to retain the idea of a tribe, although today the official terminology has changed to that of a 'traditional community', living on 'communal land'. References to 'reserves', 'locations' and 'homelands' have been deleted by the transition to democracy.

'Transformation' refers to something more substantial than change or 'development': a process of change in which structural relationships change significantly. In South Africa the notion is increasingly associated with the advancement of formerly oppressed people after the political transition of 1994. But transformation is particularly evident when looked at historically over the *longue duree*. Transformation co-exists with gradual change and continuities, e.g. of institutions (Mahoney and Thelen 2009). This brings us to a discussion of different approaches to historical change in the Lowveld, specifically in the area around Shiluvane and Tzaneen.

Reconstructions of life in the Lowveld: sources and approaches

I make a distinction between three approaches to the history of the Lowveld and name them *conservative elite*, *critical elite* and *critical inclusive*. The literature reveals an important difference between conservative and critical approaches towards the construction of tribal and ethnic identities in colonial and apartheid times. Most of the historical publications focus either on the good chief (Muhlava I), the good work of the church (Swiss Mission in South Africa) or homeland and tribal history from a celebratory point of view. The Lowveld conservative elite historiography is mostly characterised by its focus on events and relationships that are concerned with 'tribe', 'ethnic group', 'homeland', officials, missionaries, farmers, etc. over a period of more than a century. What is problematic in this history is its lack of contextualisation, no critical investigation of power relations and the exclusion of non-elite people, in fact these histories are a-historical.

The emergence of tribal history in the case of the Nkuna tribe was strongly linked to missionary activity, as Patrick Harries (2007) has indicated with his work on the missionary ethnographer Henri Alexandre Junod. The Swiss missionaries arrived in 1875 in the Groot Spelonken area of the

Zoutpansberg district from where their work expanded. They promoted the establishment of national churches and worked hard to record and standardize the related dialects in their area of mission work. The missionaries saw the mission field as linguistically defined. Also, the mission situation was seen by them as similar to the situation in Switzerland where there were strong ties between nation and church (Harries 2007:91) and it was therefore quite normal for them to hoist the Swiss flag at the mission station (Maluleke 1993:239; Van Butselaar 1971:16). The mission area was demarcated in 1879 in cooperation with the German missionaries of the *Berliner Missionsgesellschaft* who were already working in the Venda-speaking and Sotho-speaking areas in the South African Republic. The Swiss mission would work south and eastwards from the Groot Spelonken area in the Lowveld and into Portuguese territory. They laid claim to this 'entire linguistic diaspora' and named the people Gwamba and later Thonga (Harries 2007:158, 161). Not only did the Swiss missionaries homogenize the various related dialects into the standard xiTsonga language, they also accepted the tribal structures in South Africa as natural and given, working closely with local leaders. This cooperation became especially evident in the work of the Swiss Mission church in Shiluvane, founded by Eugene Thomas in 1886, and situated close to my research site.

Henri Alexandre Junod worked at Shiluvane from 1899 to 1910 (Harries 1981:44; 2007:132, 133). Looming large over later anthropological work in the region is his influential publication, the first classic ethnography in southern Africa, *The Life of a South African Tribe, vol. I and II*, (1913, reworked for a second edition: Junod 1927a and 1927b), based on his work in Mozambique among the Ronga (published in French, Junod 1898) and among the Nkuna at Shiluvane. Although written by a missionary, this ethnography was written with the anthropology of the time in mind and drawing from leading social scientists Durkheim and Van Gennep. This work of Junod has received praise for its ethnographic detail and for presenting the perceptions of black people and accepting their humanity (Harries 1981:49; 2007:2, 3,212). The work expresses the positivist social science framework of the time:

The life of a South African tribe is a collection of biological phenomena which must be described objectively and which are of great interest, representing, as they do, a certain stage of human development (Junod 1927a:7).

It was a form of salvage anthropology, written from an evolutionary theoretical perspective. Black people were seen as in need of assistance due to their vulnerability as primitive ('savage') people in a world full of dangers associated with urbanization and industrialization (Harries 2007:148, 224). When Junod stated that the '... great bulk of the tribe is still absolutely savage ...' (1927a:2), he was using an historical perspective current at the time, a view that justified the intervention and protection by missionaries. His evolutionary perspective was also basic to his analysis and presentation of the material in terms of the life-cycle and organic analogy of the body (Harries 2007:219). In this theoretical perspective the search was on for hypothetical original conditions, something Junod applied to the social system of the Thonga by proposing that they must have had a matriarchal stage in the development of their presently patriarchal kinship system, which he inferred from the special relation between Ego and the mother's brother (1927a:267 etc). The well-known critique of Radcliffe-Brown (1952), that this relationship could be better explained by using a synchronic functional point of departure, marks the difference between the older evolutionist anthropology of the 19th and early 20th century and the structural-functionalism that would dominate anthropology for so long since the 1920s.

While Junod's work was sympathetic to Africans, his evolutionary perspective, typical of the colonial time, was also filled with scientific racism. When Calvin Maphophe, a pastor, visited Junod in Switzerland, he was taken to an anthropologist who did physical measurements to verify that he was an African, for which he was probably also required to strip naked. Moreover, in 1907 Junod proposed such measurements to be routinely taken at the mines for their 'scientific' importance (Maluleke 1995a:210).

Junod saw history as tribal history linked to language which he referred to as the 'mirror of the soul of a people': '... the Thonga language ought to be considered as the oldest element in the life of the tribe and we can then understand how it has given it its unity' (Junod 1927a:32). Each tribe was seen as an organic unit, a social group with its own mind. Collecting facts of the tribal life and proving their unique existence with supposedly authentic artifacts and photographs, deriving from a pure culture, was part of Junod's methodological approach (Harries 2007:217). In the reconstruction of Thonga history, Junod (and his son H. P. Junod after him) showed a bias towards a great Thonga past when they referred to Portuguese documents of the 15th century onwards that 'proved' that there were elaborate homogeneous chiefdoms among the Thonga, even before those of the Zulu (Maluleke 1993:241). With regard to the history of the Nkuna, Junod does provide useful historical detail. However, in his monograph Junod generalized from the Nkuna to other Thonga clans even though the Nkuna had never been part of the Gaza empire (Harries 1981:44).

As Junod saw Africa as stagnant, he did not focus on colonialism, interventions by the missionaries, the trade in guns or migrant labour that became prominent realities even before his time in the Lowveld (Harries 1981:40; 2007:225). This romantic approach to historical conditions and his focus on tribal life had the implication that Junod was not an activist with regard to the injustices suffered by the people he was serving as a missionary. He was not strongly against the oppressive forced labour system that was imposed by the Portuguese administration and was in favour of pass laws and strong chiefs in South Africa (Harries 2007:222, 236). He involved himself with the acquisition of land for chief Muhlava as he believed in the need for tribal reserves where the missionaries had a strong paternalistic role to play as instruments of civilization. With regard to segregation and apartheid, Junod seems to have thought that these could work well if they were rid of their discriminatory features (Harries 2007:254, 263). Harries could therefore state that '... many of Junod's ideas served to build the intellectual foundations of segregation' (2007:6). He also indicates that the Swiss church, including through the ethnographic, linguistic and historical work of Junod, created an imagined community 'that would one day mobilize itself as a political entity' (2007:159).

Later anthropologists used a similar framework of history as an uncritical account of dynastic histories, ignoring the political economic realities of the time and providing accounts of tribal origin, ethnic characteristics and possible impurities. This is evident in the work of Van Warmelo and Krige on Lowveld tribal histories that they recorded. Van Warmelo (1935) was the Government Ethnologist whose standard 'preliminary' classification of South African Bantu tribes was basic to further interventions in the reserves. He classified tribes, including a number of 'Tonga tribes', in terms of their linguistic relationships, historical origin and cultural characteristics. He also investigated and recorded the numerical strength and distribution of the black population, matters that were extremely useful for the government of the day in their concern with succession disputes and tax liability. This work of Van Warmelo was a continuation of the work of the Transvaal Native Affairs Department (1905; Massie 1905). These government publications provided the main historical facts, but there was also a clear element of strategic calculation in their concern with traditional leadership and ethnic difference:

In any future troubles that may arise, we may still under ordinary circumstances count on the assistance of Swazis or Shangaans against Basuto-Bechuana or Bavenda tribes or vice versa, and even some Basuto tribes against others belonging to the same nation (Massie 1905:117).

There is still an ethnological section in the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs in Pretoria that keeps tabs on origins and historical events in tribes, as well as claims to seniority and disputes about chieftaincies and succession matters.

More broadly, in early South African anthropology, questions of history in the Lowveld were mostly seen as concerning tribal history, ruling dynasties and cultural complexes. Krige (1937, 1938) collected historical material in the Lowveld by putting questions to chiefs and old men. His discussion of the 'Tonga invasion' (1937:355) is clearly biased to the perspective of Sotho-speakers among whom he worked. In the same vein, the celebratory biography of Chief Muhlava I of the Nkuna tribe by

Shilubana and Ntsanwisi (1958)⁵ is pure tribal history and uncritical of separate development or the apartheid state's handling of black people.

This ahistorical history, accepting things social as naturally given phenomena and not as the result of power relations, shaped by conflict and dialectical relationships within a political economic context, can also be found in the work of *volkekundiges* on the Lowveld. *Volkekunde* was an anachronistic Afrikaans variety of anthropology, tied to the political project of separate development and associated with the static and essentialist approach to culture known as 'ethnos theory' (Hammond-Tooke 1997; Sharp 1981).⁶ The work of Hartman (1979) in the Bushbuckridge area is an example of an emphasis on people and culture in terms of a careful classification of a mixed population into ethnic groups and a focus on ethnic traditional law of 'the Tsonga'. In associated work in this tradition, Boonzaaier (1985) also focuses on the recording of ethnic indigenous law as if this can be copied from the knowledge of presently living informants that supposedly know their culture in its 'pure' form. He concludes that a correct version of the Tsonga life pattern can be constructed if the informants are chosen from the core group of the Nkuna (1985:60, 68). Similarly, Kriel and Hartman (1991a and 1991b) discuss 'the Tsonga of Gazankulu' as an ethnic group (1991a:5) with a tribal and homeland history that is ethnically defined and a future that is tied to a homeland, pictured in glowing positive terms. To prove the continuation and relevance of tradition (ethnic history and purity) they use the ethnographic present for their descriptions and make strongly biased claims, e.g. that 65% of the population in Gazankulu lives in 'typical Tsonga huts', that 71% of the population is directly involved with agriculture and that every woman has a granary (1991a:23, 24, 73). Their emphasis on cultural continuity with the tribal past is due to their uncritical support of separate development, without attention to its effects and the resistance to it that was raging in the Bantustan.

Very recently, a similar ahistorical elite focus on tribal history emerged in electronic documents (Maluleke 2002, Maluleke et al 2007) as interventions in a debate about the possibility of having a paramount chief for all the Tsonga tribes. The claim of a Changana identity that was pushed by Chief Nxumalo in the Bushbuckridge area was challenged by a claim that the N'wanati tribal group under Chief Mhinga should rather be considered as the senior Tsonga group if government was to create such a paramountcy. The claim to the existence of a 'single cultural and linguistic' Tsonga ethnic group over many centuries is made with reference to 16th century Portuguese records referred to by Junod and the fact that proverbs across the Tsonga dialects are regarded as very similar. One of the documents (Makuleke et al 2007) recommends 'that the Tsonga community should be recognized as one ethnic group without a single king.'

In contrast to the essentializing, uncritical, uncontextual approach that takes the interests of the ruling elite, the mission and the government as a point of departure, critical elite contributions to the history of the northern Lowveld make use of the insights developed in political economy. Patrick Harries has made a detailed study of the work of Junod in Mozambique and at Shiluvane, contextualizing his writings in terms of the mission history in Switzerland, the social history of science and the political economic context of the time (Harries 2007). Harries shows that the emphasis on tribal and clan unity as well as linguistic and cultural homogeneity was part of a larger project of classification that was evident in Junod's natural history contributions. In addition, the work of Harries (1994) on migrancy from Mozambique into South Africa provides insight in the entanglements of streams of black labour that go back to the early nineteenth century and that have shaped life at their points of origin in important ways. Harries shows that the ethnicity of 'the Tsonga' was created by the Swiss missionaries and a petty bourgeoisie that pushed for a separate ethnic identity in the homeland system in order to compete for land and development resources. In the 1950s and onwards this

⁵ I obtained a copy of an unpublished Afrikaans translation of this text at the Ethnological Section of the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs in Pretoria. It was published in Tsonga by the Nkuna tribe.

⁶ I was trained as a *volkekundige* in Pretoria, where its academic centre was located in the 1960s-1980s, but managed to break away in a critically important phase of my own intellectual development during my doctoral studies. I may be somewhat biased towards the work of my former professors and colleagues due to my exit from their social network, but I also do have useful knowledge due to my experience in their formal academic milieu and their informal social sphere.

ethnicity depended on the class interests of chiefs, teachers and a bureaucracy that were supported and exploited by the nationalist government in Pretoria (Harries 1987:4,5; 1989:82).

