The Making of Lebowa’s Civil Service

This paper is an abbreviated version of a Chapter from my PhD thesis. In the chapter I argue that by injecting new resources into the Lebowa Bantustan economy, Bantustan government employment changed social, economic and political processes on the ground. This was particularly noteworthy because it shaped the lives of large numbers of Bantustan residents, reconfiguring social forms and structures in the region. Thus the Bantustan ‘state’ was an important driver of stratification in Lebowa, while at the same time government employment formed a central pillar of the Bantustan and central South African state’s attempts to take the edge off black political aspirations. While there has been little scholarly writing on the Bantustan civil service, that which does exist is primarily interested in the political affiliations of Bantustan bureaucrats. However, I show that reliance on a state salary did not predetermine civil servants’ political allegiances and to assume that state employment automatically produced a uniform class position is to miss the mechanisms – and varied outcomes – of Bantustan civil servants’ relationship to the state.

The abbreviated form of this chapter does two things. First, its tracks the growth of the Lebowa bureaucracy from 1972. While arguing that the expanding administration fundamentally shaped the region, I also show that this process was complex and uneven and so government employment did not produce a singular civil service class. However, secondly, many of Lebowa’s public and civil servants nonetheless did benefit materially from government employment. I demonstrate how government housing in particular facilitated new processes of stratification in Lebowa, shaping civil servants’ livelihoods, family structures, access to resources and strategies of accumulation.

The Africanisation, Growth and Development of the Civil Service

The desire to turn Lebowa into an autonomous ethnic state - in line with the interests of apartheid’s planners – fuelled both the growth and Africanisation of the Bantustan bureaucracy. Prior to gaining ‘self-governing status’ in 1972, much of the regional administration was staffed by white officials. After 1972 many of these officials remained in senior positions in Lebowa as ‘seconded employees’ from the central state, but there were increasingly loud calls to Africanise the administration. Over the next two decades the Lebowa administration grew at a remarkable pace, making the Bantustan government the single largest employer in the territory. By 1980 migrant remittances made up the bulk of household incomes, but a civil servants’ salary was slowly becoming the backbone of greater numbers of Lebowa homes.

The expansion and Africanisation of the Lebowa bureaucracy was a complex process, not only because a new generation of civil servants needed quick training, but because the whole bureaucracy was restructured to cater to the goals of the new Northern Sotho political entity. In the first instance, this meant that pay-scales were reconfigured to fit with a racially defined salary structure. As white civil servants were withdrawn from the newly constructed Lebowa, both the South African state and the Lebowa parliament were embroiled in debates about the appropriate wages and benefits for African employees.

2 D. De Klerk, Manpower Planning for Lebowa (Pretoria: Buro vir Ekonomiese Navorsing: Samewerking en Ontwikkeling (BENSO), 1981), 41. .
Pretoria controlled Lebowa’s purse strings, paying roughly 70 per cent of the Bantustan’s revenue. The central South African state could thus insist that seconded white officials earn more than their local counterparts, explaining that the financial burden on the state would be too great if black and white civil servants were on the same pay-scale. The central state argued that white officials did not live and work in the same place, and thus needed better car allowances and salaries for travel. Lebowa’s civil servants and MPs pushed hard against this policy, demanding that they should be involved in setting wages levels in the Homeland in conjunction with the central government. Over the following years small gains were made, but the Lebowa administration remained highly racialised, with white officials rarely falling under a black manager.

The departmental structure of the Lebowa administration also changed over the course of the 1970s. In the first half of the 20th century Native Commissioners had held significant power in managing administration in rural South Africa and from the 1930s the South African Native Trust (SANT) was central to rural governance. However, under Verwoerd’s leadership, the Department of Native Affairs tried to dilute ‘the commissioner complex’ by empowering chiefs, hoping to do away with the ‘paternalism’ of the pre-apartheid United Party government and promote the project of separate development. Thus until 1972, Lebowa’s local administration had largely relied on chiefs and magistrates to deal with matters of tax, courts and commerce, while education, health and other key services were either governed through mission stations or the central South African state. However, upon gaining self-governing status, six Lebowa Departments were established: Chief Minister and Finance; Interior; Justice; Agriculture and Forestry; Education; and Public Works. In the years to follow, the central South African state also handed over the function of the Department of Health to Lebowa and a separate Department of Law and Order was created to manage the Lebowa police.

