

PRINCIPALS, CHIEFS AND SCHOOL COMMITTEES: THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION IN RURAL LEBOWA, 1972 – 1990*

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INTRODUCTION

In December 1994, Heather Jacklin and Johan Graaf, two UCT academics, submitted their final report to National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI), convened in 1989 by the National Education Policy Crisis Committee (NECC). The reports covered the structure and systems of education in the ten former Bantustans, and sought to prepare the groundwork for the new education order just as the processes of incorporation into democratic South Africa had been finalised. Ominously the report on Lebowa, the Northern Sotho ‘homeland,’ was titled ‘Inherit the Wind,’¹ a phrase that resonated powerfully with the dramatic upheavals in schools across Lebowa during this period. Newspapers from the early 1990s heralded what looked like pending doom, with headlines such as “Lebowa Chalk-Down Enters Ninth Week,”² “Row Over Arrears for Teachers,”³ and “Sex for Marks Scandal Rocks Lebowa.”⁴ By 1994, and after the publication of a damning report on corruption and maladministration in Lebowa’s Department of Education,⁵ it looked like students of schools in what then (primarily) became the Northern Province, would, in fact, be left to “inherit the wind.”

*A note about sources: The Lebowa Archives are uncatalogued. All references from the Lebowa Archive are from my own cataloguing system. All interviewees names have been anonymised.

¹ “He that troubleth his own house shall inherit the wind: and the fool shall be servant to the wise of heart” (Proverbs 11: 29)

² South African Press Association (SAPA), “Lebowa Chalkdown Enters Ninth Week,” *The Citizen*, 28 September 1993.

³ Nel, D. “Row Over Arrears For Teachers,” *The Star*, 16 November 1993.

⁴ Matala, M. “Sex for Marks Scandal Rocks Lebowa School,” *The Star*, 23 October 1991.

⁵ De Meyer, O “South Africa. Kommissie van Ondersoek na dies Besteding van die Lebowa-inkomstefonds en Beweerde Wabestuur in Lebowa, Derde Verslag,” Government Printers, 1993. (Hereafter, this will be cited as the De Meyer Commission.)

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Such levels of corruption have been taken as almost paradigmatic of the rotten core of the Bantustans. From the comprador class of Roger Southall's *South Africa's Transkei* to the graft of Mahmood Mamdani's "decentralised despots,"⁶ the Bantustan leadership and their administrations have been mired in failure. In this paper however, I want to probe the equation of the Bantustans to corruption, by asking not only how this corruption *reflected* the Bantustans' moral bankruptcy, but what its role was in the *making of* the Lebowa administration. By focusing on local patron-client networks in rural Lebowa, it starts to become clear that the administration was both made by – and facilitated – neo-patrimonial relationships.

The Bantustan school is perhaps the best place to locate this study. Despite a range of insightful works on Bantu Education and rural school politics, there has been very little research conducted on the institution and bureaucracies of these schools. This has been a serious oversight, as it is in these less dramatic spaces that fundamental historical processes have played out. As Laura Evans argues, there is much to be gained by focusing on "the role of non-agrarian resources controlled by the state... in forging relations and new political dynamics between the state and the local people in the homelands."⁷ The schools of Bushbuckridge, on the western edge of Lebowa, are particularly fruitful sites. It is most starkly obvious here how the violent generational politics of the late 1980s – as best explained by Edwin Ritchken and Isak Niehaus⁸ - were intertwined and shaped by the

⁶ Mamdani, M. *Citizen and Subject. Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Kampala: Fountain, 1996.

⁷ Evans, L, "South Africa's Bantustans and the Dynamics of 'Decolonisation': Reflections on Writing Histories of the Homelands," *South African Historical Journal*, 64:1, pg. 133.

⁸ Ritchken, E. "Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge: Struggles to Define Moral Economies within the Context of Rapidly Transforming Political Economies," Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Witwatersrand, 1994 and Niehaus, I. *Witchcraft and a Life in the New South Africa*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

administration, entrenching unexpected relationships between chiefs, teachers and business elites.

By placing the institution of the school within the political and moral economy of the era, it starts to become clear that the processes of Bantustan ‘state’ formation were locked into multiple layers of local meanings and productions of authority; which in turn, were shaped by institutional configurations. Such a project entails, as Clifton Crais has shown, an examination of “the personalities, conflicts and machinations of bureaucrats who devised and ultimately implemented policies.”⁹ In this case, it is therefore the changing relationship between the chiefs, principals and school committees – the triad of school governance in rural schools in Lebowa – that drives the paper.

I make my argument by focusing on rural education in the district of Mapulaneng, which was on the border of Gazankulu in Bushbuckridge. This was one of the eleven districts of the non-contiguous Lebowa “homeland” and furthest away from the capital and its resources. Prior to the construction of the Bantustans, the area was very ethnically heterogeneous, populated by a range of chieftainships, including that of the people that came to be known as ‘Shangaan¹⁰’ and Pulana, many of whom were intermarried and did not have strong ethnic identities.¹¹ It was only with attempts by the apartheid government and the effort to concretely ‘retribalise’ that the area configured more strictly along ethnic lines, often producing an aggressive

⁹ Crais, C. ‘Introduction’ in Crais, C. (ed.) *The Culture of Power in Southern Africa: essays on state formation and the political imagination*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003, pg. 4.

¹⁰ See Harries, P. ‘Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity Among the Tsonga-Speakers of South Africa’ in Vail, L. (ed.) *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, London: J Currey, 1989.

¹¹ Ritchken, E. “Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge: Struggles to Define Moral Economies within the Context of Rapidly Transforming Political Economies,” Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Witwatersrand, 1994, pg. 163.