Another set of historical writings that provides a critical engagement with the past, especially as far as the mission is concerned, is provided by Tinyiko Maluleke in debate with Swiss church leaders about the question whether the Swiss mission was consciously promoting a national Tsonga church, with their approach which he typifies as *Volkschristianisierung* and their consequent becoming compromised in the colonial and apartheid projects. Maluleke (1993) indicates that Hudson Ntsanwisi as church leader, academic and politician was only mildly critical of the apartheid system and the suffering brought about by the relocations during the creation of the Gazankulu Bantustan. He claims that there was an 'entanglement between church theology and homeland ideology' (1993:251). In reaction, Swiss church representatives (Blaser, Klauspeter et al 1994) gave an alternative reading of the mission history, claiming that Maluleke overemphasized the negative aspects of ethnicity and that in fact the church had occupied itself with a positive process of 'inculturation' (1994:194), offering a home to scattered clans of refugee groups and giving them cultural asylum. Maluleke stressed the fact that *Volkschristianisierung* was a dominant approach in the 19th century, at least in Germany and Switzerland, and that their work on a supposedly homogeneous Tsonga language and culture was a useful element in the hands of the nationalist government in apartheid times (1995a:13, 236, 237). The critique by Maluleke was repudiated by Van Butselaar (1996) who defensively interpreted the work of the missionaries as being a positive support for Tsonga language and culture, perceived by the missionaries as ordained by God. The critical analysis of Maluleke and Harries was followed by the work of Jeannerat et al (2011) who looked in detail at the entanglement of the church with nationalist homeland politics.

The third approach to the history of the Lowveld, the critical inclusive one, is what I start to attempt in this paper: building on the critical tradition, using political economy and contextualization of the historical narratives, published histories and archival materials, but at the same time giving more voice to local narratives and local experiences. I find inspiration in the work of Niehaus, Mohlala and Shokane (2001:7) that uses an eclectic theoretical framework, from a departure point in the processual approach of Victor Turner and Max Gluckman

that treat[s] social and cultural transformations as the central focus of concern ... [and is] particularly interested in capturing the connections between local patterns of change and wider transformations, and exploring the relations of the unit of ... fieldwork with the larger contexts within which it is embedded.

I made use of four different types of material to make a reconstruction of Lowveld history: published and unpublished literature, archival materials⁷, oral accounts obtained in interviews and my own experience during participant observation in the period 1986-2013. My collection of oral histories and local level experience is mostly concerned with life experiences of the non-elite and their historical constructions that are very specific in terms of locality. In important ways these accounts could be considered to be more representative of the life experience of the majority of rural inhabitants in the former Bantustans than what is found in the literature where the focus is on the larger structures and the role of elite players. In parallel to the work of Tinyiko Maluleke, I do find some evidence of a local, vernacular perspective in documents that were created for official purposes, e.g. in the evidence before the Beaumont (1916a and 1916b) and Stubbs (1918) Land Commissions. In the next sections an historical overview of the history of population of the settlement and their ancestors will be provided, before I turn to a short analysis of thematical foci in the last part of the paper.⁸

It is possible to approach the periodization of the history of the period covered here in terms of the changes that occurred on the national level and that had important effects on the local level, e.g. the

⁷ I worked in the National Archive in Pretoria, the Unisa collection of Junod's materials, the collection of materials of the Swiss Mission in South Africa at the Cullem Library of the Witwatersrand University and obtained records from the Deeds Office in Pretoria.

⁸ The sometimes conflicting historical accounts in the literature are here fashioned into one possible story without any pretension of historical exactness.

Anglo Boer War, the 1948 change of government, and so on. I decided to use a mix of events to create the sections below and prioritized important changes on the local level where it seemed useful to do so. In this way four periods were identified.

From refugees to loyal subjects in search of tribal land: 1840s to 1901

Archaeologists who surveyed the farm Berlyn 670 LT (Van Schalkwyk and Moifatswane 1999) have found evidence of Early and Middle Stone Age tools. There are also Early Iron Age (200-1000 AD) and Late Iron Age (1000-1850 AD) remains on this farm, including remains of iron smelting. Iron smelting slag and pieces of tuyeres can be seen on the surface in the Berlyn settlement and in its environment, but this is unknown to the present population. Generally, people know names and graves in the male lineage up to four generations back. For everything more than 70 years ago we do depend heavily on written records. These deal mostly with large political events and the elite side of his story (history).

The Nkuna (the name of the chiefdom under Muhlava I and his ancestors) are thought to have left Nghome in Zululand around 1750, lived near Lydenburg for a while and then moved to Bileni to live among Tsonga-speakers in what is now Mozambique (Boonzaaier 1985:62; Junod 1927a:24; Massie 1905:66; Shilubane and Ntsanwisi 1958:16). The Tsonga-speakers were overwhelmed by Manukosi (also known as Sochangane) around 1820-1840 when he moved with his soldiers from Zululand into the Lower Limpopo area and formed an independent warrior kingdom, separately from Shaka, his former king (Junod 1927a:28; Wilson 1969:176). The unrest associated with the wars of incorporation over a wide area led to several waves of refugees moving westward across the Lebombo mountains into the South African Lowveld. Shilubane and his people also left after they had been ordered to move northwards, closer to the centre of the Gaza kingdom (Massie 1905:66) and were attacked by Sochangane's warriors in 1836 at Bilene and again in 1842 in their new home in the Lowveld (Shilubane and Ntsanwisi 1958:24, 27). Groups of refugees left to flee westwards in the 1840s, early 1860s and again in the 1870s, especially during the wars of succession after the death of Sochangane in 1856 (Junod 1927a:28, 29). The devastation of recurrent warfare was compounded by drought, famine and smallpox, sending small groups of people looking for new life opportunities in the interior (Harries 1989:83). Such small groups settled where they could find a safe space and were willing to accept the rule of Sotho and Venda chiefs, such as Modjadji, Maake and others. By 1850 there were four clusters of refugee groups in the South African Lowveld, namely a group under Albasini in the north, the Maluleke people in the northeast, a group in the area around Haenertsburg, including the Nkuna, and a cluster south of the Olifants river. In 1897 a final wave of refugees arrived after the Gaza Nguni (descendants of the group under Sochangane) were defeated by the Portuguese in the war of 1894-1895 (Harries 1989:84; Harries 1994:146, 147). It seems that the harsh natural environment, hunger and high political instability in the coastal Lowveld favoured the formation of centralized chiefdoms as well as the strategy of migrating towards a better set of conditions in times of crisis (Harries 1994:7, 8, 16, 17). Monica Wilson mentions that the westward move of the Tsonga-speakers was also facilitated by the contraction of the tsetse belts in the Lowveld and that the movement of refugees was preceded by centuries of trade by people from the interior with coastal traders, including Arabs and Portuguese. Slaves from the interior were traded in Lourenco Marques (1969:177).

More movement, this time of individuals clubbing together in small male groups, was involved in the patterns of labour migration out of Mozambique from the 1850s in streams of workers walking to farms in Natal, and from the 1870s to Kimberley, despite the high levels of danger due to attacks and extreme weather conditions (Harries 1994:8, 30; Wentzel and Tlabela 2006:72). This movement increased as mining and industry expanded on the Witwatersrand in the 1880s. Workers for the mines were also forcefully recruited by the native commissioner and other state officials of the South African Republic in the Lowveld of the Zoutpansberg district. The officials received a capitation fee of two Pounds per 'volunteer' that they were able to recruit (Harries 1994:130, 261). From the start of migrant labour this had a strong gender dimension: it was mostly men who migrated and their income gave them a socio-economic benefit through which they could become more independent from their seniors.

They were able to earn their own bridewealth and to have access to the labour of women and children as well (Harries 1994:98, 198). Harries points to the important shift that this involved: the workload of women in the homesteads in the Lowveld increased, '... causing an often severe sexual repression' (1994:159). This can be related to the start of the spirit possession cult in the Delagoa Bay area in the 1860s which also spread into the Lowveld and which may be understood as an expression of protest in a socially acceptable medium against women's lower status (Harries 1994:164, 165).

Another movement was involved in the search for a secure place to live in, to get access to land and overcome low social status (Van Warmelo 1974:71) among groups that had a long history in the mountains bordering the Lowveld. When the Nkuna arrived in the Lowveld around 1840, they lived with the Sotho chief Maake for a few years on the farm Sedan 672LT, near the later town of Leydsdorp, then moved south and in about 1858 further north to the headwaters of the Selati under Modjadji until 1873 (Boonzaaier 1985:65; Krige 1937:347; Massie 1905:66; Shilubane and Ntsanwisi 1958:25; Transvaal Native Affairs Department 1905:60). The general pattern in the Lowveld was that Tsonga-speaking refugees accepted the rule of a Sotho chief and were given permission to live in the low-lying areas. The Nkuna were regarded as beggars by the Sotho who saw themselves as the owners of the land (Shilubane and Ntsanwisi 1958: 28). The Sotho-speaking people of Mafefe dominated the other Sotho and the Tsonga in the foothills of the escarpment in the late 19th century (Krige 1937:347, 348). The relationship with the people of Maake remained positive for about a century and several battles were fought with them against attackers originating from polities in the area, e.g. with Swazi in 1864 and 1868 and with Sekororo in 1901 (Junod 1927a:427, 511 and 513). The Nkuna people were also from time to time expected to join in attacks on other polities by their Sotho-speaking overlords and later by the South African Republic.

The South African Republic created locations for African chiefs and their subjects from where they resourced labour, tax and military support. In the northern Lowveld the self-made chief of the Tsonga, the Portuguese Albasini, became the Superintendent of African tribes who was allowed to rule by force and take the spoils of war for himself (Wilson 1969:436, 441). Albasini demanded that the Nkuna people should join him and when they refused, they were attacked and fled south to settle on the farm Berlyn 670LT (Mchidwana) from where they moved to the farm Sedan 18 KT in 1861 where they lived close to the Kgaga people. After the first Swazi attack, the Nkuna moved to Westfalia (Khoname) and after the second one to Monavein 61LT (Miringwen) in 1870 (Boonzaaier 1985:66, 67; Massie 1905:66). The history of the Nkuna in the Lowveld was therefore characterized by repeated episodes of insecurity due to the turbulent politics of the mid-nineteenth century in the Lowveld.

One point of convergence between oral and written history of the 19th century occurs in the knowledge that members of the headman's lineage in Berlyn have of the hijacking of the chieftainship after the death of chief-regent Shiluvana in 1875. The Tsonga-speakers practised an adelphic form of succession by which younger brothers took the position of a ruler before the title reverted to the eldest son of the deceased. Sometimes, the younger brother-regent held on to the position, reserving it for his own lineage. This happened, famously, in the case of Nyantshiri's oldest son Majuvana and his descendants who, as the senior patrilineal descendants should have taken the 'chair' after Shiluvana. Majuvana died in a skirmish and his young son Mbhokota should then have been installed, but instead a succession contest erupted between four contenders, with Muhlaba I (1864-1944), the senior son of Shiluvana, winning the competition after a couple of years with the support of the army, the Kgaga chief and captain Dahl, the Native Commissioner of Zoutpansberg. The dependents of Mbhokota remained discontented and moved some distance away from the tribal centre (that was then on the farm Sedan 18KT) to the confluence of the Letsitele and Letaba rivers. Mbhokota even had his own circumcision lodge (a sign of political independence) at one time, but he had to submit when he was threatened with military force (Boonzaaier 1985:67; Junod 1927a:411-413; Mathebula 2002:79, 85-87; Shilubane and Ntsanwisi 1958:46, 47). The story of this hi-jacking is kept alive among the descendants of Mbhokota in the Nkwhashu lineage at Berlyn, but there seems to be no real political effect associated with this event.

The Swiss mission arrived in the Nkuna area in 1886, soon after Muhlava I had taken full control. Reverend Eugene Thomas was the first missionary to work at Shiluvana and he bought the farm where the Nkuna lived, on behalf of the mission. The easy reception of the mission by the Nkuna was probably partially a response by their leadership to the continuous threats of attack from stronger chiefdoms in the region. The role of the missionaries in strengthening the chiefdom of the Nkuna under Muhlava I was remarkable. Bringing the church, education and health services were the direct outcome of the mission work, but for Muhlava I the assistance of the missionary with creating a reserve (known as a 'location' in the colonial time) with all that that meant in terms of security of land tenure and tribal administration was as important. Black people were not allowed in the South African Republic to own land and were dependent on missionaries holding land for them in trust. As a young and ambitious chief, Muhlava I opted for a close association with the missionaries and, with his friend, the Sotho chief Maake, was educated by the mission and then converted to Christianity in 1897. He was also further educated at Thaba Nchu (Boonzaaier 1985:67; Changuion and Steenkamp 2012:96,98; Shilubana and Ntsanwisi 1958:57, 71, 75, 76, 87; Transvaal Native Affairs Department 1905:60). In 1899 Muhlava I returned from Thaba Nchu, due to the general disruption caused by the Anglo Boer War, in the same year that Henri Alexandre Junod arrived in Shiluvane to start a training college for evangelists. There would be close cooperation between these two men (Shilubana and Ntsanwisi 1958:83). Muhlava I managed to have good relations with the missionaries, white farmers, the South African Republic authorities as well as with his Sotho neighbours who he regarded as being one people with the Tsonga. He described himself as a liminary figure: a morula tree planted on the border between two fields who had to care for both his Christian and non-Christian subjects. In the wars of the 1890s against chiefs Makgoba, Mushothi and Mmamathola chief Muhlava I provided warriors to assist the Boers (Mathebula 2002:88; Shilubana and Ntsanwisi 1958:68,81,84,89). Such loyalty would be repeated in the two World Wars of the 20th century.