The departmental structure of the new Lebowa administration had a two-pronged effect, reflecting some of the key concerns of local and South African officials who hoped to use the Bantustan state as a political vehicle to shape the rural countryside and legitimate the Homeland policy on an international stage. On the one hand it suddenly created new sites of state power in a previously under-administered territory in which the chief and magistrate had been the sole contact point with the state. On the other hand, where chiefs were particularly powerful – such as outside of the proclaimed towns of Lebowa – the administrative structure offered new resources for chiefly gatekeeping.

A strengthened chieftaincy was an important consequence of the new administrative structure, but the growth of the Lebowa administration did not solely serve the project of ethno-traditionalism. While there is no doubt that the Bantustans were a key pillar in apartheid’s racial segregation, it was also true that concerns about ‘development’ – an ostensibly apolitical concept - shaped much of the thinking within official circles, particularly from the late 1970s.

At times officials understood chiefs to be key agents of anti-poverty ‘development’ efforts, but at other times they focused their energy on establishing a form of modernity...
thought to be antithetical to the chieftaincy. Though South African administrators continued to conceive of the Bantustans as sites of a particular ‘African mode of governance’ there was often equal attention paid to ‘developing’ the Bantustan state by creating a ‘modern’ bureaucrat. As had played out elsewhere in Africa in the years after the Second World War, the insistence on ‘development’ as a mode of governance in the Bantustans shaped political and social structures on the ground.12

The concerns with creating bureaucrats for the creation of a ‘modern’ and ‘developing’ Lebowa spilled over into the general needs of the administration. By the late 1970s for example there were no concerns about the number of chiefs required for administration, but rather the Lebowa Public Service Commission (PSC) reported that it urgently needed 8340 more teachers and similar number of medical personnel.13 As the population was growing, and school going children were streaming into Lebowa in the aftermath of the Soweto uprising, the demand for teachers and teacher training colleges spiked. There was also an emphasis on the need to train up local engineers, technicians, and scientifically-trained agriculturalists for “long term planning.”14 The reports coming out Lebowa’s Manpower Division thus reflected the complex growth and nature of the Bantustan administration in a context in which local and South African politicians were anxious to take the edge off black political aspirations and create financially autonomous Homelands.

**Differentiation in the Lebowa bureaucracy**

The expanding Bantustan bureaucracy drove up demand for educated Lebowa residents who could enter the civil service as teachers, nurses, clerks and police. From the mid-20th century there was already a slow but steady expansion of schooling across the rural territory, but the twin pressures of a growing state and shifts in apartheid state policy significantly accelerated the process. While in the first half of the 20th century, schooling and education were deemed Christian pursuits by the 1970s schools mushroomed across the Bantustans and more parents were prioritising their children’s education in the hope that this would secure their future. Thus, unlike their parents, by the 1970s it was common for children growing up in Lebowa to have at least some formal schooling. Over the next decades the numbers of children in school only increased. In 1978, for example 84 500 children in Lebowa began school, by 1983 the Department of Education estimated that 96 000 children started school and in 1992 this number had risen to 113 865.15

Despite this general trend though, school attendance varied for a range of reasons, but most commonly because of financial constraints and gendered prejudices. And once in the Lebowa bureaucracy, civil servants’ experiences were also highly differentiated and resources were distributed unequally. Despite the drive to bring in a local labour force to staff the Lebowa administration and use the administration to ‘develop’ the beleaguered territory, the bureaucracy’s growth was felt unevenly by its various employees. In the first instance, this was racialised. Although the number of white officials dropped in Lebowa, they were nonetheless overrepresented in senior positions, ostensibly to transfer skills to the newly recruited black civil servants.16 This produced resentment from Lebowa’s civil servants, not only because white administrators continued to receive higher wages, better benefits and were more senior

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14 Ibid., 99.
16 In 1984, 357 positions were held by ‘Republican’ officers ie. white South Africans.
than their black counterparts, but also because, as one senior official explained, “Pretoria is not famous for handing over its best administrators to homeland administrators....”17 Local employment in the Lebowa administration thus tended to be bottom-heavy and there was serious concern about appointing black officials to senior positions within the administration, lest they hold a superior position to the seconded white employees. This meant that there were few locally held senior managerial positions within Lebowa.18

Women and men also had very different experiences in Lebowa’s civil servants. Not only were certain professions blocked off for only men but their pay and benefits differed quite drastically too. For example, the administration was conflicted about how to deal with pregnancy in the workforce. Female teachers were given leave, provided that they were married. However, if falling pregnant outside of marriage, women were suspended from teaching for a year.19