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nationalism. By the late 1980s, its population totalled 130 000 people most of whom were forcibly relocated into the area in the 1960s and 1970s.¹²

THE SLOW PRODUCTION OF SCHOOLS AS SIGNIFICANT, 1912 - 1953

The first schools in Bushbuckridge were primarily Swiss Mission schools, the most active mission in the area. After arriving in 1872, the Mission attached itself to the Paris Mission in Basutoland,¹³ but soon sought out its own ‘tribe’ to proselytize. The Berlin Mission Station had already laid claim to the Pedi of Sekhukuneland, and so the Swiss moved on to the south west of the Zoutpansberg Mountain, where had heard about the presence of ‘bergkaffirs’ or ‘knobneuse.’¹⁴ Settling in the Bushbuckridge area, the Swiss Mission identified Portuguese East African refugees – “Shangaans”, living under Pulana authority speaking a set of languages that the missionaries would come to call collectively ‘Tsonga’ – as prospective converts. They left the SePulana speakers to the Berlin Mission Station, to be incorporated into their project of converting all “Northern Sotho” speakers along with assumed brethren who spoke similar dialects, such as Pulana. Had they attempted to convert the Pulana however they would have met many more obstacles than they did with Shangaans, as the Shangaan chiefs had – despite much disagreement – eventually taken a decision to negotiate with the ‘white state’ and its Christian representation as a local counterweight to local Pulana chiefly authority. The Pulanas on the other hand rejected the church and increasingly white state, for the danger it posed to ancestral authority and the church’s position on circumcision,

¹² Ritchken, “Learning in Limbo, Part II, Experiences of Secondary Schooling in the Mapulaneng District, Lebowa, 1989.” For the Education Policy Unit, 1990, pg. 2.

¹³ Ritchken, E. “Leadership and Conflict,” p. 185

¹⁴ Quoted in Ritchken, E. “Leadership and Conflict,” pg. 185.

an important part of Pulana youth socialisation. Edwin Ritchken quotes a retired Swiss Mission Principal's recollections:

“The Pulana had a different culture. When they were twelve or thirteen they would go to initiation school and then straight away go to work. When they returned they got married. They were not interested in school. The “Tsongas” would stay at home during their teens and go to school.”¹⁵

There were however, Lutheran Mission attempts to convert the Pulana. Born in 1885 and son of a Kgoši Radia Mahlakoane, Hosea Makata Mahlakoane, pioneered Christianity under the auspices of the Berlin Lutheran Church. His son, Michael Mahlakoane's notes on his life tell of his struggles in proselytizing across a wide region to Pulana communities. Summarising his difficulties, he said that

“They walked a long distance from Salique to various congregations [;] He later used a mule called Neggie to visit his congregations [;] He bought a bicycle and rode on it to visit congregations [;] he eventually bought a Plymouth Motor Vehicle from Dr Jones of Acornhoek Hospital (Tintswalo), which helped him visit congregations.”¹⁶

He spent his life attempting to evangelise communities and set up churches and schools across the Bushbuckridge area. The earliest church/school he set up was Molototse in 1912 in Frankfort on a farm owned by a white farmer, Golman. His name became known across much of Bushbuckridge, despite the fact that in attaching himself to the church he forcibly dislodged himself from his father, a Kgoši his family and its local sources of traditional authority.

¹⁵ Ritchken, E. ‘Leadership and Conflict in Bushbuckridge: Struggles to Define Moral Economies within the Context of Rapidly Transforming Political Economies,’ Unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Witwatersrand, 1994, pg. 188.

¹⁶ Personal Correspondence with Michael Mahlakoane.

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Over the next fifty years the status quo slowly began to change. By the mid-1930s, the church was becoming an increasing threat to the Pulana chiefly authority. Mr Matsane, born in 1934 near Burgersfort, told a dramatic story about the resistance to education by the chief under whose rule he and his family fell:

So my father was killed because ... he put himself out and said no, my wish is that my children should school. If I allow this boy to grow into a man, before he goes to school he may not be able to do what I wanted him to do. You know what it means, you're going to transgress the tribal rules and so on. And then they organised a group of men and they killed him.¹⁷

At the same time, the viability of an agricultural life was becoming increasingly unsustainable. As Peter Delius and Sekibakiba Lekgoathi have both argued, the mixture of betterment policies, the creation of tribal land and an increasingly migrant economy, meant that parents slowly started seeing schooling as the best alternative to farming to ensure a successful life for the next generation.¹⁸ By the late 1950s and early 1960s, most children in the wider Bushbuckridge area were at least starting school.

The introduction of Bantu Education in 1953 was, however the most decisive factor imprinting education on black landscapes – (originally) both urban and rural. And with the Eiselen Report (1951) and the institution of Bantu education (1954) Black Education was removed from the administration of mission schools and placed under direct state control.¹⁹

Jonathon Hyslop discussion the state's reluctance to spend huge amounts of money on black

¹⁷ Interview with Mr Matsane, Burgersfort, 15 April 2013

¹⁸ Delius, P. *A Lion Amongst the Cattle*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1996, pg. 155; Lekgoathi, S. 'Reconstructing the History of Educational Reform in a Rural Transvaal Chiefdom: The Radicalisation of Teachers in Zebediela from the Early 1950s to the early 1990s' Unpublished MA Thesis, University of Witwatersrand, 1995, pp. 160-161; Manyike, NL, "Schooling in Sekhukhuneland, 1956 – 1976: Resistance, Co-option and Legitimation," Unpublished M.Ed Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1992, pg. 50.

¹⁹ Kallaway, P. 'Introduction' in (ed.) Kallaway, P. *The History of Education Under Apartheid, 1948 – 1994*, Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 2002, pg. 2.

education as well as a resilient persistence to see the tribe as the basic unit of African society. This resulted in the proliferation of the ‘Community Schools’²⁰ in which the state had minimal financial duties to the school, and the burden of raising money for schooling fell on communities. Furthermore, in an attempt to get local buy-in from the parents and these communities, school committees and school boards were set up. Hyslop quotes Verwoerd’s speeches to parliament in which he explained that administration of black education

“...will make him [“The Bantu”] feel that he is co-responsible for his education but that he is also assisted by the guardian [“The European”] in so far as he is incapable of assuming responsibility for it...” His conception of ‘co-responsibility’ was “two-fold – it is co-responsibility for control, but associated with that is co-responsibility in respect of finances.”