Apart from their church work and the scientific work of Junod that has been mentioned, the Swiss missionaries also produced a number of maps of the northeastern Transvaal (1871, 1883 and 1886). These are indications of several important aspects of their missionary activity. One was their work to create a tribal group from the scattered dialect groups into the Gwamba/Thonga/Tsonga nation. On the 1886 map of H. Berthoud a green line indicates areas of occupation by the Gwamba, including two groups in my research area. The work of the church was closely associated with the distribution of Tsonga-speakers. Not less important was the interest that the missionaries had in acquiring land for the mission as well as more security for the people among whom they were working.

One other important player in the Lowveld has only been scantily mentioned thus far: the South African Republic. The influence of Pretoria in the outlying areas of the republic was weak and it took several military expeditions in the 1890s before the northern Lowveld and adjoining areas were militarily 'pacified'. Part of the pacification was that 'natives' paid taxes to the government from about 1870 (Jeppe 1893:216). The SAR government was required by the Convention of Pretoria to create a Location Commission and to identify areas for locations of black inhabitants. By 1884 land was surveyed and beacons erected, but the land allocation process took a long time to be realized. While Muhlava I did not get a location from the SAR, he was promised one. Meanwhile, many of his subjects were living on the farms belonging to an absentee landlord, the Harmony Proprietary Company. Tenancy had become common in that time on farms in the Lowveld where whites were not yet living in numbers. 'Squatting' was regulated in 1887, restricting the black population on a farm to five families who had to work for three months per year in return for residential rights (Changuion and Steenkamp 2012:94, 96; Harries 1989:92; Massie 1905:66, 67).

While commercial farming in the area had not yet taken off in the late 19th century, the exploration for minerals and the mining revolution also struck into the Lowveld. Gold was discovered in 1869 east of Shiluvane in the range of hills below which the Berlyn settlement is situated. The discoverer, Edward Burton, named the hills the Murchison Range and wrote in a report in 1870:

In 1869, at the kraal of the Kafir chief Sebulaan [Shiluvane?], I found his people busy forging picks, etc., from ore of good quality, which is mined in the vicinity of his kraals (Jeppe 1893:218).

It is probable that the reference to iron-working can be linked to the remains of iron-smelting that I mentioned earlier with regard to archaeological findings in the area. In any case, a Gold Commissioner was placed at Leydsdorp, in the area where a gold rush to the Selati Goldfields had occurred in 1888, but by 1891 Leydsdorp had already been abandoned. Telegraph and telephone lines had by then been installed to link Leydsdorp and other small emerging sites of investment and mining activity with the core of the economy in Pretoria and the Witwatersrand (Bulpin 1983:293; Cartwright 1974:5; Jeppe 1893:222). Of interest is also this remark of Jeppe (1893:224) about labour at Leydsdorp in what it reveals in terms of the local economy, wages, labour supply and expectations of submission:

The natives are respectful and obedient to the whites, supplying them with milk, butter, eggs, fowls, etc, on reasonable terms. Wages range from fifteen to twenty-five shillings per month, and the demand is small compared with the supply.

While mining was a flash in the pan in the area, the Lowveld was not of much interest to the white farmers in the SAR initially, as it remained infested with tsetse and malaria and only hunters visited the area in winter (Jeppe 1893:217). It seems that farms in the Lowveld were only slowly taken up from the 1870s onwards until the government speeded the process up by instituting a system of 'occupation farms' in 1886, devised to attract white farmers to free land in the northeastern parts of the SAR where there was political instability and where several military campaigns were directed in the 1890s (Cartwright 1974:44; Changuion and Steenkamp 2012:96). In the Deeds Office in Pretoria the first deed of grant for the farm Berlyn 330 on record is that of 10 January 1877 to Hendrik Lambert Venter, followed by a transfer on 16 March 1878 to Maurits de Vries and another on 3 December 1878 to William Mockford, the Director of Harmony Pty Co Ltd, who bought the farm(s) for 13 000 Pounds. The farm Berlyn would remain in possession of the company as part of a group of 26 farms between the Letaba and the Olifants Rivers, for the twin purposes of land speculation and mineral rights at least up to the 1940s (Cartwright 1974:71; Stubbs Commission 1918:229).

Many other farms in the Letaba area were occupation farms on which the occupants were supposed to be in residence and provide military service when called up. These occupation farm dwellers were often landless *bywoners* who received their small farms of 500-1500 morgen in the late 1880s. For them the high land values in the rest of the country were outside their reach. However, there was a catch:

Occupation farmers also exercised a tenuous hold over their newly surveyed farms as these were already densely settled and attempts to remove their African occupants were met with protracted resistance in the form of incendiarism, cattle-stabbing, settlement on fields ploughed by the white farmer, and the destruction of improvements to his farm (Harries 1989:92).

The occupation farmers were not successful, after a decade of war against various chiefdoms, lacking capital and suffering from the rinderpest calamity and malaria (Harries 1989:93).

By the end of the 19th century Tsonga-speakers in the area (between Shiluvane and the Letaba river) were living on state land, a mission farm or private farms owned by individuals or land companies. Each of those owners had their own conditions for occupation. Increased taxing on government land relative to taxes on the privately-owned farms pulled many black families to a farm to evade tax, even as they could, according to the anti-squatting laws of 1887 and 1895, be expected to do active service on those farms. While white farming only took off very slowly in the area, black small farmers managed to use the opportunities provided by available fertile land and produced for subsistence and sale to the market, especially on farms owned by land companies where they were less bothered. Many of the occupation farms were subsequently sold to land companies that encouraged the settlement of Africans for the labour and rent that such occupants could provide. Many Tsonga-speaking families moved between farms or found a refuge in the Zoutpansberg mountains where there was no efficient government control yet or went to Mozambique where they still had relatives (Harries 1989:93). In

1897 rinderpest led to the death of game and most cattle, a heavy blow to people who had invested much of their migrant labour earnings in cattle (Packard 2001:595).

From surplus production to migrant labour reserve: segregation and apartheid, 1902-1962

Where the previous period was characterised by the experience of settling in Transvaal as refugees from Mozambique and the start of increased integration into the larger political economy, the period after the Anglo Boer War is especially important for the way in which relations with regard to land, labour and administration were rearranged in the Lowveld. While government ('crown') land made up a large part of the Lowveld, white farmers were establishing themselves in the area as commercial farmers after the Anglo Boer War. At first they rented their land to the black people who had been living on the land and later moved to a labour tenure system in order to keep a sufficient number of workers on the land and have them available for free labour. Of crucial importance in this period were political developments with regard to the change from reserve to homeland and all that this implied under the political frameworks of segregation and apartheid in which tribal administration played an increasingly important role. This period is also one that is within living memory, from which important inferences can be made that help to give content derived from personal narratives. Importantly, this period is remembered as relatively good, especially as far as access to land for food production was concerned. It is only towards the end of the period that the full effect of the dispossession of the means of agricultural production and complete proletarianization was experienced.

According to Massie (1905), about 50% of the black population in the Transvaal was living on the land of white farmers and land companies immediately after the Anglo Boer War. Although the Squatter Law of 1895 of the SAR prohibited a land owner of having more than five black renting families on a property, this law was not enforced. The people on this land or on crown land were renting at a minimum of one Pound p.a., while no rent was paid on government locations. However, a poll tax of 1 Pound per adult male person was payable on crown land and on the locations this amount was 2 Pounds plus 2 Pounds for every wife above the first one (Massie 1905:97, 99). Most interestingly, Massie mentions that the Native Affairs Commission noted that black people wanted to buy more land and that it had decided that communal land occupation had to be turned into individual tenure, a surprisingly progressive approach to the land question at an early point in the South African history, but something that has even now not been implemented. Instead, an oppressive policy of dispossession and alienation was to follow.

Nevertheless, between 1905 and 1913 some freedom from the restrictions on land purchases by black people was experienced and some families were able to buy land by clubbing together after a Supreme Court decision in favour of black land ownership (Harries 1989:94; Hay 2012:365; Surplus People Project 1983:346). Chief Muhlaba I was keen to have his own location, as promised under the SAR before the Anglo Boer War, and to buy land. Junod wrote to the Department of Native Affairs in November 1904 to find out about the acquisition of land by natives and was given the reply that permission was needed for such land transactions and that the land title would be held in trust by the Native Commissioner (Wits Library Swiss Mission Collection AC 1084/56, 11/11/1904). In another letter in the same month about a location for Chief Muhlaba I, he was told that the land on which the tribe was living since about 1902 was a temporary arrangement, but that this land could become the location. This temporary status also applied to 101 other farms in the Spelonken and Haenertsburg district (from 1929 called the Letaba district) that were termed 'undefined locations' (Hay 2012:365). It is probable that Junod had assisted the chief in making the application for a location (Shilubana and Ntsanwisi 1958:99). Soon after the location was confirmed and the chief was able to enforce his rule more firmly over his subjects, due to his control over land. The discontented group that was living separately after the hijacking of the chieftaincy, were by then still located on the Berlyn farm and its immediate environment under headman Mbhokota (the patrilineal cousin of the chief). In about 1909 Mbhokota had opened a circumcision lodge without asking the chief for permission and the fees due to the chief were not brought to him. Muhlaba I then complained at the Native Commissioner who said that 'Mbhokota is not a chief'. Muhlaba I sent his warriors to take a number of cattle from Mbhokota

that were slaughtered and eaten, sending a strong message to the dissident group. Mbhokota's complaints were ignored by the Native Commissioner (Shilubana and Ntsanwisi 1958:101, 102). These events, regarding land and subjects, are indicative of the alliance between the traditional leader, Native Affairs and the mission, a bond that would continue for decades. Junod mentions that Muhlaba I had about 6 000 subjects (1927a:19) but Van Warmelo (1935:58,93,Plate 15) provides a figure of 2 918 that refer to tax-payers, most probably. Between 1920 and 1936 Muhlaba I was able to buy three farms near his location that were made available to his sons and where some of his subjects rented land for farming (Boonzaaier 1985:67). The wealth of Chief Muhlaba I was considered as high, with his 572 Pounds in a bank account in 1923 that he used to also buy a farm in the Haenertsburg area priced at 800 Pounds (Packard 2001:606). Buying land with money collected from subjects was a common practice of chiefs in the Lowveld in the early 20th century (Hay 2012:366).

Chief Muhlaba I's close bond with the Swiss Mission was evident in the fact that no other churches were admitted in the tribal reserve (Shilubana and Ntsanwisi 1958:135). He was known for his good relations with whites. There is an interesting account of the day in the life of a (white) Lowveld farmer in which the good life on a prosperous farm in the 1930s is sketched, including the rhythms of work, taking a census, relaxation, hunting and drinking and where a meeting with Chief Muhlaba I (then 74 years old), as a good neighbour and friend, is mentioned without any trace of the class and racist undertones that one might want to read into that time among white farmers (Thwaites 1937). Eventually, Chief Muhlaba I received wider recognition when he was elected to the Native Representative Council in 1942, but he died in 1944 (Shilubane and Ntsanwisi 1958:163). After his death there were regents appointed as his son, Xiluvana II had a hearing impairment (Mathebula 2002:90).

While the chief looked after his own interest in land with the help of the mission and the Native Affairs Department, his subjects had to pay tax to him which was used for buying 'tribal' farms and a motor-car, but this land was not sufficient for everyone and furthermore the government tax on residents in the locations was higher than for those living on commercial farms. African small-farmers cum labour migrants therefore preferred to rent land to be free to work where they got the best wages and when it suited them (Beaumont Commission 1916a:10). Many of the subjects of Muhlaba I opted to reside on the land of land companies or commercial farmers. Hay (2013) rightly infers that families and individuals were relatively independent from the chief's control in the early 20th century. The mention of 'tribes', she argues, needs to be understood as part of the discourse of officials. Chiefs often had their influence mostly in their own area of residence and less so further away, to be understood as concentric circles of diminishing power or power radiating from the centre. Often families moved to another farm due to eviction (receiving a *trekpas*) or on their own request. People also moved away from farms when rent tenancy changed to labour tenancy (Hay 2013:9,11).