But the distribution of state resources to Lebowa’s civil servants was also heavily shaped by political and social connections, which made the administration’s growth follow very particular networks. Promotions, pay grades, sick leave and study leave were often issued through one senior official without much oversight. In 1990, FW de Klerk, appointed Oelef de Meyer to head up a commission of inquiry into maladministration in Lebowa. When the Commission called for complaints and submissions from the Lebowa public, commissioners were inundated with letters from civil servants explaining that they had been overlooked for promotion or improved benefits in favour of a colleague with better political and social connections.20 In the Lebowa Parliament in 1977, an MP went so far as to suggest that “one cannot get a higher post in this government if one is not related to the Chief Minister or to one of the ministers who are in charge of the promotions.”21 While this was an over exaggeration, there is no doubt that familial and social networks could determine one’s success and upward mobility within the civil service. As scholars have explained for many different contexts, nepotism is often particularly rife when gatekeepers control access to resources in an otherwise economically poor environment.22

But nepotism and neo-patrimonialism have also flourished when bureaucracies are weak and unable to impose their rules onto society. Similarly, in Lebowa, the chronic problems with promotions were also partially the product of a rapidly growing bureaucracy in a context of constrained resources. Unable to impose bureaucratic rules over the process of hiring and promotions, social relations and networks offered an alternative path to state resources. Promotions were managed by a subcommittee within the PSC, with seven ‘personnel practitioners’ tasked with managing the career development of approximately 24 000 civil servants by the late 1980s.23 In the Education Department limited resources and a rapidly expanding population meant that there was insufficient oversight of schools, giving local power brokers significant power to dictate the distribution of state employment opportunities. School management across the Bantustans was divided into regionally defined administrative circuits, but in Lebowa resources were so limited that each circuit had 102 schools in it. Circuit inspectors were stretched thin and thus there was significant room for schools to run independently from one another and for the school committee and chiefs to turn individual

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18 Ibid., 2.
schools into fiefdoms. Time and time again teachers who fell on the wrong side of a school’s governance system had their pay withheld or could not find employment.\(^{24}\)

The growth of the Lebowa administration was also determined by overt political concerns. While many individual civil servants supported the liberation movements, until the late 1980s the ethos of the administration was explicitly pro-Bantustan and opposed to any anti-state activity. Discussions about and within the civil service were couched in a discourse of professionalism, with many government employees also strongly holding on to a notion of themselves as a ‘professionalised elite.’ This was a common feature across all the Bantustans. For example, Lizzy Hull found that KwaZulu nurses linked the ideas of ‘professionalism’ with a particularly classed-notion of ‘respectability and ‘bourgeoisie’ morals.”\(^{25}\) No trade unions were allowed to operate in the Bantustans; instead Lebowa’s civil servants were represented by professional associations. As Sekiba Lekgoathi has argued in the case of teachers, until the schooling crisis of 1985, “cautious leadership had dominated teachers’ bodies, which, sycophantically, undertook to remain politically neutral and to cultivate an ethos of working collaboratively with the educational authorities.”\(^{26}\) Civil servants were expected to remain ‘apolitical,’ which meant being either politically apathetic or actively supporting the Lebowa government. The ‘professionalism’ in Lebowa’s civil service was thus far from politically neutral. Employees who displayed overt support for organisations critical of the Lebowa government were fired or isolated by their superiors. However, as youth protests engulfed Lebowa in the 1980s and the civil service became younger, teachers, nurses and administrators became increasingly radicalised. In response, senior officials in the administration went further and further out of their way to squash the careers of politically-active employees. By the mid 1980s the Lebowa Authorities resolved that any public servants involved in the UDF, AZAPO (Azanian People’s Organisation) or other ‘subversive’ organisations should be immediately removed from government employment.\(^{27}\)

Thus, though the Lebowa administration grew enormously over the 1970s and 1980s, the nature and shape of its growth was heavily determined by politics, gender and a lack of resources.

**The Bantustan House**

Despite the varied experiences of Lebowa’s civil service, a government job was nonetheless a prized position in Lebowa. A regular salary, a secure pension, and by the mid-1980s, medical aid radically changed the lives of Lebowa’s civil servants. But perhaps access to a ‘family house’ was the most significant perk of government employment. In Lebowa’s ‘proclaimed towns,’ where property could be owned in titled-tenure, the Lebowa government sponsored the construction and purchase of homes for its employees. Because many of the proclaimed towns were new creations built to service the growing Bantustan, there was very little existing accommodation to absorb the sudden influx of residents. The Lebowa government stepped in, concerned to provide housing for its growing civil service, and in the process, constructing a circular economy where Lebowa’s civil servants paid Lebowa’s builders to construct houses using locally sourced material. The central Lebowa government allocated a percentage of its houses to each government Department, which in turn set up their own Housing Committees to control the management of the properties. By 1982 Lebowa government Departments controlled around thirty-four per cent of all state-built houses in


\(^{25}\) Hull, *Contingent Citizens*, 41.