The apparatus for decentralising the administration of black schools relied on the School Board and School Committee, made up of representatives from local areas and approved by Pretoria. The school committee was made up of local parents and traditional authorities, while the School Board covered a larger geographical area, and was controlled by local leaders and representatives from Pretoria. Sello Mathabatha writes about the school committee in Sekhukhuneland, whose members were “pro-government in outlook and were confidants of government officials. They were only semi-literate with only elementary education, but vested with the power to control the school and schooling staff.”²¹ In Bushbuckridge, Rev Hosea Mahlakoane, the first black Lutheran Missionary in the area, headed the School Board, along with, according to Rabbi Khosa, ‘old and traditional men.’²²

²⁰ There is a longer history of ‘Community Schools’ but they only really expanded with the introduction of Bantu Education.

²¹ Mathabatha, S. ‘The Struggle over Education in the Northern Transvaal: The Case of Catholic Mission Schools, 1948 to 1994’, Unpublished MA Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, pg. 87.

²² Interview with Rabbi Khosa, Polokwane, 31 May 2013.

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The School boards played an important role in overseeing and controlling teachers who might evidence some form of political resistance to the system.

By the mid-1960s, Bantu Education and the changing nature of the apartheid economy meant that black education structures were very much part of the broader state apparatus, responsive to a mix of the capitalist economic drives, urban concerns and an increasingly central ideology of ‘tribalism’.

SCHOOLING APPARATUS IN LEBOWA

While the structure and governance of community schools were put in place with the passing of the Bantu Education Act, the function of Education was only hived off to black administration with the creation of the Bantustans. Thus Transkei, the first Bantustan on the road to ‘independence,’ took control over education in its territory in 1963.²³ In Lebowa, this process happened later when it was categorised as a ‘self-governing territory’ in 1972, entrenching ‘tribal’ aspects of schooling in the Northern Transvaal reserves and shifting the locus of direct power away from Pretoria. Firstly, the function of education was outsourced to the administrations in line with attempts to develop autonomous ethnic homelands and up until the 1990s, no central funding was provided for education.²⁴ This helped bolster the economic and ideological preferences of the apartheid state. Within Lebowa however, the government agreed to finance ‘departmental’ schools in ‘proclaimed towns,’ but left this responsibility to communities and traditional authorities outside of these towns, with serious implications for the financial structure of the Bantustan schools. Proclaimed towns were strategically defined by the Lebowa government, and often excluded very dense settlements,

²³ Horrell, M. ‘A Decade of Bantu Education’ for the South African Institute of Race Relations, Johannesburg, 1964, pg. 52.

²⁴ Jacklin, H and De Graaf, J, “Final Report of Homeland Education” in Rural Education in South Africa: A report on Schooling Systems in the Bantustans, NEPI, 1994, pp. 6-7

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with the justification that “schools in these areas have more in common with schools in remote, less densely populated areas than with schools in proclaimed towns.”²⁵

Different community schools required different amounts from the parents, but there were a number of standard funds communities were expected to pay. This included money for ‘school fund’ (usually between R2.00 and R20.00); a sports fee (up to about R15.00); a library fee (usually about R10.00); a night watch/security fund (not more than R5.00); funds for the employment of ‘private’ teachers (around R10.00); and always a building fund (which could be as much as R30.00 or R40.00).²⁶ The circuit inspector, a departmental employee, approved these funds and usually – especially in the case of a building fund or development fund – required principals to cease demanding the fee once the building was erected or the project was finished. It was seen as the duty of the tribal authority to initiate and collect these funds, not only from parents of children going to school, but from the community at large.

The only rebate available to parents was administered through what was known as the Rand-for-Rand scheme, in which the Lebowa Department of Education would refund communities 50% of building costs after the community had spent all the money and this refund would – at first – be banked through the Tribal Authority office. The department also paid the salaries of principals and teachers. However, for teachers to receive a salary they had to have the correct qualifications – the department would not pay the salaries of under-qualified or unqualified teachers, referred to as ‘private teachers.’ Communities often struggled to pay all these funds. In the words of Norman Malatjie, a former principal of Lekete and Ngwaritsane High School, attempting to raise the school fund “would make parents cry.”²⁷

²⁵ Jacklin, H. and De Graaf, J. ‘Summary Report on Homeland Education’, for NEPI, pg. 8.

²⁶ Lebowa Archives, Department of Education, Mapulaneng Register Circuit Office, 6261.

²⁷ Interview with Norman Malatjie, Bushbuckridge, 4 April 2013.

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This stood in contrast to schools in proclaimed towns, which received more departmental funding. Struggling with funds to build a laboratory, the Principal of Lekete High School wrote to the Department in 1980 “Beg[ging] to apply for financial assistance. The school is in desperate need of money to erect a laboratory, library, needlework/domestic centre and five additional classrooms.”²⁸ The principal was turned down by the department with the explanation that “The Department of Education is responsible for the erection of departmental schools only... The only proper step to take should be to approach the regional authority in this regard.”²⁹

The distinction between ‘departmental’ and ‘community’ also had important implications for governance structures in Lebowa schools. While the circuit inspector, a departmental employee, oversaw the running of all the schools in his (always his) circuit, individual schools were run by a school committee as school boards were phased out from the 1970s.³⁰ The De Meyer Commission notes that school committees were to be elected democratically through parent meetings and should include “five parents and four members elected by the inspector after consultation with local interested persons nominated.”³¹ ‘Local interested persons’ referred to the tribal authority, who was also responsible for “the allocation of land... the collection and control of community funds and the procedures for claiming subsidies.”³² The tenure of a school committee was, in theory, three years and five members at a meeting constituted a quorum. The principal played a vital role on the school committee too, as an ex-officio member. This differed to a departmental school in a proclaimed town, where the school governance committee was made up of the principal, vice principal, a

²⁸ Lebowa Archive, Department of Education, Mapulaneng Circuit Office, 6333.

²⁹ Ibid, 6332.

³⁰ National Archives of Pretoria, BAO 1.1901

³¹ De Meyer Commission, pg. 4. *Lebowa Gazette Government Notice No. 19*. Government Printers, 1978.

³² Jacklin, H. ‘Inherit the Wind’, pg. 7.