Commercial farm labour shortages existed into the 1930s and 1940s as long as black families could farm for themselves and an indication of this is that Lowveld farmers had to hire Mozambican migrants, especially in the labour-intensive peaks of the agricultural cycle (Packard 2001:607,608). The 1913 Land Act enforced labour tenancy by imposing fines on landlords having Africans living on their land only for rent. Such residents were required to work for the farmer for free for 90 days, but the renting system was only slowly rooted out in the Lowveld over a number of decades, as the life histories of older residents in Berlyn attest to. As mentioned above, the Lowveld was mostly used by whites for hunting in winter and land speculation until the 1940s. Malaria is often seen as one of the major factors that prevented farmers from settling in the Lowveld which worked to the benefit of African cultivators. Only at the end of the 1940s was malaria well under control, with cases in Transvaal dropping from 3 909 in 1944 to 61 in 1952, contributing to the expansion of commercial agriculture in the Lowveld in response to the growing demand for agricultural products after World War II (Lowveld Regional Development Association 1954:168,169). The black population in the Lowveld may have acquired some immunity to malaria, but both black and white suffered heavily in the malaria epidemics of 1923, 1926, 1928, 1936 and 1942. The use of DDT had dramatic effects: while there

were 40 houses of white farmers associated with 700 acres of cultivation along the Letaba river in 1940, this increased to 235 houses and 12 000 acres in 1950 (Packard 2001:591-605).

The white penetration of the Lowveld for agricultural exploitation was facilitated by the politics of black dispossession of land. The Natives Land Act of 1913 laid the final basis for the racial segregation of the population through organizing access to land in such a way that it excluded black people from private land acquisition outside the locations. In the Lowveld, as elsewhere in the country, land value had risen after the Anglo Boer War and with the expansion of agricultural production and the demand for workers in the mines and industries, the demand for farm labour also went up. When land owners made more use of their land, they demanded more labour from the tenants. This process put pressure on black people, diminishing land renting opportunities and pushing them towards the reserves and urban centres. While the mines benefited from the extension of reserves (locations) and the movement of people off the farms to the reserves, farmers were opposed to black farmers having access to more land that made them more independent, competed with their products and pushed up labour costs. The Natives Land Act of 1913 was a compromise between the government, the mines and land companies. It extended the locations under chiefs, put into place regulations that were aimed at reducing rent tenancy and forbade black people to own land outside of scheduled areas that would be held in trust for a tribe by the Minister of Native Affairs. The requirement of having to work for three months for a white farmer led to many people leaving the land and to move to other farms or to a location (Harries 1989:94, 97; Surplus People Project 1983:347).

In the testimony for the Beaumont and Stubbs Land Commissions (1916 and 1918) one can hear some of the thinking of white farmers and Native Commissioners in the Lowveld behind the framing of the discourse around land that was firmly weighted against black acquisition of land, in the aftermath of the 1913 Land Act:

The less ground you give the native the more useful he will become... (Stubbs Commission 1918:84).

If [the] country is suitable for irrigation it should be excluded from the native area, because natives cannot make the same economic use of it (Stubbs Commission 1918:97).

... when you come to my area you have practically to do with natives slightly more advanced than baboons (Beaumont Commission 1916b:366).

Furthermore, the white lobby provided arguments for not extending land rights to black people in the Lowveld, arguing that white farming was qualitatively better than that of blacks and that black people were needed to provide their labour. The insecurity experienced by black people was used to argue that they should not be given land, the implication being that they would not value it for its agricultural value. Even the missionary, Rev. Cuenod from Shiluvane, testified against giving good land in the foothills of the escarpment to black people. For the black population he recommended that farms in the low-lying area should become part of a reserve and indicated that Berlyn and other farms would be suitable to become a 'native area'. Some of these farms were good land, in his opinion, but others were 'barely suitable even for natives; as a whole they would form a large area where the natives could thrive' (Stubbs Commission 1918:209).

There was also the question of land companies versus commercial farming to deal with. Farmers were not in favour of the land companies providing tenancy to black tenants, as such an option for small black farmers would continue to prevent them to become farm labourers on their commercial farms. It was beneficial for black families to rent on state or company land where they did not have to work (Harries 1998:95). Opinions of whites speaking at the Commissions about renting in relation to commercial farming, land companies and the Muhlaba location were divided. Mr T.T. de Smidt, a land inspector, said that while the Harmony Block contained some of the best citrus land in the country, '[i]t pays the companies always better to have natives on their farms than white men. They get 300 or 400 Pounds rent from them, which a white man will never pay'. The black small farmers on these farms had cattle and could work on the mines if they wanted and refuse to work on the commercial farms. He said: 'I think that particular block of farms is too valuable for natives' (Beaumont 1916b:356). The Sub-

Native Commissioner of Haenertsburg, however, recommended that a large part of the Harmony Block should be added to the reserves as black people were already living there when those farms were surveyed. 'The companies have practically locked up the country because the farms were producing such magnificent revenue from natives' (Stubbs 1918:91).

Black people who were able to testify in the hearings of these commissions provide another reading of the situation, although relatively muted. Some of the local chiefs in the northern Lowveld testified, saying that their land was too small and that they did not want to move from it (Beaumont Commission 1916b:362-364). Chief Muhlava I also testified, saying that he wanted to remain where he was, that his land was too small for his people and that he wanted to continue renting land from whites to farm and furthermore that he wanted to buy land (Beaumont Commission 1916b:362-364). In the Stubbs Commission hearing, Chief Muhlava I started his testimony by saying: 'I am a chief and a Zulu' (Stubbs 1918:85). With this statement he claimed the right to speak with authority, the Zulu identity being useful in white company where it was highly respected (see Carton, Laband and Sithole 2008). Muhlava I proceeded to state that the locations were generally too small and that five more farms, including Berlyn, needed to be added to his location. These were company farms that were not occupied by whites, but by his people who were living outside the boundaries of his location (Stubbs 1918:85).

In the early 20th century a small class of black farmers emerged, including Chief Muhlava I, who owned land and cattle and had people renting land from them. Large amounts of surplus grain were sold in Pietersburg and Pretoria. This emerging class formation was stopped by the government by preventing black people from getting access to more land and by supporting poor whites and other white farmers, e.g. by providing drought relief exclusively to them in the 1930s. From this small class, forming a relatively successful and educated black farming elite, the entrepreneurs would emerge that would manipulate the ethnic identity of Tsonganess in the homeland times (Harries 1989:95, 96).

The overpopulation and poverty in the reserves were evident in the 1930s and were the focus of government attention. The report of the Native Economic Commission of 1932 put the blame for black underdevelopment on their 'unscientific' agricultural practices, with overstocking and soil erosion as the roots of the problem. This reading of the situation allowed for interventions in the name of development and 'betterment' (which was implemented from 1939 onwards) by the Department of Native Administration (DNA): reduction of animals, dividing land into residential, grazing and arable land and education (Delius 1996:53, 54, 56). In the following decades the DNA would grow into an enormous bureaucracy with the aim of managing the traditional leadership structures as well as the land held in trust for black people.

The 1936 South African Native Trust and Land Act was the government's response to the evident needs for land and development in the black rural 'reserves'. The land for black people was increased from 7% to 13% of the country's surface and areas were indicated where the South African Native Trust (SANT) would be able to buy and improve farms that could be added to existing reserves (the 'scheduled areas') and other areas where land for blacks was to be acquired (in the 'released areas') as defined by the Natives Land Act of 1913. This process of buying land was later termed the 'consolidation of homelands' during separate development, but already in 1936 this process was placed on a tribal basis. The intention was also to strengthen the power of chiefs in the administration of their reserves and to act more firmly against squatting (Harries 2007:89, 99; Surplus People Project 1983:348). As in other parts of the country, white farmers in the area around the Muhlaba Location, the Released Area 29, opposed the inclusion of their farms into the released areas. In the Letaba District the buying of released land took more than twenty years due to white resistance and a lack of capacity on the government's side⁹. The increased agricultural activities in the Lowveld led to an

⁹ By 1959 only 35% of the released land had been transferred to the SANT. In 1985 a total of 90% of that amount had been transferred (Changuion and Steenkamp 2012:174).

interest among white farmers in the land that was to be transferred. Some made a profit out of buying this land for speculation and selling to the SANT for a high price and in the process 1000s of families were evicted from white farms (Hay 2012:367-370). The Assistant Native Commissioner of the district reported bluntly in 1948:

The owners were prepared to keep a considerable number of the residents as farm labour tenants and their terms to the natives were very reasonable. All the residents however took up an unreasonable attitude and refused to give the owners a hearing at all. I spoke to them and they told me that some of them were born on those farms and that they were not going to engage themselves as farm labourers nor are they going to move from the farms and the Government could do whatever they liked. They were all given three months notice by the owners to vacate the farms (Hay 2013:12).

Farmers used the same discourse as was used twenty years earlier in the Land Commission hearings, saying that:

good land should be kept for white farmers who would 'develop' it and that Africans were degrading the land and ought to be removed, particularly when they lived in ecologically sensitive areas (Hay 2012:370).

The SANT proceeded to negotiate with individual farms and buy land, as the need for more land for black occupation was perceived to be urgent on the government's side (Hay 2012:371-375).

In the period under discussion, 1902-1962, small-scale farming by black residents on the farms in the district and on the reserve and mission land continued, with some surplus production, but the security of access to land became increasingly weaker with an associated decrease in production and an increase in dependency on migrant work. From the available accounts it seems that migrant work was initially an option and not a necessity for many, although it became increasingly important as the economic life of the economic core and the rural areas became intertwined. In the literature mention is made of surplus production of maize that was sold to shops in the early 20th century. Life histories of residents in Berlyn repeatedly mention that surplus production of maize, peanuts and other products was possible for many decades into the 20th century. These narratives told of men going to work on the mines to be able to buy clothing and other items that needed to be bought, such as cattle for marriage goods. Surplus maize was typically stored in the *nturuka* hut. It was a house with a floor above the kitchen space on which maize was stored, conserved by the smoke of the cooking fire below. In the accounts of senior citizens in Berlyn this structure and its disappearance is often mentioned as a symbol of relative self-sufficiency in the decades up to 1962. Food was not bought deep into the 20th century and maize was often traded for clothes, for instance in the shops of Masokisi (the Jewish trader Harry Crown who opened his first shop in 1918 in Muhlaba's Location and who ultimately had 22 shops in the area) (Cartwright 1974:156; Changuion 1994:166).

There was a perception among older people of Berlyn that men in the 1940s and 1950s had been relatively well-off: they had owned many cattle and were often able to marry more than one wife. A map of the farm Berlyn, drawn in about 1957, shows 14 'native lands', spread across a wide area on the farm, with some on the very fertile soil next to the Letaba river where the black residents had been living for generations. The fields vary in size, from 2,6 to 33,8 morgen, totalling 139,3 morgen and with an average size of about 14 morgen. Presumably these were all dry lands. In some cases huts are indicated in the fields. The land farmed by the owner, in between that of the black residents, does not seem to be much larger than the fields of the black residents, but the farm inventory mentions irrigation piping, etc. as was common on commercial farms. It is clear from the life histories that the black residents had to work for the owner in order to stay on the farm. Some of the black residents had to make space for the citrus plantations of the owner in the early 1950s. A group of these residents had to move to the hills, further away from the river and the more fertile arable land. This included the headman, Jack Mashamba.

The white farmer on Berlyn had some citrus on the farm in the 1950s, but also had rice and other produce on his fields. The farm was sold to the SANT in 1957 and incorporated into the Gazankulu homeland. The citrus plantations would be increased substantially in the 1960s, following a trend in

the Letaba valley. From the 1920s citrus had been introduced into the Letaba area on a large scale with the establishment of the large Letaba Estate, a property of the Schlesinger group of companies that also owned Zebediela. Lower down the Letaba valley, citrus was planted by white farmers from the 1930s, and very successfully by B. J. Vorster from 1941 (Cartwright 1974:137, 138; Changuion 1994:96), just opposite the Berlyn farm on the very land where the ancestors of the headman of Berlyn had been living in the early years of the 20th century. The extension of the Selati railway from Skukuza to Tzaneen in the period 1910-1912 and later to Pietersburg via Soekmekaar, gave the commercial farmers of the Letsitele area better access to the urban and the international markets. The farms provided local job opportunities to the uprooted families, especially for seasonal work in the winter harvesting period. Another source of paid work was at the businesses and mines that developed in the area, e.g. the Gravelotte mines that were established from 1934 onwards (Cartwright 1974:94,96,160).