\(^{26}\) Lekgoathi, “Teacher Militancy in the Rural Northern Transvaal Community of Zebediela.”

\(^{27}\) *SAIRR Annual Survey* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1985), 293.
Lebowakgomo. The remaining sixty-six per cent fell under the control of the East Rand Administration Board, the Black Commissioner and the Town Council.28

At first the Lebowa government allowed occupancy in government houses only for the duration of government employment. But from the early 1980s, they released portions of government-owned houses into the market and gave the current occupants of the house preferential purchasing rights. Various Lebowa government departments offered their employees the option of renting to buy departmental houses, but by 1986 the Lebowa Cabinet had taken a decision not to build any further houses and rather offered subsidies to civil servants to build their own property.29 The 1986 decision was driven by a range of concerns, including resistance to paying maintenance costs and a generalised belief among policy makers that the government should play a less active role in housing provision.30 As Rebekah Lee argues, this shift away from state provided housing to ‘site and service’ units was part of a broader national trend that increasingly encouraged Africans to rely on the private sector.31 In Lebowa, by the late 1980s, more and more departmental houses were sold to civil servants – often with the support of government loans – in an attempt to get rid of government’s property.32 At the same time, Lebowa withdrew government sponsored transport for civil servants living outside of the proclaimed towns.33 While trying to place the burden of housing provision on its employees, the Lebowa government was also trying to encourage urbanization.

The departmental provision of housing was underpinned by two intertwined ideas about how to govern and manage Lebowa’s ‘proclaimed towns.’ First, the Lebowa government – along with the central apartheid state – was very concerned about trying to stabilise its population, in the hope that this would help legitimise the Bantustan project. Secure housing in the Homelands, it was thought, was a key way to achieve this goal. As early as 1977, before Lebowakgomo had even officially been designed as the Bantustan capital, there was a strong sense that the provision of housing in the newly constructed town would “promote…domiciliary contentment especially [important] as we are in a homeland situation.”34 Providing housing also propped up the Bantustan’s attempt at ‘creating a modern middle-class,’ a clearly stated goal of the Lebowa administration. In meeting after meeting, Lebowa officials declared their belief in the value of property – and particularly property ownership – to ‘development.’35 It was also hoped that secure housing would allow civil servants a foot into the housing market and relieve the state from its duties of supporting its employees.36

The role of housing in stabilising the Bantustan population and creating a middle class had a particularly gendered bend to it, both in provision and design. Deborah Posel has documented the phenomenon of ‘vat en sit’ marriages37 in securing housing in South Africa’s urban townships from the 1930s to the 1960s.38 To qualify for housing in urban South Africa

28 “Miss T.E Mokoka,” September 13, 1982, Dept. of Health, Box 3, 8/8/6/2, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
30 “Reply,” June 12, 1986, 61, Department of Health, Box 40, 8/8/6/2 Part 12b, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
32 “Houses as Official Quarters,” June 20, 1986, Dept. of Health, Box 3, 8/8/6/2, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
33 “Decision on Verbal Submission,” April 8, 1986, Dept. of Health, Box 3, 8/8/6/2a, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
34 “Dr Crous,” October 21, 1977, 29, Department of Health, Box 25, 8/8/6/1, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
35 “Re: Lebowakgomo Housing Project,” September 24, 1985, Department of Health, Box 2, 8/8/6/2 Vol. 10, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
37 Literally, ‘take and sit’ marriages
then, black men and women had to prove marriage, resulting in a proliferation of last minute marriages between strangers, to secure housing. Posel argues that housing provision was thus a form of social engineering, driven by a desire to create a compliant and stable black middle class.

Similarly, many Bantustan officials and civil servants associated ‘married housing’ as being a marker and driver of stability. Thus, in the late 1970s, Lebowa’s Departmental Housing Committees adopted a policy requiring all applications for ‘family’ or ‘married’ housing to be accompanied with a marriage certificate. There was even a suggestion that houses on main roads should be allocated to married couples, because doing so would supposedly help establish the desired tone of urban respectability. Housing committee officials were often sympathetic to the difficulties of living with extended family members and the Lebowa Government policy encouraged the creation and entrenchment of an idealised form of nuclear family life.