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teacher – as chosen by the secretary in consultation with the inspector and another person.³³

The major difference between these governance structures was the presence of the tribal authority, and for this reason, Heather Jacklin has termed this form of governance a hangover of the “colonial tradition of indirect rule.”³⁴

This structure firmly placed community schools within the logic of the ‘local state’ of the Bantustan, where community structures were bound up with tribal authorities, consequently were increasingly ethnically defined and had significant distance from the somewhat more ‘secular’ Lebowa Department of Education. Rural Lebowa education apparatuses sought to strengthen the tribal notions of the Bantustans. The payment of qualified teacher’s salaries and oversight role of the circuit inspector was the only remaining direct channel of interaction with the Department – with, as will be shown later, significance for the modes of governance modes in the schools. While the Lebowa parliament consisted of 60 chiefs and 40 elected members there was a clear gap between the structures of government and community schools.

THE BIFURCATED SCHOOL³⁵: EARLY BANTUSTAN EDUCATION

1972 – 1980

Despite the defined structure of administration for community schools, the changing political and moral economies of the region produced quite varied forms of governance and power within them. This early period is best characterised by referring to the occupation of the space of school governance by two quite different forms of authority, linked to different levels of the Lebowa ‘state’s’ power. Chiefs and tribal authorities on the one hand, were presented as the legitimate representatives of the community and thus entrusted with the role of organising

³³ De Meyer Commission, pg. 5.

³⁴ Jacklin, H, ‘Inherit the Wind,’ pg. 10.

³⁵ Mamdani, M. *Citizen and Subject*. I use Mamdani’s terminology critically, to hint at two different forms of governance within the rural areas he characterises to be under the law of uniformly decentralised despots.

school buildings by gathering funds from the community – very much in the mode of indirect rulers. However, in the day to day running of the school they were often only tangentially involved. Principals and teachers, on the other hand, were often from outside the community, and were far more responsive to the ‘central’ Lebowan bureaucracy. In this position, they looked far more like a native administrator or magistrate than a community representative. The result was that principals, tribal authorities and school committees – the third element of the governance structure - formed an uncomfortable and unequally weighted triad. The distance between the leaders ultimately boosted principals’ authority while at the same time, allowed tribal authorities the space to embezzle funds. In this period schools were not yet securely embedded in the local Bantustan structures and experienced pulls in opposite directions.

While the Bantu Education Act of 1953 initiated the process of mass schooling for black students, there were still not very many schools on the Lebowa side of Bushbuckridge. In fact Lekete, established in 1966 was the only secondary school in the area,³⁶ and for that reason accommodated large numbers of students from all over the region. Taking over from Rabbi Khosa in 1971, Mr Matsane of Burgersfort was the principal of the school until 1976 when he was employed as the Rector of Mapulaneng College. While there were several Lower Primary and Higher Primary schools in the area, even the children attending these schools often had more than 10 kilometres to walk to school every day.³⁷ An indication of the sparseness of the schools in Bushbuckridge was the spatial structuring of administration in the area. Each school belonged to a regional circuit office, which in turn reported directly to the Lebowa Department of Education. In the 1970s there were 13 circuits, with Bushbuckridge falling into Bohlabela circuit in the Burgersfort area, which meant that

³⁶ National Archives of Pretoria, BAO 1.1901, 48/1080/7/2 Part 1

³⁷ Interview with Mr Matsane, Burgersfort, 29 May 2013.

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Lekete, the only Secondary School on the Lebowa side of Bushbuckridge was over 160 kilometres away from the administrative office.

The disparate communities that schools served in this era thus meant that the students came from a wider range of communities established under a larger variety of tribal authorities. Lekete for example, was originally established by the Mapulaneng **Regional** Authority, not the local Sethlare Tribal Authority. As chiefs shared in the building of the school, no one chief was particularly invested in it, opening a space for the principal – a Lebowa government employee – to hold a relatively independent position in the governance structures of the school.

In addition to this, the chiefs on the Lebowa side of Bushbuckridge were also primarily uneducated themselves and at times quite hostile to the project of education. They continued to derive authority from quite different sources to that of the school, which was often perceived as a threat. While there was the potential of accessing money through the structures of the school, this could be done without much engagement with the running and governance practices. Axel Maile tells a story about his secondment to establish Letsele High School in the late 1970s and his struggle with the chieftainship to limit the time young boys spent at circumcision school. When the chief first found out that he was demanding that boys spend only a short period time on the mountain,

“...they [the tribal authority office] couldn’t even speak to me. They called me to mošate and said, ‘tell this young chap what he is doing to our culture.’ I was bold though I respected him. And I said you have to be educated.”³⁸

³⁸ Interview with Axel Maile, Bushbuckridge, 12 May 2013.

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They eventually came to a compromise, with the chief agreeing that boys could get circumcised during the winter holidays, and would only go once, rather than attending circumcision school when their relatives were going too. Jonathon Hyslop found an even more dramatic tension between tribal authorities of the early Lebowa period and principals and teachers. Drawing on the struggle for control of the Lebowa parliament, between traditionalist Matlala and former teacher Dr CN Phatudi, Hyslop traces tensions between traditional authorities and western educated teachers who had not been circumcised. He quotes several examples of teachers being forcibly circumcised in Lebowa as part of this greater tension between different world views and competing claims to power.³⁹

Principals however, were positioned quite differently. Because the Pulana had rejected Mission education and very few schools had been set up in the area, almost none of the principals or teachers were locals. Leonard Komane, at school in the 1960s and 1970s, claimed that amongst his peers at schools, teachers were always said to have come from Pietersburg, the provincial capital, irrespective of whether this was true or not.⁴⁰ There was also a sense among Pulana in Bushbuckridge, that the Lebowa homeland privileged Pedi ‘citizens’, and being far flung out on the western periphery of the Bantustan they were perceived as stupid.⁴¹ Years later in fact, there was an attempt by the Mashile brothers, two MPs representing Mapulaneng in the Lebowa parliament, to appeal to the central South African state for Pulana homeland extending all the way from Middleburg to Bushbuckridge, and in doing so, to separate the Pulana from ‘Pedi hegemony.’⁴² Principals were thus primarily thought to exist outside of local community structures and had a closer relationship

³⁹ Hyslop, J. ‘School Boards, School Committees and Educational Politics: Aspects of the Failure of Bantu Education as a Hegemonic Strategy, 1955 - 1976 ‘ in Bonner, P. et al. (eds.) *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1989.