Meanwhile, in the early years of the 20th century, the Swiss Mission that had been established at Shiluvane continued to develop with the support of Chief Muhlava I. The farm Sedan on which the mission was located was eventually sold to the SANT in 1965 and incorporated in the emerging Bantustan of Gazankulu (Jeannerat, Morier-Genoud and Didier 2011:44). The mission functioned as a farm that had black Christian families paying 1 Pound per year as rent, similar to the situation on the land company farms and, similarly, anyone could be evicted from the land by the mission managers (Jeannerat et al 2011:61). Some of the people renting land on the mission station sub-rented land to their tenants, but all were supposedly Christian and fell under the strict rules of the mission re the prohibition on polygamy and the expectation that the land would be tilled (2011:65,93). The approach of the missionaries was paternalistic and in favour of 'assimilation by protected segregation' – in a process of evolution in which the mission would help the black Christians in a safe space until fully developed (Jeannerat et al 2011:81,104).

Primary schools were built by the mission and community, at Shiluvane, on commercial farms and at Mafarana, near Berlyn, where some of the people from Berlyn that I met in my research had received their education in the 1950s. These schools functioned under direction of the mission and hired teachers that were paid by the government, but at a much lower level than was the case in white education. The church strongly emphasized education in the home language of the children, an approach that was based on the view held by the Swiss mission that the tribe and language group was the core identity of a black person. Despite this orientation, the National Party government was critical of the perceived alienation from the black community in mission education. In the 1950s Dr. Verwoerd, as minister of Bantu Education, therefore instituted a system of Bantu Education to tie the educated 'Bantu' more to their community and in the process absorbed the mission schools into the state system (Jeannerat et al 2011:19,27,29,103,105). In the 1920s a small hospital was started at Shiluvane that became the Douglas Smit hospital in 1943 (Swiss Mission 1975:34, 37) and that would later become a focal point of serious ethnic conflict in the 1980s.

The family histories of people in Berlyn tell about a pattern of migrancy that was already established in the 19th century, increasing in the 20th century as the taxes required by the government and chief, the rent required by land-owners and the need for manufactured goods and money escalated. Eventually, food would also be bought and less would be produced. It was mostly the men that were moving to the mines and factories of the economic core, but many also worked in the Lowveld, away from home for many months. With their low level of education the work that rural migrants could find was usually unskilled. Larger households were better able to diversify, with some men looking after the interests of the homestead and its cattle at home and others, in a cycle of migrancy, spent a year at work before returning for a visit over Easter or Christmas. The effect of labour migrancy on family life had a gender and generational dimension. Women had to take on more responsibilities at home while their work was less valued and marriage relationships became stressed due to extra-marital relations at the workplace. Younger men became more independent from their parents.

The low productivity of migrant labourers and the associated high turnover were reasons for capitalist industrialists to oppose migrant labour as a system. In 1948 the Fagan commission report, commissioned by the Smuts government, recommended that black labour should be stabilized by phasing out migrant labour and by encouraging workers to bring their families to the workplace. The plan was to have a stable urban and rural population. However, the National Party came with their own approach to structuring the South African economy in the form of the Sauer commission report, also of 1948. This report reaffirmed the migrant labour system, proposed the consolidation of reserves and a separate political system for black people. This was to become one of the blueprints for apartheid policy (Ntsebeza 2005:137).

Soon after the Nationalist Party came into power in 1948, its leaders started with the process of separating the South African population along racial lines and to strengthen traditional authorities that were seen as an important instrument for creating a separate political future for black people. In 1951 the Bantu Authorities Act was introduced to recognise the important role of traditional leaders and to acknowledge them as paid political partners of the government. The functions of chiefs that were recognised by the white government over decades¹⁰ were further strengthened. Chiefs were given the power to collect taxes, control land, adjudicate according to customary law and were made responsible for local development projects, such as dipping and road maintenance (Niehaus, Mohlala and Shokane 2001:30). The Nkuna Tribal Authority was formally established for the Muhlaba Location and given jurisdiction over subjects that lived outside the reserve.

The Tomlinson Commission was set up in 1949 to report on the rehabilitation of the 'native areas'. After a comprehensive study, it recommended in its report of 1955 that individual tenure should be introduced in the reserves and that a class of fulltime black farmers needed to be developed. The Commission saw the problem of underdevelopment in the reserves as a cultural problem and therefore promoted the 'metamorphosis of the Bantu' (*Tomlinsonkommissie* 1955:77). The rest of the rural population would have to be a proletariat (Ntsebeza 2005:137; Platzky and Walker 1985:45). The National Party and the minister of Native Affairs, Dr. Verwoerd, were, however, not interested in the building of a black class of small farmers by extending private land tenure to them nor in the conservation of the reserves. Of more importance for them was the re-tribalization of the black population. Betterment and rehabilitation schemes would suffice (Ntsebeza 2005:138). The recommendation of the Tomlinson Commission to consolidate the land of black groups in the rural areas was more acceptable to the government. The Commission proposed Block B to be for Venda and Tsonga-speaking people, on the northeastern borders of the country. Its views on the prevention of racial mixing and integration and its emphasis on the delimitation of land for white occupation where black workers would not have political rights was, of course, quite welcome to the government, but it did not want to have European industrialists making investments in the 'Bantu areas' (Houghton 1956:3,4,13,14,75; *Tomlinsonkommissie* 1955:183,213).

The ethnic consciousness that had been cultivated by the church and government resonated with the Tomlinson Report's emphasis on ethnic division. By 1955 some Tsonga chiefs, led by Chief Mhinga, asked for more powers as provided for by the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951, leading to the forming of four Regional Councils for the Tsonga-speaking 'ethnic group' (Harries 2007:104). This policy of ethnic national units was taken further in the Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 through which a separate national unit would be created for each ethnic group, on the basis of its separate culture. For the Tsonga-speaking population, declared by the 1959 Act as the Shangana/Tsonga national unit, this happened in 1962 with the launch of the Matshangana Teritorial Authority and the creation of a bureaucracy that would gradually take over many of the functions that had previously been allocated to the tribal authorities (Harries 2007:104; Niehaus, Mohlala and Shobane 2001:31, 139). The farm

¹⁰ The Native Administration Act 37 of 1927 recognised the functions of traditional leaders with regard to administration and adjudication in the reserves.

Berlyn, now a SANT area and under the control of the Nkuna Tribal Authority, was part of the Ritavi Regional Authority that contained three tribal authorities (DBSA 1986:1-1).

From dispossession through homeland 'development' to liberation: 1963-1993

The most important historical event that the people of Berlyn refer to when they talk about their history is the forced removal from their homesteads by the 'GG' lorries in 1963. They see the removal as a direct result of the decision of the Europeans who managed the farm to 'plant their sisal' on the sites where they had been living. In the summer of 1963 the people were told by the agricultural officers that they would be relocated. About 60 families were taken to the southern part of the farm, below Mmanopi hill in the Murchison Range, while others were taken to neighbouring Trust farms, such as the settlements Mafarana and Mulati. What stands clearly out in the collective memory is the suffering that accompanied the resettlement: no compensation, loss of land, loss of the animals that they could not keep securely, exposure to rain and no water provision. In the first days the people made makeshift lean-tos from grass and branches for shelter. This relocation was the culmination of a slow process of dispossession that had started with the sale of the farm to private owners in the late 19th century, followed by farming activities in the 1950s by the white owners on the farm that necessitated the black families to move away from the Letaba river and move into the hilly and stony part of the farm on its southern border. Nor was this the last forced removal, as they had to move again in 1968 from their scattered homesteads to the concentrated residential stands that were then allocated by the agricultural officers in the process of enforcing 'betterment' across the Bantustans, starting in 1964. Villages for hundreds of families, each located on a stand of 1500 m², were demarcated by agricultural extension officers. Everywhere where moving into *malayineni* (= in the lines, referring to the demarcated residential stands in a grid pattern) happened, people experienced the change as traumatic and disturbing. While they benefited from better access roads, the breaking up of family clusters, the lack of privacy, lack of access to the veld for toilet purposes, problems with damage by livestock and increased crime was resented (Schneider 1984). The loss of their fertile land must have been a heavy shock.

This process of resettlement inside the borders of the emerging homelands happened while the eviction of workers on commercial farms continued. Labour tenancy had been abandoned in the Tzaneen area in 1967, turning workers into 'squatters' that had to move away once their contract had expired. Many had to move to the Bantustans to find land to live on. This also applied to the towns in the Northern Transvaal that were purged of black people, leading to the economic downturn of these towns (Hay 2013:12; Surplus People Project 1983:120, 156). In the 1960s an increased focus on the development of 'homelands' was the attempt by the government to justify the large-scale relocation of black people to these areas as part of 'grand apartheid'. Agriculture was to be a core focus of development as the economic future of the Bantustans was seen to be mainly agricultural, supplemented with 'border industries', at least for the short and middle term. It was thus that the irrigated citrus orchards that existed on Berlyn farm were extended as part of a project that would provide job opportunities and was supposed to be an example of the best projects in homeland development. In addition, a large sisal plantation was established on the drier part of the farm and a plant was built for the production of sisal fibre. In an effort to attract industrialists to the homeland, impressive incentives were provided at Nkowankowa on the border between the Nkuna tribal authority and the municipality of Tzaneen.¹¹

In 1969 the status of the Bantustan was raised with the appointment of a Commissioner-General, the building of the capital Giyani and the start of Radio Tsonga. In 1972 the status of the area in the Bantustan hierarchy was further upgraded with the proclamation of the area as the self-governing national state of Gazankulu and the adding of Tsonga (as an official language), a flag and anthem as national symbols (DBSA 1986: 1-3; Kriel and Hartman 1991a:41). Increasingly, the emphasis was put

¹¹ The conditions were attractive: a rail rebate of 50% and a wage subsidy of 95% up to R100 per month per worker (Surplus People Project 1983:15).

on the 'ethnic identity' of Tsonga-speakers for whom Gazankulu was meant to be a political and economic home. As part of the sorting out of ethnic identities, Venda- and Sotho-speakers were removed to their homelands in the late 1960s, especially around Levubu and Bushbuckridge (Harries 2007:105, 106). At Berlyn and its neighbouring settlement, Mulati, Sotho-speaking families were expected to submit to the control of the Nkuna Tribal Authority and when they refused they were forced to leave the area.

In the next few decades the 'ethnic identity' of Tsonga and Sotho would be repeatedly invoked in conflicts on the local level in a social situation in which there had been many decades of close interaction between these language groups, their intermarriage and cooperation. A culmination of ethnic conflict between Lebowa and Gazankulu subjects occurred in 1981 when the Douglas Smit Hospital at Shiluvane, that had been built to cater for the subjects of chiefs Muhlava (Tsonga) and Maake (Sotho), was first allocated to Lebowa and then to Gazankulu. The hospital had been a model of inter-ethnic cooperation, and was associated by intermarriage and bilingualism, but now an ethnic warfare erupted. The government of Lebowa immediately sent trucks to remove all patients and staff from the hospital in protest. Thousands of Sotho-speakers were termed 'Lebowa citizens' by Gazankulu, some were fined for 'squatting', were then forcefully removed from residential areas on Gazankulu land in the district and dumped in an already overcrowded area in the Naphuno area of Lebowa¹². A number of political dissidents were jailed and people lost houses, furniture and their livestock. These events were the culmination of a border dispute between the Nkuna (Gazankulu) and Kgaga (Lebowa) tribal areas that had emerged in 1974 and had led to a report by the Uys Commission in 1978. Its implementation was associated with armed clashes that occurred repeatedly on the disputed boundary in 1985 in an area where peaceful relations had existed (Dubow 1981:1, 16, 17; Harries 1987:11; Harries 2007:106, 107; Jeannerat et al 2011:125-127, 143; Surplus People Project 1983:35, 174, 175).

In the process of homeland creation there was a convergence of interests between church, local elite and the South African government around the ethnic project (Maluleke 1993). More than a 100 years after the arrival of the first refugees from the wars around the kingdom of Gaza, the naming of the new ethnic Bantustan as Gazankulu (Great Gaza) was a reference to the ethnic heritage of a separate people. From the start, the Swiss Mission had emphasized and promoted a sense of ethnic belonging, through the Tsonga language project and the exclusive focus on Tsonga-speakers in its work in the Lowveld (Jeannerat et al 2011:175). The educated local elite benefited from this church orientation once the homeland project started and provided them with protection for their business interests and gave financial support through the Gazankulu Development Corporation. The chief and headmen benefited from the homeland system because it encouraged them to attract large numbers of people to their area of jurisdiction, gave them control over tribal funds and supported their role in local development projects. The clientelism and patronage that was endemic to the system of homeland development channelled money and power through the traditional authorities in the form of drought relief, development funds as well as decisions about land, pensions and jobs (Harries 2007:108).