⁴⁰ Interview with Leonard Komane, Hazyview, 29 March 2013.

⁴¹ Ritchken, E. “Leadership and Conflict,” pg. 300.

⁴² Ritchken, E. “Leadership and Conflict,” pg. 302. Interview with E Chiloane, Bushbuckridge, 2 May 2013.

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with the Department of Education and the Circuit Inspector than with the tribal authority office or community. Even when teachers were local, the fact that there had been a range of forced removals into Bushbuckridge, meant that parts of the community were unknown and local networks barely existed.⁴³ The Principal's Council, "an extended arm of the circuit in particular and the Department in General to which they owe allegiance by virtue of their appointment,"⁴⁴ affirmed principals' allegiance to the Lebowa Department of Education.

Furthermore, in the early 1970s, school boards were phased out as they were increasingly vilified as proxies of a white government. In their place, the school committees and circuits were expected to play the role they had previously filled. The school committee however were not nearly as socially powerful as the school board had been, especially in Bushbuckridge where the Reverend Hosia Mahlakoane, the first black Lutheran Missionary in the area, had presided at the head of the board. The school committee members tended to be poorly educated, if at all, and all the principals that I interviewed barely paid them any attention. Mr Matsane said of the school committee,

"most of them were quite... ignorant as far as educating was concerned. But what I did [was] I took the regulations, which were written in both Afrikaans and English and I would translate them into the vernacular. So that when we have meetings, they know what we're talking about... They were actually there just to rubber stamp. They didn't have much to say. Although they did, they were given the powers to talk to the students and tell them what is in charge and mind you most of them were illiterate. You found a principal who had his own things, he would just mislead them"⁴⁵

⁴³ Niehaus, S. 'Witchcraft and the South African Bantustans: Evidence from Bushbuckridge' in *South African Historical Journal*, 2012, 64: 1.

⁴⁴ Lebowa Archive, Department of Education, Mahwelereng, 3177.

⁴⁵ Interview with Mr Matsane, Burgersfort, 15 April 2013.

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The impotence of the school committees even became a concern of the Department which tried several mechanisms to ensure they played the role they had been assigned. Constant reminders were sent out about holding proper meetings, for example,

“... to the circuit Inspectors and school committees, seeing that in some parts of Lebowa the school committee do not comply with the regulations.”⁴⁶

Those parents who were not on the school committee held almost no power over the school and the behaviour of the teachers. Many parents were migrant labourers and thus were not around to be involved to oversee their children’s education,⁴⁷ and generally discipline and authority was not questioned. Mr Malele recalls returning home after a brutal beating at school, and explained that while his parents were sympathetic, they

“believe that you couldn’t have been beaten if you didn’t do anything wrong. So it’s a question of you having invited it... So while they will sympathise with you, it will be rare when a parent will take you to school and inquire what was the problem, because if they do the child will become a victim.”⁴⁸

These structural circumstances meant that there was a significant symbolic distance between the authority of chiefs and that of principals. The principals derived their authority from very different sources to that of the Chiefs and Tribal Authorities and consequently exercised it differently. Responsive to the circuit office and the Department of Education in Lebowa, they came in face to face contact on a daily basis with the children of Bushbuckridge, administering education, often in fairly authoritarian ways. Tribal authorities and their representatives on the school committee, on the other hand, were removed from this day to day governance role, instead effectively limited to collecting taxes to establish and build schools.

⁴⁶ Lebowa Archive, Department of Education, Education Registry, 6419, 1979.

⁴⁷ Ritchken, ‘Learning in Limbo.’

⁴⁸ Interview with Mr Malele, Cottonfale Circuit Office, 12 April 2013.

Sello Mathabatha's work on Roman Catholic schools in Sekhukhuneland suggests that the mere existence of community schools historically had propped up the status of the chiefs sympathetic to the white government, giving them direct access to school resources. He goes on to claim that "the newly elected chiefs saw the changes as an opportunity to legitimate and symbolize their new positions by establishing community schools."⁴⁹ While principals could – and did – act as authoritarian commanders in their schools; and there were enough loopholes in the system for tribal authorities to recklessly embezzle funds, these two forms of capturing the school – through governance and through finances – rarely happened conjunctively.

.....

It would be incorrect however to characterise this period with one brush stroke. Other forces were at work, producing many exceptions to the rule. For example, after 1976 there was sudden rush of urban students to rural South Africa. While Bushbuckridge was hardly affected by the 'conscientised' students in Soweto and other urban centres in South Africa, the increase of urban students in the late 1970s started spreading youth political consciousness and a sudden massive increase of students in the schools. This in turn, led to a higher demand for schools and a sudden proliferation of schools in Bushbuckridge in the latter part of the decade. The apartheid state also took a stronger decision to discourage black urbanism and thus put a moratorium on black high schools being built in urban areas. The alternative, they suggested, was for more high schools to be built in the Bantustans. Also, by the late 1970s, a generation of Bushbuckridge students had gone to school. Consequently, the kind of structures that allowed for principals to hold autonomy from the community were already eroding away throughout the decade.

⁴⁹ Mathabatha, S. 'The Struggle over Education in the Northern Transvaal,' pg. 85

“NGWANA WA MOBU”⁵⁰: THE LOCALISING OF BANTUSTAN SCHOOL POLITICS, 1980 -1994

In 1980, the Lebowa Department of Education created a fourteenth circuit by dividing the Bohlabela circuit into Bohlabela and Mapulaneng, citing the difficulty of managing the large Bohlabela Circuit.⁵¹ Despite the division, at the end of 1980 the new administrative circuit of Mapulaneng was home to 36 876 students, making it the fifth largest in Lebowa.⁵² The number of schools in the area was now markedly more than had been in the Lebowa side of Bushbuckridge a decade earlier and signalled the changing configuration of power and authority in local school administration.

Perhaps of most significance was the fact that a generation of Mapulaneng residents had now gone through schooling themselves, unlike that of the generation before them. This had a few important effects on the running of Mapulaneng schools. Firstly - and ironically - it gave birth to large numbers of unqualified local teachers in the schools. In the earlier decades, the minimal number of schools in the area meant less pressure on the Lebowa Department of Education to advertise and pay for teacher positions. However, as the numbers and size of the schools grew, the Department's budget (or budget allocation) did not, producing high ratios of students to teachers in the schools.⁵³ Exacerbating this was the perverse financing structure of the Lebowa Department of Education, which would only allocate the post of a teacher in relation to the appropriate number of classrooms at a school. A community that could not

⁵⁰ “Son of the Soil” in SePedi

⁵¹ Department of Education, Lebowa, *Annual report*, Government Printers, 1979, pg. 4

⁵² Department of Education, Lebowa, *Annual report*, Government Printers, 1980, pg. 10

⁵³ Providing exact numbers for this is very difficult as there are serious discrepancies between the official data produced by the Lebowa Department of Education, and NGO and Archival documents. For example, the Lebowa Department of Education Annual Report for 1982 states that there were no privately paid teachers in 1983. However, there are multiple documents in the Lebowa Archive which contradict this information. For example, in a letter from the Circuit Inspector to the Principal of Ben Matloshe High School, dated 1 August 1983, it is noted that R2827-06 was paid out of the School Fund for salaries and wages. (Lebowa Archive, Department of Education, Mapulaneng Circuit, 6295)

Draft. Work in Progress.

afford to build a classroom could not get a teacher post allocated, resulting in serious overcrowding. School administration thus gathered funds from parents and the community to pay local top achieving graduates a 'private' (unqualified) teacher's salary before they went to training college, as the Department would not pay for under- or un-qualified teachers. Norman Malatjie for example, principal at Lekete and then at Ngwaritsane High in the 1980s, recalls keeping an eye out for promising students to recruit to return to the school as teachers.⁵⁴ It soon became common place for, as Heather Jacklin discovered, "[y]oung standard ten graduates [to]... use teaching as a temporary stop gap until other employment is found."⁵⁵ Edwin Ritchken's report on experience of schooling in Mapulaneng reported that Makoropane Primary, which he took to be a paradigmatic example of Primary Schools in the area, had an enrolment of 532 students and 14 teachers, ten of whom were unqualified; the largest class was the Grade One Class of 100 students, and the smallest class was 54 students in the Standard Four class.⁵⁶

The employment of local unqualified teachers played an important role in 'localising' school governance and the concerns of those that populated it. School committees – in theory, the representatives of the community of parents in the school – now had much more power over who got hired to teach in the schools. Zachariah Dlamini, originally from Soweto had an interesting story about his experience teaching at NP Mathibela High in Marite. He was recruited by the principal Mr Malisa, he explained, because of the principal's concern about the lack of qualified teachers in his school. According to Dlamini, the principal himself was highly qualified and, he explained,

⁵⁴ Interview with Norman Malatjie, Bushbuckridge, 4 April 2013.

⁵⁵ Jacklin, H. 'Inherit the Wind,' pg. 26

⁵⁶ Ritchken, E. 'Learning in Limbo,' pg. 3

“wanted his school to set an example for Bushbuckridge: he wanted to qualify teachers, which is why we were recruited to come teach there.”⁵⁷

He went on to explain that when he was hired, “most of the unqualified teachers’ contracts were not renewed there. They were phased out.”⁵⁸ Later on in the interview, Dlamini spoke about the communities’ hostility towards him that centred primarily around the perception that he, along with other outsiders had taken ‘local’ jobs.⁵⁹ The school committee’s powers and investment in the position of teachers had become increasingly political and tense.

The new generation of educated Mapulaneng residents also meant that principals were far more likely to be locals too and consequently, embedded in local networks. If not, they would struggle to command authority.⁶⁰ Principals, officially employees of the Department through the circuit, were thus deeply embedded in the politics and struggles for authority with makgoši and their representatives, bringing the tribal authority in closer communication with the department and combining sources of authority. The principals were seemingly impervious to much of the authority of the Circuit Office. The Lebowa archives are filled with letters written by exasperated Circuit inspectors year after year, making the same complaints and seemingly making no progress in holding principals to account. Mr Mathibela of Maripe High, for example, was known by many in the community to be involved in embezzling funds,⁶¹ and yet he remained principal of the school until he died in the late 2000s. A letter written by the inspector in the late 1980s claims that,

⁵⁷ Interview with Zachariah Dlamini, Bushbuckridge, 26 May 2013.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ For example, interview with Michael Mahlakoane, Brooklyn, 4 April 2013.

⁶¹ Interviews with Mr Malele, Cottondale Circuit, 4 April 2013; Interview with E. Chiloane, Bushbuckridge, 2 May 2013; Discussions with Edward Shokane, April – May 2013; Interview with Zachariah Dlamini, 26 May 2013.

It seems as though this principal thinks Guidance on Regulations regarding administration of school funds can be disregarded as long as the principal thinks he is right. This office strongly recommends that disciplinary measures be taken against the principal for such deliberate irregularities.⁶²

It is thus worth pointing out that the only threat to Mr Mathibela's authority at this time came from students and young teachers involved in the 'comrade movement' and the violent youth politics of the era. These viscous politics were a vital element in the local power struggles of the 1980s. Mr L Shokane, a teacher at Maripe High at the time recalled finding Mr Mathibela behind a bush, hiding from students he whom he said were threatening to kill him.⁶³ ⁶⁴The department, his employer, never managed to threaten his position of authority. Principals were less and less representatives of a Lebowa run from Lebowakgomo, and increasingly responsive to the local politics.

Makgoši and their representatives were also now more sympathetic and interested in schools, some of them having had the chance to go to schools themselves. In addition to this, the increasing pressure on the Bantustans to produce secondary schools to push black youths out of urban white South Africa, and the injection of money through the schooling system resulted in, as one commentator from Lekete High School noted, "each and every chief ha[ving] his own school..."⁶⁵ The investment of the Kgoši in the school was deepened even further, with the increasing unrest in Bushbuckridge from the mid-1980s. As is quite carefully documented by both Edwin Ritchken and Isak Niehaus, disputes over the Cottondale railway line border between Lebowa and Gazankulu became inflamed after the publication of the Consolidation Commission, which redefined the borders in Buskbuckridge

⁶² Lebowa Archive, Department of Education, Mapulaneng Circuit, 1879.