The Swiss Mission church became more independent from the mother church and changed its name to the Tsonga Presbyterian Church in 1962 as an indication of its commitment to the ethnic project. The entanglement of church and political process and its compromised prophetic position was most clearly evident in the career of Prof. Hudson Ntsanwisi. He was both the moderator of the church and the political leader of the homeland. He embodied the alliance between church and local state throughout his political career (Jeannerat et al 2011:17,146; Ngwato 2011:97,98). Like his friend, Mangosuthu Buthelezi, the leader of the Zulu Bantustan, Ntsanwisi rejected the racism of 'petty apartheid' (Ntsanwisi 1978b:85) and the independence of Bantustans, but did believe in the homeland project as a potentially just and viable trajectory for Tsonga-speakers in South Africa. His critique of

¹² About 115 000 people were forcefully relocated in Gazankulu in the process of establishing the Bantustan as an ethnic entity (Surplus People Project 1983:115).

the political system was limited to his complaint about the viability of the Bantustans due to their lack of land and capital for homeland development (Ntsanwisi 1978a; Swiss Mission 1975:13). He accepted the important role of traditional leaders in this process of building a nation for the Tsonga and had himself proclaimed a chief in the 1980s. He started a political-cultural movement, *Ximoko Xa Rixaka* (whip of the nation) in 1981 (Jeannerat et al 2011:178), that was converted into a political party in 1990 similar to the Zulu Inkatha movement. A women's movement, Gazankulu Womens Association (GWA), and an urban movement were also created (Harries 1987:13-15). On the local level of rural settlements GWA was visible in its organization of cooking and sewing lessons for women and the organization of traditional dances of girls and women, which was an indication of the traditionalist view of the position of women in society.

The Legislative Assembly of Gazankulu in 1971 was composed of 68 members of which 42 were nominated and 26 elected. In 1990 the ratio had improved to 46 nominated and 42 elected members (Kriel and Hartman 1991a:43, 44), still making it impossible to change the government without the support of the lobby of traditional leaders who dominated the politics in the Bantustan. Chief Muhlava II became a senior member of the Gazankulu administration. He was Minister of Health for a period and the speaker of the Legislative Assembly (Mathebula 2002:91).

The creation of homelands involved that the 'surplus' population in the cities and on the farms would be channelled to the Bantustans in order to achieve the apartheid dream of a white South Africa. Despite all attempts to reach this goal by the use of influx control, of the 1 million Tsonga-speaking population in South Africa, in 1980 only half were living in the Bantustan, according to the population census of that year (Booyesen and Smit 1983; Platzky and Walker 1985:17). This population in the rural areas was impoverished and lacked the skills needed to achieve the economic development that was envisaged to make a 'homeland economy' possible. Huge backlogs in investment in education were a chronic problem of Bantu Education in a context of growing poverty. In 1988 33% of the population in the district of Ritavi 2 had not had any education and only 6,4% had achieved Standard 9 or 10. In 1984 the pupil:teacher ratio in the Ritavi district (of which Berlyn was a part) was 54:1 in primary education and 29,4:1 in secondary education. The pupil:classroom ratio was also very bad, with a ratio of 93:1 for primary schools and 50,3:1 for secondary schools (DBSA 1986:10-9, 10-10, 10-11, 10-12; De Villiers et al 1990:48). The government therefore had to commit large sums to create job opportunities in a place like Gazankulu. The bureaucracy of the homeland administration was one such employment creation environment.

Another attempt at stimulating economic development in the Bantustan was the work of the Gazankulu Development Corporation (GDC) which subsidized small and medium businesses as well as industries at 'economic growth points', such as Nkowankowa. In the period 1969-1973 only 122 jobs had been created by the small industry promotion by the GDC in Gazankulu, while 3 400 jobs were annually needed. By 1988 there were 44 industries established at Nkowankowa with an investment value of R71 million and 4 247 people were employed there. By 1991 it was reported that 80 businesses had been established, employing 7 000 people. However, South African industry was not easily enticed to move to the border industry locations as they realized that these were artificially subsidized at a high cost to the economy (*Beeld* 24 October 1991; De Villiers et al 1990: 26; Rogerson 1974:261, 264).

The Department of Agriculture in Gazankulu had several irrigation schemes in Gazankulu of which the Berlyn citrus and sisal projects were important parts. The intention of the Tomlinson Commission was that there would be a sustained effort to create a class of small fulltime farmers and move the rest of the population off the land to live in rural villages and closer settlements with very little access to arable land (Platzky and Walker 1985:45). However, it seems that the priority of the agricultural department moved from a focus on small farmers and conservation of the land to a focus on running successful departmental projects, such as Berlyn. By 1989 a total of 800 ha of sisal had been planted on the farm, adding to the citrus project of 185 ha. The Gazankulu government furthermore created work for the very poor and unemployed during the droughts of the 1980s in projects such as

infrastructure maintenance and land reclamation. However, despite all the efforts to make the Bantustan work economically, agriculture contributed only 2,85% to the total income that was earned by households in the district of Ritavi in 1988. The largest share of household income was earned by migrant labourers in the core of the economy in a mutually dependent system of industrial production based on a labour flow from the rural areas (De Villiers et al 1990:21,24, 35; Gazankulu 1986:16, 22; Van der Waal 1991).

Population growth in the Ritavi district was high in the 1970s and 1980s, with an average growth rate of 4,8% annually due to resettlement for agricultural betterment and the eviction of farm workers, but also the inflow of Mozambican refugees in the mid-1980s. The population in the Nkuna tribal area was calculated to have grown from 35 218 in 1970 to 54 388 in 1980 and 64 382 in 1988. The water situation for this growing population became especially worrisome and has remained critically underprovided since the 1960s. In 1990 it was mentioned in a planning document that 18 households used one tap, but this did not take into account that water was mostly not available at all of the taps on a regular basis (De Villiers et al 1990:18,19,43,46). The hard rock that hindered the drilling of boreholes in the area and the deep water table were not the only reasons for the lack of good water provision. The people in rural settlements were not regarded as equally important as the industries and urban population who were provided with a reasonable water infrastructure. Headmen and chiefs welcomed a high population growth as this provided them with a basis to claim more resources from the government and it strengthened their position vis-à-vis other traditional leaders.

During the civil war in Mozambique, during the period between 1985-1990, a point of escalation of atrocities and famine forced about 320 000 refugees into South Africa. The official South African position was to treat these people as illegal aliens that were deported if found by the police. However, in a challenge to the politics of separation, the Bantustans closest to Mozambique (Gazankulu and KaNgwane) accepted these 'brothers' from across the borders. As the refugees did not have official papers, they did not have access to welfare services and could be exploited by farmers and other employers, including established local households with one or more formal sources of income, who employed women as chars and men as herders. In the places where concentrations of refugees lived, they were given temporary small plots on the fringes of existing settlements. One such a concentration of refugees emerged next to the Mulati settlement, close to Berlyn in the late 1980s, due to the proximity to farm work. Chief Muhlava II had them forcefully removed and dumped in the Sotho-speaking area where they had previously stayed in a temporary camp. In 1993 the refugees were eventually given refugee status but in the following year the UNHCR coordinated their repatriation after peace returned to Mozambique. Only a minority of the refugees made use of the offer to be repatriated. Many stayed on to earn money in South Africa and many integrated into the community (Ngwato 2011; Wentzel and Tlabela 2006).

Across the country the 1980s were important in the way that protest against the apartheid political system emerged and was gradually transformed into the United Democratic Front (UDF) as a strong coordinated social movement. The reforms that the government instituted were seen as signs of weakness and stimulated further political activism in order to move towards the end of apartheid and a democratic political system. One of the changes that occurred was the scrapping of the influx control regulations, making it possible for rural people to freely move to the cities. Most importantly, the UDF started to work in rural areas in the mid-1980s and this was also evident in Berlyn where a local civic association was formed that worked against the homeland system and the rule by traditional leaders. In the formation of the local branch the twin settlements of Berlyn and Mulati were joined into one branch, thereby sending a strong message about their rejection of the division between communities on the basis of divisions that formed part of the tribal authority system.

The internal struggle for freedom in South Africa reached high levels in the 1980s and was evident in the Tzaneen area in the form of protests against the Lebowa and Gazankulu homelands in Lenyenye and Nkowankowa where there were clashes with the police and incidents of stone-throwing at the time

of the start of my fieldwork in Berlyn in 1986. Hovering military helicopters above the settlements was a show of strength by the South African army in response to the unrest that was spilling over from the urban areas into the Bantustans during the state of emergency. On the level of the Berlyn settlement, young men were mobilized as comrades who held meetings outside the village (often on the soccer field), marched and sang freedom songs at night. This was part of a strong youth protest that emerged across the rural areas in the country.

After the release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of the liberation movements in early 1990, the Letaba district was the hotbed of political protest in Gazankulu. Chief minister Ntsanwisi was boo-ed at a meeting he had organized in Nkowankowa and was forced to leave the gathering. The rumour was then spread that he had left the Bantustan hiding in a coffin or dressed like a priest. The unrest spread from the Letaba district to other parts of the homeland. In the town of Nkowankowa the protest was led by students at the teachers' training college of Tivumbeni where the rector was chased away. Edgar Mushwana, local leader of the UDF and the former speaker of the Legislative Assembly, chief Muhlaba II¹³, were seen as the main opponents of the chief minister. A wave of violent protest swept across Gazankulu, with 28 people dead by 15 March 1990, 1 100 held in custody and 240 huts burnt in witch-hunts. By April 1990 there were stayaways by civil servants, more violent clashes with the police and a nine week school boycott that was only ended after a meeting between Ntsanwisi and Mandela and the withdrawal of the army. The chief minister forced government officials to join his cultural movement, *Ximoko Xa Rixaka*, and then turned it into a political party with a view to participate in the multi-party talks that were planned to take place in preparation for the political transition in the country. He also expressed the view that homelands were there to stay. A strong reaction resulted, with Nkowankowa as the flashpoint. The house and businesses of Ntsanwisi in Nkowankowa were stoned in December 1990 and he had to leave the town. Ntsanwisi closed the Tivumbeni college in March 1991. However, the unrest continued in the following years up to the early months of 1994, in expectation of the political transition (*Beeld* 5 March 1990, 6 April 1990, 3 November 1993; *City Press* 18 November 1990, 2 December 1990; *Sowetan* 21 February 1990, 5 March 1990, 15 March 1990, 19 March 1990, 25 April 1990, 20 March 1991; *The Star* 23 February 1990; *Weekly Mail* 2 March 1990).

In Berlyn the political unrest manifested itself in the resistance of the civic association to cooperate with the headman and the school boycotts that affected the studies of the learners negatively due to a period of general disruption and turmoil. Part of the manifestation of the rural protest and evidence of the social unrest that was building up in the country were the witch-hunts that functioned as a medium for expressing antagonism against political opponents of the youth activists, such as traditional leaders and traditional healers, but it was also directed to the older generation, especially to marginal figures and people who could become scapegoats such as old women and other vulnerable individuals. In Bonn, a settlement across the mountain from Berlyn, a series of suicides by young people sparked a witch-hunt that led to the death of seven people in 1990. In the period 1985 to 1995 a total of 389 people were killed in the northern part of the country in witch-hunts that flared up from time to time, typically hunting down a person accused of witchcraft, stoning the person and burning the body and house of the victim.

Isak Niehaus, who has studied witchcraft in the Lowveld in depth, indicates that the comrades profiled themselves as the protectors of the community and guardians of morality by acting against apartheid and witchcraft. The general turmoil of the political transition years in South Africa and the absence of strong civilian or political structures in the rural areas of the poorest provinces provided a space in which young men could step in and take the lead in political activism. John and Jean Comaroff framed this change in the structure of political competition in South Africa with reference to a move away from race and class towards cleavages between age and generation social categories. Witchcraft accusations and the killing of witches was the work of young men who were trying to rid society from

¹³ Chief Muhlaba II had strategically joined the struggle by becoming a member of Contralesa. In the late 1980s political anger had been directed at his rule in the area of the Nkuna traditional authority.

the enemy within that was seen as vicious and difficult to identify, being associated with the negative side of the supernatural order. The prominent role of young men was facilitated by the absence of migrant workers. The young men were attending secondary schools that provided a common meeting-site and they were joined by a large number of unemployed young men. Their political activism acquired a strong masculine ethos and an emphasis on the need to overcome the political ignorance of their parents' generation. It took a few years before the ANC leadership could establish sufficient control over the activist youth and effectively put an end to the witch-hunts (Kohnert 2003:218, 221; Niehaus, Mohlale and Shokane 2001:1,9,146-148,181; Van Kessel and Oomen 1997:566).

A core focus of the youth activism in the rural areas, ten years after the Soweto revolt in the urban areas, was their resistance to tribal leadership. This was a widespread characteristic of the rural unrest throughout the Bantustans. Traditional leaders were seen as the agents of the central government and their participation in Bantustan politics was resented. Furthermore, the taxes and levies that they demanded as 'the owners of the land' made them very unpopular. The chiefs had lost some of their influence and the income from migrant registration fees when influx control was abolished in 1986. In some places chiefs were chased away by angry mobs and they were often in conflict with the civic associations that were formed in the settlements. In the Berlyn settlement the civic association took over adjudication functions from the headman and started to undermine his position in development activities as well, e.g. by disciplining the water pump attendants who were accused of a lack of commitment to their work. Local civic associations were active from 1985, but a national umbrella body was only formed in 1992. Given the resistance to traditional rule, it was no surprise, that traditional leaders looked for an escape out of their precarious situation by forming links with the ANC. In 1987 the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (Contralesa) was formed as a progressive, liberation-oriented and ANC-linked organization. Chief Muhlava II also joined the organization which helped to move the attention of the comrades away from him (Ntsebeza 2005:254, 261, 262, 263; Van Kessel and Oomen 1997:564, 567, 568).

Not only did national politics with regard to the liberation movement play a role on the local level in the rural areas, there was another dimension to the shift in power: a fear of white revenge to the black liberation struggle. Niehaus describes this fear in another part of the Lowveld where it was expressed in a fear of poisoning and witchcraft by whites (Niehaus 2003). In the Berlyn context there was a realistic fear of the white Afrikaans-speaking and extreme rightwing movement, the *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (AWB) that was active in the Letaba valley. In the 1992 referendum for white voters on the continuation of constitutional negotiations, the frustrations of the right-wing about the loss of white power was acted out on cattle owned by black people. One morning, shortly after the referendum, a cow was found close to Berlyn, near the tar road with her tongue cut off and painted on the side with the AWB logo. It had to be killed. Two other cows were painted with the word *NEE* (NO), presumably as an indication of the rejection of the referendum by the AWB. The fear of right-wing violence before the 1994 transition was often expressed by the villagers, especially the possibility of being shot at from a passing motor vehicle, something that did occur from time to time in the Gravelotte commercial farming area not far from Berlyn (*Beeld* 24 March 1992; *Sowetan* 23 March 1992).

From 1990 until early after the transition of 1994 there were attempts across the country, pro-actively and in anticipation of a democratic and integrated governance system, to get negotiations and cooperative planning and decision-making on municipal matters going. Various authorities and interests groups were involved in these transitional fora. In the Ritavi District of Gazankulu there had already been attempts at bringing business interests of Tzaneen and Nkowankowa as well as municipal managers together into a planning body before 1990. There was a Nkowankowa Development Committee, a Ritavi Functional Committee and a Ritavi Task Team that produced a *Ritavi Subregional Integrated Development Strategy* (De Villiers et al 1990). Despite the enormity of the gap between the Bantustan structures and the liberation movement, there was an attempt to retain some continuity with existing planning structures and to bring various role-players together that had

strongly divergent ideological points of departure. Some continuity with the pre-1990 planning process was built into the formation of the Upper Letaba Development Forum in 1990 that brought together Gazankulu planners, the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), the Gazankulu Development Corporation, the civic associations on the regional level and white commercial farmers. This body aimed at integrated development planning, away from the separation imposed by the former apartheid-based exclusivist homeland planning. However, in 1992 it was reported that the Greater Letaba Development Forum had collapsed (*Letaba Herald* 11 September 1992). At that time, before the actual transition of the 1994 election and change of government, the form that local government was going to take was quite uncertain. In fact, the Local Government Transition Act of 1993 that put in place the structural framework for transitional structures was silent on the former Bantustans (Ntsebeza 2005:255). New governance structures and new forms of interacting with them were to follow.

From liberation to protesting its limits: 1994-2013

On 10 May 1994 the new South African government under president Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the culmination of the formal South African transition from apartheid to democracy was reached. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) (ANC 1994) with its strong emphasis on meeting the needs of the population and a focus on public participation was widely supported in the country and seen as the vehicle for structural change. The people of Berlyn now found themselves in the Northern Province (later renamed Limpopo Province), the poorest province with an average income of R725 p.a. in 1995 and real unemployment estimated at 48%, the lowest literacy rate in the country, an extremely high infant mortality rate (57 per 1000 births) and a high population growth rate. The transition to democracy was the result of two elites coming to an agreement and in the new governmental dispensation the tendency of the democratic government to become detached from the people was built into the process that unfolded in the next twenty years. The first sign of this detachment was the demobilisation of the UDF and the civic organization. On the local level this lack of articulation with grassroots politics, despite the establishment of parliamentary offices in every voting district, led to frustrations about the neglect of local needs due to the focus on national and provincial structures of government and a disconnect between the former position of the liberation movement against traditional leadership and the national politics of inclusion and accommodation that followed after 1994 (Levin 1996).

Intermediate structures (Transitional Local Councils and development fora) were formally instituted on the municipal level before 1994 to facilitate the transition towards elected local government structures that were to follow the 1995 local government elections. Initially, there was some continuity with the old order in the creation of councils that replaced the former all-white municipalities. In the vicinity of Berlyn the nearby town, Letsitele, became part of the Greater Letsitele/Gravelotte Transitional Local Council that consisted of 10 councilors broadly representing the different interest groups in the area (Du Toit et al 1998). However, the disconnect between the former and new political orders was so deep that the structures that emerged in the De Klerk reform period were increasingly ignored in the creation of a new set of planning and governance structures after 1994. This led to the loss of institutional and technical capital in the building of new planning and development structures (Levin 1996). In the Berlyn area and the Limpopo Province, more broadly, the need for a radical break with the past was evident in the dismantling of institutional structures that were associated with the former Bantustans. The GDC and its projects, the subsidies to the industrial growth point at Nkowankowa and the Gazankulu agricultural projects, including those on the Berlyn farm, were summarily brought to a halt. This process of de-industrialization and de-agrarianization led to the laying off of thousands of workers who had benefited from the state subsidies flowing to the area in former times.

In 2000 new, democratic and larger structures were formed for back-to-back municipalities across the country. Each municipality contained an urban core and a rural hinterland. In this way all former Bantustans were included in the municipal system. The Nkuna tribal area became part of Tzaneen

Municipality and the Mopani District¹⁴. For the purpose of development planning, infrastructure provision and local administration the municipality was the body that would have to work with the traditional leadership structures in their area of jurisdiction. Initially, this superimposition of a democratic structure over the traditional authorities led to considerable antagonism and a lack of cooperation between the traditional leaders and the ANC government as the functions of traditional authorities were unclear. Nationally, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs was supposed to bring municipalities and traditional authorities under one administration. The formulation of Integrated Development Programmes (IDPs) and the work of municipal councilors in their wards¹⁵ was initially extremely difficult with regard to the tribal areas (specifically the cooperation they needed from the chief and headmen), including in the Tzaneen municipality. This lack of cooperation and uncertainty about roles was due to the unresolved question about authority over land matters. However, this was to change with the legislation that was subsequently created to support and strengthen traditional authorities.

After the democratic transition the position of traditional leaders changed from rejection by and conflict with Sanco and grassroots ANC members to uncertainty about their future role in governance and from there to recognition and strengthening of their position vis-à-vis democratically elected representatives. In the negotiations towards democracy, constitutional guarantees were given to traditional leaders, who were organized in Contralesa, in a process, supported by Nelson Mandela, that aimed to draw in all centers of power. The traditional leaders used threats of non-cooperation and violence to make sure that their role in local government would be fully recognized. A fundamental issue was the contradiction in the Constitution that foregrounded democracy but also recognized the inherited position of traditional leaders. As Ntsebeza (2005:33) indicates, democratic and inherited power cannot be harmonized without changing traditional leadership towards becoming democratic itself. Especially problematic from a human rights perspective was the position of women in traditional communities where they were seen as legal minors. Nevertheless, two acts in 2003 gave more clarity to the future of traditional leadership. The first one was the Traditional Leadership and Governance Framework Act that recognized and regulated the role of traditional leaders and traditional councils. The second law of 2003 was the Communal Land Rights Act (CLARA) which gave traditional leaders extensive rights, in consultation with their subjects, to allocate and administer land. In this way traditional authorities were given more powers in land administration than they had before, strengthening their position in a core area of their existence as against local interests and the interests of women. The act stipulates that ownership of land is to be transferred from the state to 'communities' that can be tribal councils, thereby strengthening undemocratic relations and patriarchal relationships. Although the law was declared unconstitutional, the government continues to strengthen the position of traditional authorities and thereby undermines the rights of rural inhabitants, especially women who have to submit to traditional law and its gender discrimination.

One of the priorities of the new South African government was to address the dispossession of land from black people after the 1913 Natives Land Act by a programme of land reform. The new ANC-led government enacted the Restitution of Land Rights Act in 1994 and set up the Commission for the Restitution of Land Rights and Land Claims Courts. By 1994 90% of the land was owned by white South Africans who formed less than 10% of the population. In the apartheid years 3,5 million people had been forcibly removed from their residential sites to be relocated in often very unfavourable conditions, as we have seen was the case on the Berlyn farm. Restitution, as one of three forms of land reform¹⁶, was open for claims on land that was dispossessed after 1913 up to the cut-off year 1998. A total of 79 687 claims were lodged of which 97% had been settled by 2012. The land claim of 200 beneficiaries on the farm Berlyn near Tzaneen has been dragging on for a number of years since 1998. The farm has been used by the ancestors of the community even before the land was turned into a land company farm, then a Trust farm and now a part of a traditional community's area. The

¹⁴ Formerly Letaba District.

¹⁵ Every ward was required to have an elected ward committee to assist the councilor.

¹⁶ The other two are redistribution and tenure reform.

residents were relocated three times in order to give up their fertile land next to the Letaba river to white farmers and later to the homeland government for a sisal plantation. Not all who should benefit are included on the list of claimants and it is frustratingly difficult to get any insight in the process that is handled by the provincial department of Land and Traditional Affairs.

The idea of communal land tenure linked to Communal Property Associations that are under the control of traditional councils builds a continuity with apartheid-type divisions in the population: tribes and language groups that were previously associated with Bantustans. In fact, the payment of cash to claimants or the restitution of dispossessed land has usually led to investment in land close to tribal areas, thereby enlarging and reinforcing the former Bantustan borders (Ramutsindela 2007). This can also happen if the Berlyn land claim will be settled in favour of the claimants.¹⁷ Apart from what has been done by the state with regard to land reform legislation, much more work is needed with regard to provide different types of rural land settlement for the poor rural landless population (tenure reform). In Berlyn, people who do own their houses and have some access to land cannot get collateral loans from financial institutions as access to land always depends on social relationships of patronage. Cattle-owners and those who want to invest in agriculture cannot make investments, a situation that is aggravated by the chief's reluctance to grant permission for viable projects. The lack of a strong pro-poor policy in land reform can be related to the international climate of neo-liberalism that has become globally dominant and that heavily impacted on the South African transition. The result was that politically, civic equality was achieved, but that socio-economic or class inequality was generally not sufficiently addressed.

Traditional leaders were given an increasingly more important role in development matters and they would also be more strongly represented in the municipalities of their areas. Their role was further strengthened by legislation that regulated and strengthened their jurisprudence. This legislation was strongly contested as it extended the right of jurisprudence by traditional leaders without the option to access the courts of law. This move towards a strengthening of traditional leadership can be partly accounted for by the changes in the global context that put the nation state under pressure, due to the expansion of neo-liberalism which was accompanied by unregulated markets and a reduced state. With regard to development, the shift from the RDP to the GEAR policy was a similar move away from the democratic ideals of the ANC. Like indirect rule under British colonialism the strengthening of traditional leaders would mean a large saving on administrative costs (Ntsebeza 2005:3,14,15,19,20, 22,257,259,270,274,275,282,288; Van Kessel and Oomen 1997:572-575).

The extension of government functions under traditional leadership in the democratic dispensation was soon visible in the opening of branch offices of various departments at the traditional council offices of the Nkuna traditional community. It was also clear on the level of the settlement that the provision of RDP houses, social grants, infrastructure improvement and development matters in general had to meet with the approval or recommendation of the local headman. If land was involved, the office of the Nkuna traditional council had to be approached. Relationships between the Tzaneen municipality and the traditional authorities improved, but this was due to the extension of rights and the recognition of traditional leaders. In a further measure to strengthen traditional leadership, the headmen across the country started to receive a stipendium to enable them to do their official work. At Berlyn, indeed, the local headman was more than before the local center of power and communication and the role of the civic association decreased to that of a potential watchdog in times of crisis.

The constraints that the government had to face with regard to implementing the RDP and to meet the huge challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality in the country meant that many of the expectations about progress and improvement that had been formed among the poorest part of the population during the phase of liberation could not be realized soon enough. It took long to get the

¹⁷ There has been a counter-claim by subjects of chief Maake (South Africa 2012), probably descendents of the Sotho-speakers who were forcefully removed from the land in the 1960s.

municipal and provincial structures into place and it was not always possible to spend the money allocated for development. In recent years the focus of the public has increasingly moved to corruption in the government as a disabler of development. The high hopes of 1994 have made place for a sense of disappointment as the limits of liberation were reached, a decade into the new South Africa. On the level of the Berlyn settlement a rise in unemployment due to the closure of the factories of Nkowankowa and the layoffs of labourers in the agricultural projects has hit households hard. At the same time, due to mechanization, many of the citrus farms in the Letaba valley have laid off many of their workers and employed fewer workers on a permanent basis. The result has been that men have had to find alternatives to local jobs. With the rise of crime in the country and the growth of the private security industry, it is remarkable how many young men are finding employment in the security industry recently. This is one of the industries that does not need high educational qualifications. Other men try to find a job in the metropole of Johannesburg and Pretoria as migrants, but the competition for vacancies is very high. The new South Africa has not brought many new employment opportunities, in fact the level of unemployment is as high or even higher than under apartheid.