⁶³ Interview with L Shokane, Bushbuckridge, 19 May 2013.

⁶⁴ Lebowa Archives, Department of Education, Mapulaneng Circuit, 2750

⁶⁵ Lebowa Archive, Department of Education, Mapulaneng Circuit, 6331

between Lebowa and Gazankulu.⁶⁶ At the same time, the Mashile brothers, MPs for Mapulaneng in the Lebowa Parliament, announced the enforced removal of Tsonga speaking children from Lebowa schools and ban on teaching the language. Around the same time, an intergenerational war, characterised by a spate of ‘comrade’ led witchcraft killings terrorised communities on either side of the Bantustan borders,⁶⁷ and the increase in school boycotts – as was happening across much of black South Africa – caused serious instability in the region. These ethnic and community tensions tightened the local politics of insiders/outside and added to the re-positioning of the makgoši as central to local school governance. Despite thorough bureaucratization and massive changes to the rural landscapes, the Department still thought of the makgoši as holding a legitimate position as the head of a clearly delineated ‘tribe.’ On the 27th of September 1985, the Inspector of Education, MJ Masemola wrote to the Regional Inspectors, Circuit Inspectors, Principals of Schools and School Committees suggesting that the tribal authority be given a privileged position in controlling the violence by granting them

“...a say in the admission of school children from outside the area of the Magosi [makgoši and] That each Regional Authority should liaise with Circuit Inspectors, Student Representatives Councils and school committees to meet at certain intervals in order to sort our problems affecting the administration of schools and colleges in the respective areas under their jurisdiction.”⁶⁸

There was also a growing sense among the makgoši that the school governance offered important sites for community control as it gave them an opportunity to shape and socialise youths, as well as giving them the ear of the parents in the community. With the decreasing

⁶⁶ Ritchken, E. “Leadership and Conflict,” pg. 302

⁶⁷ Ritchken, E. “Leadership and Conflict,” pg. 305

⁶⁸ Lebowa Archive, Department of Education, Education Registry, 6453

investment in structures like circumcision schools, chiefs sought out new spaces through which to assert power. Peter Mashego, at school at Tladishi High in the 1980s, recalls the firm hand of A. Chiloane, the Kgoši at the head of the mošate attached to the school. He claimed that the representatives of the Tribal Authority, including Enos Chiloane were given their positions on the school committee to act as the ‘eyes and ears of the Kgoši’ and in turn, the eyes and ears of the Lebowa government.⁶⁹

Therefore those holding a position of authority in school in Mapulaneng started seeking their power from the same sources and were embedded in the same local systems. Principals, while still employed by the Lebowa Department of Education and still theoretically representing non-traditional authority interests were now closely locked into the same forms of representations as the makgoši. This produced a variety of effects on the nature of local school governance: at times it meant that there was collaboration in the administration – and abuse – of authority; and at other times serious struggle over power in the schools. The local schools, increasingly embedded in the local structures of the Bantustan state, had become sites of power acquisition and struggle, while at the same time reproduced the logic of the Bantustans as ethnically particular and tribally controlled structures.

Two cases of power struggles and corruption illustrate this in different ways. The first story is about the economic bind between principals and chiefs. By the 1980s, enough cases of tribal authorities embezzling money had reached the Department that provision was made for principals to bank school funds with the local magistrate.⁷⁰ Tribal authorities and their representatives thus found it harder to act independently in the controlling of funds. In the case of the chairperson of the Sethlare tribal authority who also served on the school

⁶⁹ Discussions with Peter Mashego, Bushbuckridge, April 2013.

⁷⁰ Ritchken, E. “Leadership and Conflict,” pg. 153. Also refer to Interview with Axel Maile, Bushbuckridge, 12 May 2013; Lebowa Archive, Department of Education, Mapulaneng Circuit, 3221.

committee at Greenvalley Primary, this resulted in a complex relationship with the local magistrate, with whom the funds were banked, and a large scale embezzlement of the building fund for the school.⁷¹ This was partially made possible as the Kgoši at the time, Rueben Chiloane, had a serious drinking problem and was therefore unable to maintain control over the school. But for many other tribal authorities and their representatives, this meant a closer connection with the principal of the school, who oversaw the banking of monies collected by the school committee. One of the most common ways that this financial relationship developed, was through the establishment of a school ‘tuck-shop’ on the school property. Because the tribal authorities acted as local government and therefore retained control over the establishment of businesses, this had to be approved by them. This allowed for a close relationship between many principals and/or school committee chairs who had access to school funds but in turn, needed favours from the local authority to set up a business on the school property. Both Lekete and Mathibela had tuck-shops owned by the school committee chairmen, with the profits inevitably *not* returned to the school. Zachariah Dlamini recalls that the school chairman at Mathibela High exercised an ‘inexplicable’ authority, often in conjunction with the principal. He speculated that the reason that the other school committee members were unable or reluctant to challenge him, was because he owned a tuck-shop and clearly occupied a position of power supported by the Kgoši.⁷² Edwin Ritchken also reports that

“A principal...complained that he was unable to open up a tuck-shop at the school because the chief demanded control of the tuck-shop.”⁷³

⁷¹ Interview with Mr Machate, Greenvalley, 10 April 2013.

⁷² Interview with Zachariah Dlamini, Bushbuckridge, 26 May 2013.

⁷³ Ritchken, E. “Learning in Limbo,” pg. 7

Draft. Work in Progress.

Clearly, together, the principal, tribal authority and school committee chairperson were able to control the schools finances and the direction it took.