This sense of the failure of the new political dispensation to benefit rural men in the former Bantustan is aggravated by the struggle for municipal services. While electricity has at last reached the Berlyn settlement in 2011, other settlements were given electric connections much earlier. Water provision remains a continuous source of irritation and frustration. The taps that are available in the settlement only provide water for a few hours on unpredictable times and for days on end the water provision in the settlement may be disrupted or is haphazard due to technical problems with the water pipe system, the theft of electric cables or pumps or other preventable reasons. The result is that women and children who are responsible for fetching water, have to go long distances to bring water or even to buy water. Education has improved in the last few decades, with new school buildings and a secondary school that have been added to the local educational facilities. In the secondary school serving Berlyn and Mulati the high pass rate for the final year of school is attributed to the dedication of a new headmaster. However, children find it very difficult to get access to higher education, coming from the disadvantaged background of a rural area and struggling to communicate in English. In recognition of the educational challenges in these settlements, president Zuma promised to have a library built after he visited the settlement during a presidential tour in 2009. The library has now been built and may prove to be of huge benefit for local children in the future, but at the same time it is perceived to be misdirected as it is placed out of reach of other settlements and too close to the existing and struggling library in Letsitele (Tzaneen Municipality 2013:125,129 and 133).

Social grants have increased substantially since 1994 and are one of the most important sources of income in many households. The high number of these grants is, in another way, also an indication of the extreme poverty that people are experiencing in Berlyn and its vicinity. The main focus in recent years, however, is on the lack of security services for which the South African Police Services are blamed. Everywhere in South Africa high levels of crime have become a focus of public attention. In many parts of the country, including in the Lowveld, people have started to protest the lack of public protection and to take the law into their own hands. In the Lowveld there is a move from a moral panic about witches in the late 1980s to a focus on thieves and rapists. As Isak Niehaus (2012) frames it: the change is 'from witch-hunts to thief-hunts'.

In 2012 and 2013 several murders and rapes took place in the vicinity of Berlyn that were insufficiently investigated by the police. People had gone missing and their bodies had been found with parts cut off, clearly a sign of *muti*-murders by people who used negative supernatural power to harm their fellow community members. At one point a woman was killed and another raped where they were collecting firewood in the bush. The survivor pointed out a prophet and healer in the community as the culprit. This prophet was also suspected of giving protection to criminals and bribing the police. When the police questioned the suspect and then released him, the rumour went viral that the local police station at Letsitele could not be trusted and that they were corrupted by the prophet. A mob of people attacked the house of the prophet, burnt his two cars and houses and chased him and his patients out

of the area. Members of the community were then charged with arson and had to appear in court. Before the court case a memorandum with complaints by the community was put together and handed to the police at Letsitele after a mass protest march of several thousand people from settlements in the vicinity. The mass action was organised by employed men who had strong links with the ANC structures in the area. A few weeks later the police met the community on a sports field and a high-ranking police officer (a female brigadier) addressed the meeting from the back of a pickup van through a loud-hailer. Her vague references to the police's commitment to continue investigating the matters did not satisfy the crowd and when the crowd became aggressive and demanded that she come off the vehicle, the organizers sped her away, just narrowly escaping while some people were already starting to pick up rocks to throw at the vehicle.

A few weeks later, on a Friday afternoon, a woman reported a young man of a neighbouring settlement to the headman of breaking into her house and stabbing her in the leg. She had first gone to the police in the morning to report the case but as the police were not pitching at the crime scene, the headman sent out people to look for the man. He was found and brought to the headman's court when it was already getting dark and alcohol and marijuhana were contributing to a heady atmosphere. While he was questioned by the headman and those present, he was already hit by bystanders who were clearly after his blood.¹⁸ Someone must have alerted the police as two police vehicles appeared but spinned away when they were stoned, windows and headlights smashed. When the suspect seemed to have argued himself into a corner, the mob became very aggressive and eventually he managed to escape and run away into the night. He was caught a 100 meters away from the scene and beaten up until unconscious, then the body was dragged back to the public space and dumped – bruised, bleeding and without a shirt. The police appeared: 12 vehicles, searchlights, the police general of the region present - many men with guns on the ready got out and first kept a safe distance while the crowd restlessly moved around. Eventually, the police entered the area and about an hour later an ambulance took the victim away. At midnight the police left, but in the next days they came back to take the headman for questioning and they also hunted down any young man they could find in the village to take them to the police station for questioning.

In January 2014 similar protests against the police erupted further to the north in the Tzaneen area with similar characteristics. Protesters engaged the police at the rural settlements of Kubjana and Relela in a running battle during protests about the poor response of the police after murders had been reported and allegations that they had been bribed. Fire and stones against guns - three community members were shot dead (*Mail and Guardian* 31 January 2014).

There are important structural changes embedded in the move from witch-hunts to thief-hunts (Niehaus 2012). In the early 1990s during the witch-hunts that were used for political action by the comrades of the time, the idea was to cleanse the country from evil that was associated with the malevolent supernatural power of older people, especially marginal women. The witches were stoned and burnt as symbols of an old order that was resisting liberation and the arrival of an utopian future of development and progress. Twenty years later, the ANC leadership has effectively suppressed the witch-hunts of the transition period, got the comrades under control and established order through the law and order departments and, in the tribal areas, the traditional authorities. It is now criminals that are hunted down, and either killed or beaten up as a demonstration of the need to get rid of the new evil that haunts society: crime by mostly unemployed and poor young men. Times have changed, the utopian future seems to be out of reach and is undermined by criminals who need to be punished in the eyes of a disenchanting population. The social movement against crime, often accompanied by service protests, has erupted across the country. It reflects high levels of social insecurity fired by the AIDS pandemic, unemployment, neglect by the state, corruption and high levels of crime. In the international context these fears and insecurities are driven by neoliberal policies that withhold the state from spending more on services and that put the nation state itself under financial pressure.

¹⁸ I was present and tried to protect the man from the attacks on his body by staying close to him and challenging the attackers.

Concluding remarks on transformations in Berlyn

The concept of 'slow violence', coined by Rob Nixon (2011), is useful for looking at the changes that have taken place over a period of 170 years in the experience of the people of Berlyn and the six or so preceding generations. This notion helps to make sense of the series of entangled events and forces that in combination resulted in repetitive experiences of dispossession, subjection, marginalization and neglect on a structural level.

On the collective level, the refugees that arrived in the Lowveld in the mid-19th century due to the wars in Mozambique adapted to the political conditions of their time by moving around as vassals to various Sotho-speaking chiefdoms, looking for more security. Eventually they settled near the Kgaga chiefdom as their military allies under the political leadership of the ruling lineage. They provided military assistance to the forces of the South African Republic (Transvaal) and the Union of South Africa. They received the Swiss missionaries at Shiluvane as a means towards greater independence through the acquisition of a mission farm and mission education. This alliance with the mission strengthened their independence from the Sotho chiefdoms and pulled them into the co-construction of an ethnic identity as Tsongas, with a standardized language. The demarcation of a location and recognition of chief Muhlava I by the colonial administration were important steps towards the growth of a small elite of professionals who used the emphasis on tribal identity by successive governments to strengthen the Nkuna chiefdom and the larger imagined ethnic unit that was given structural shape as the Gazankulu homeland under apartheid. The people of Berlyn were associated with the Nkuna chiefdom but lived on company and commercial farms where their subsistence farming was increasingly undermined by the farming of the white farm owners and subsequently the citrus and sisal project farming of Gazankulu. Several forced relocations brought them to the present settlement that has been rapidly expanding in the last three decades. In the last decade of apartheid resistance to the system spread from the urban areas to the Gazankulu towns and settlements with the young men taking the lead in challenging the political system, especially in educational institutions. Associated with this was a period in which witch-hunts were used as a political weapon by the youth organized as comrades and a civic association.

After the transition to democracy and the destruction of Bantustan structures, Berlyn became part of Ward 25 of the Tzaneen municipality. The Nkuna tribal area was gradually integrated into the Tzaneen Municipality in a process of 'cooperative governance', associated with the strengthening of the traditional authority. Infrastructure such as housing, water provision and electricity as well as education and health services were improved since 1994. However, the competition for services between municipal wards and tribal areas is high and the provision of services is outstripped by the demand. With strengthened traditional leadership and the slow pace of service delivery, the headman is perceived as the stronger political figure in the local arena, with the ward councilor being at a disadvantage due to the size of the ward, the associated lesser visibility and the jurisdiction over land by traditional leaders.

In the last few years, with increasing disappointment about the achievement of the new democratic government and with the realisation of the limits of liberation, the collective anger of villagers is again directed towards evil forces. Rising expectations, more unemployment, growing inequality and political instability add to the insecurity of rural residents. This time, however, the violent moral panic is less focused on the supernatural invisible dimension of evil as mediated by the older generation, but more on the invisible anti-social behavior of insiders, the unemployed and poor young men. Vigilante type action against the criminals in the settlements is combined with violent protest against outsiders who deliver poor services and are perceived to be corrupt. The police service is not trusted and protest action and violent clashes with the police occur from time to time. ANC officials are involved in the protest, leaving little room for political mobilization by new political players, such as the Economic Freedom Fighters.

Access to land for food production was a vital need of the refugees coming from Mozambique from the 1840s onwards. Apart from a short period in which it was possible for black people to buy land in the early 20th century, access to land was managed by the white mission and the colonial government that held tribal land in trust. The tribal leadership was given the formal control over the land and has remained in that position since the early 20th century. The refugees were living on that tribal land and on land that became the property of land companies and of commercial farmers, initially paying rent and later becoming labour tenants. Due to the politics of segregation and apartheid they were forced to move to Native Trust land that was placed under the control of the Nkuna Tribal Authority and at a later stage under the Gazankulu Bantustan administration. The Berlyn families were forcefully moved from the fertile land next to the Letaba river where they had been living for generations and dumped on marginal land in the hilly and rocky part of the farm and then again forced to move into demarcated stands during the process of land betterment. After 1994 it was possible to lodge a land claim based on forced resettlement and this happened for the Berlyn land in 1998, just before the cut-off date for land claims.

Migrant labour wages have become the main source of livelihood, increasing in importance as the residents in the settlement were drawn into the industrial economy and had to pay all kinds of taxes. Migrants still tend to come home irregularly, but the increased transport facilities make more visits from the urban area possible, while cell-phones have led to a communications revolution. As the highest incomes can be earned in the urban areas, many opt for work there, but many also find lower-paying work in the region, and many of the younger men are now recruited by the security industry. By the 1970s subsistence agriculture had become very marginal to the provision of food, although it remained, together with informal sector activities, important for specific periods of unemployment or as an addition to processed food and money income. Social grants were extensively increased after 1994 and became an important basis for women to have a marginal financial independence.

The changes in the political and economic domains had effects on gender relations. Women's position in the household was severely undermined by migrant labour and the end of the self-production of food. Women also received less education than men when schools became available. High levels of interpersonal violence directed to intimate partners was an indication of the low social status of women. Patriarchal ideology and customary law confirmed this low status. Women were, however, increasingly also gaining education and taking part in the wage labour economy. Female work in the citrus industry in the Letaba valley was of high importance. After 1994 women have benefited from the constitutional guarantees of social equality in many fora, including the meetings of the headman with villagers or the ward committee where they fully participate and take a leadership role. Furthermore, the extensive improvement of social grants and the provision of social housing has strengthened the social position of women. Legislation against intimate partner violence seems furthermore to have a real positive effect through its sanctions against the violation of the female body. However, cases of rape remain high and may be connected to the increasingly dire position of a number of unemployed young men who do not have the means to create a family.

Generational relations started off with a strong emphasis on the authority of older men over women and their children. Migrant labour gave young men a possibility of establishing their own families without complete dependence on their fathers and patrilineal relatives. The breaking up of multi-generation family clusters during the resettlement of the community in demarcated residential stands accelerated this process and made households less dependent on each other. Children were, however, often sent to live with their grandparents where they could contribute to household labour needs. Continuous improvement of and participation in education played an important role in separating the older uneducated from the younger educated generation. This difference was especially important during the political resistance of the comrades in the final years of apartheid when the parents were blamed for their political naïvety and lack of political resistance to the homeland system. Young people challenged the traditional leadership structures and lived with women without marriage formalities. As the job market required higher levels of skills and education, many young

people are seeking higher education and many are unemployed. This increases their dependence on their parents. After 1994 the older generation also regained control over political and community structures. The strengthening of traditional leadership, furthermore, contributes to the demise of structures, such as the civic organization that were controlled by young people in the previous decades. The violent turn on young criminal males as the collective social enemy during thief-hunts is an indication of the junior role that young people again play in the social fabric. Transformations take place but institutions are resilient and give evidence of continuities and adaptations.

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