The second story – about the power struggles at German S Chiloane Secondary in Brooklyn - had the opposite consequences. The school was established in the late 1980s, in response to a need in the community for another more local school for secondary students and was named after German S Chiloane, the Kgoši at the head of the Setlhare Tribal Authority. In early 1987 Mr NC Mashile took over as acting principal of the school, however, by the end of 1987, the relationship between the authorities in the school had disintegrated to such an extent that the Mapulaneng circuit inspector, Rabbi Khosa, was called into mediate. The tension revolved around an accusation that Mr Mashile was embezzling funds from the school fund. However, underpinning the accusations and the resulting tensions were more fundamental struggles over authority in schools, who deserved power and how this would be exercised. Again, the setting up of a tuckshop was central to the exercise of power. On the 1st of December 1987, the mošate wrote to the Circuit Office, accusing Mr Mashile of telling First National Bank, where the schools funds were banked, that a member of the school committee (and representative of the tribal authority) was too ill to add his signature to the request to remove funds from the school fund account. The mošate also claimed that the principal used public funds to build a tuckshop on the school campus without the permission of the Kgoši.

Mr Mashile responded to the complaint taking it upon himself to launch an investigation by going to the bank and asking them to recount what happened. He claimed that “verbally, the bank official has denied that they have received information convening ‘illness’ and ‘latent death’ of the complainant.”⁷⁴ Mr Mashile claimed that the accusations were “an underground

⁷⁴ Lebowa Archives, Department of Education, Mapulaneng Circuit, 6371

Draft. Work in Progress.

plot to throw me from my school's leadership." And in explaining why he would not go speak to the complainant in his home, claimed that

"My school, like any other civilised institution, has its own independent capital (i.e. the office of the principal. That problems pertaining to this [sic] schools have their rightful place where they are being solved (i.e. the office of the principal and NOT at someone's home)... I still stress – the office of the principal is to be seen as the force of gravity and as a point of departure for all problems that are related to the school".⁷⁵

In response to all these allegations, a commission was constituted by the Mapulaneng Magistrate Office, under the leadership of the Secretary for the Chief Minister on the 8th of August 1988. It recommended that

"Since the Principal behaved in an unceremonious manner, this Office recommends the dismissal or transfer to any School outside this Circuit as he seems to be too much involved in *local* politics. [my emphasis]"

The Circuit Inspector went on to speculate in a letter penned on the 18th of August 1988, that "It is alleged that the MP's [referring to the Mashile brothers] have much to do with the teacher and the chairperson of the school committee."⁷⁶ And re-iterated that he be dismissed or "transferred away from this area."⁷⁷ The letters, accusations and investigations continued into the 1990s, until, in the violence of the period, Mr Mashile was burnt alive in a brutal expression of power by students aligned to the comrade movement.⁷⁸

The story is both dramatic and powerful, giving us significant insight into the changed nature of the politics of governance in schools, and their development into sites of contestation over

⁷⁵ Lebowa Archives, Department of Education, Mapulaneng Circuit, 6380

⁷⁶ Ibid, 6371.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 6371.

⁷⁸ Interview with L Shokane, Bushbuckridge, 19 May 2013.

local politics. The first indication of this, is the tension between the mošate and the Principal – a struggle over access to control and resources. Secondly, it is very significant that the Mr Mashile of German S Chiloane High School was of royal blood. According to Mr Kgopah, who noted these difficulties as a serious headache during his tenure at Mapulaneng, Mr Mashile acted as he did because his position in the community gave him privileges and protection. He warned Mr Mashile a number of times to curb his behaviour, but he recalls coming up against arrogance and disdain for the authority of the circuit inspector. The sources of authority had merged and the school became a site for elite capture and battle over local spaces.

CONCLUSION AND EPILOGUE

This paper has tracked the developing significance of schools in rural South Africa by placing the institutions of education in a long history of colonial and apartheid governance. In the 1970s, elites of the Bantustan with significantly different power bases were able to capture the school through a number of mechanisms. This was possible both because of the formal structures of education and the informal way in which authority was produced and practiced. Two sets of patron-client relations penetrated the bureaucratic structures of the schools, representing the moral economy and its factions of the 1970s.

However, as the politics of the era changed, the administration of the schools structured a new set of social relations in Bushbuckridge. Whereas before, teachers and principals operated on different playing fields, the combination of the generational tensions of the era and the bureaucratic configuration of the schools allowed for new struggles – and new alliances – in the school. Thus, this paper ultimately shows how the administration of the local school tightened, how networks of governance became horizontal, and how authority became comprehensively embedded in Mapulaneng politics.

In tracking the development of neo-patrimonial networks, this paper does not make an attempt to explain why limited resources resulted in the corruption that plagued Lebowa schools. Rather, I focus on showing the effects of these networks on forms of governance in the schools, and on the development and nature of local administration. Following the changing political and moral economy shows how both formal and informal structures of governance adapted through the Bantustan era – with significant consequences for the future.

The early 1990s and the shift into democracy characterised yet another changed phase of the nature and production of authority in local Lebowa schools. While the late 1980s started showing strands of the unrest to come, in the 1990s this reached a new level of intensity and the emergence of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU) added yet another layer to the complexity of power in schools. Nonetheless, the increasingly localised nature of school administration and its relationship to the exercise and production of power in the 1980s set the stage for nature of local school administration in the post-apartheid era. As Tom Lodge, Ivor Chipkin and Sarah Meny-Gibert have argued, the structures supporting corruption and weak administrations in the former Bantustans have had a pernicious hangover into post-1994 South Africa.⁷⁹ This paper thus opens up a range of possibilities for future historical analysis of the dramatic and seemingly chronic disasters in contemporary education, especially in rural South Africa. In showing the significance of administrative structures and informal internal operations, this paper suggests how and why schools have fallen – and continue – to fall apart. In 2013, thirty three years after I periodise the increasing localisation of school governance, the politics of 'sons of the soil' remain prevalent in school administration in areas of the former

⁷⁹ Lodge, T. 'Political Corruption in South Africa,' *African Affairs*, 97: 387, 1998; Chipkin I. and Meny-Gibert, S. 'Why the Past Matters: Studying Public Administration in South Africa' *Journal of Public Administration*, 47:1, 2012.

Draft. Work in Progress.

Lebowa. As many of my informants confided to me off the record, it is still very difficult for outsiders – ethnically and geographically defined – to assert control over these structures.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Off the record interviews with SB and IS, Bushbuckridge, April – May 2013.

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