The design of government housing entrenched these idealised gendered and classed norms. There were different design options for state housing, but the most upmarket houses included an indoor toilet, built-in wardrobes, a garage and three to four bedrooms to house a nuclear family. These houses stood in contrast to an earlier generation of state-provided housing which were much smaller and, importantly, did not have both hot and cold water.

Housing as a capital asset
A government house gave Lebowa’s civil servants an important asset, often used as a springboard for accumulation. Many civil servants hoped to purchase the houses they had been assigned by the Lebowa government because they perceived that doing so would be a wise investment in their future and the future of their children. Nurses and teachers, particularly in Lebowakgomo where there was a serious housing demand, felt that purchasing their departmental house made immediate financial sense. PS Mohale, for example, an employee in the Department of Health, calculated that rental was almost double the amount of monthly instalments. His monthly rent in 1984 was R40,11 but to purchase the house he already lived in would cost him R25,00 per month in subsidized loan repayments. Many civil servants also felt that owning their house in a proclaimed town would secure their tenure and ensure a comfortable retirement. House ownership would allow civil servants to invest time and money into home improvement, making the house an even more valuable asset to pass on to their children. For civil servants who had bought furniture – an important asset for many black South Africans as it was often difficult to borrow money against property - a house in which they had secure tenure helped protect their already existing assets.

However, even rented property offered important benefits to Lebowa government employees. Having access to a house in a proclaimed town positioned civil servants close to work, but also within relatively easy proximity of key services. Schooling, hospitals and shops all became far easier to access and saved Lebowa’s civil servants transport costs. Departmental Housing Committees’ received letter upon letter asking for access to a proclaimed township house citing their difficulties of getting themselves to work and their children to school.

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44 “Purchase a Dept House,” June 24, 1984, Dept of Health, Box 39, File 8/8/6/2, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
45 “Purchase a Private House,” March 14, 1983, Dept. of Health, Box 2, 8/8/6/2, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
47 Deborah James, Money from Nothing (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2015).
well-positioned house in a proclaimed towns thus released some of the pressure on household finances.

Access to a state house also facilitated a range of economic activities for its occupants. In some cases, civil servants tried to rent – or sublet – their rooms to other civil servants or members of the general public. At times this was sanctioned by the local Departmental Housing Committee, but in principle housing provision remained part of the broader goal of creating a urban and stable, black middle class. Nonetheless, it was common for civil servants to rent out their rooms to supplement their state income. 50

The yards and spaces in official government houses also offered an important avenue for earning additional money. One family, for example, were known to use their back yard to rear ‘fowls,’ for subsistence purposes but possibly also to sell on the informal market.51 Florah Mabitsela used her house as a base to bake bread and cakes to sell outside the hospital she worked at.52 Though government houses were small, space could be made in the kitchen or yard to cook, grow, sew and store goods that could be sold on to the public.

Some civil servants were able to maintain land and links to their more rural family members, and some of my informants relied on access to agriculture and livestock to supplement their government incomes.53 However, this was not true across the board, and in fact, their mere status as a civil servant often meant that they struggled to hold on to productive land in rural Lebowa. For the most part, civil servants were far better educated than the chief on whose land they had lived. This often produced serious tension in rural communities across Lebowa, and chiefs exercised their power over land allocation to exclude their dissidents and opponents from the community. For those out of favour with the chief, housing in the proclaimed town was an important alternative to living on rural land under the chief.

Nurses and administrative clerks often also found access to a family house to be particularly valuable for furthering their career.54 Unlike teachers, nurses and clerks usually began working straight out of high-school. Throughout their career, they often did additional courses and gained new skills allowing for their promotion or specialisation. They thus were often writing exams and had to study. In a small house without privacy this was very difficult to do, especially after a long day at work. In citing their requests for housing nurses and clerks thus often asked for access to family housing because it would offer them the kind of privacy and quiet they could not get in singles quarters or living with extended family. Thus, a family house in a proclaimed town allowed civil servants a site from which to base themselves and invest in their careers and livelihood.

Shifting social relations

The availability of housing for civil servants did more than simply offer the owner or tenant access to a valuable asset. Housing also shifted and entrenched certain social relations, often reconfiguring the home as a unit of distribution. On the one hand, the availability of housing often bolstered the power of married men. Because it was easier to qualify for a ‘family house’ – either to rent or to buy - if you could prove that you were married, married couples were at a significant advantage to their unmarried counterparts. However, it was married men that the Lebowa government assumed would be applying for a government house, not their wives, even if their wives were employed. In a Housing Policy Circular, for example, house ownership was recommended for “officials whose salaries including those of their wives”

50 “Unauthorised Occupation of a Room”.
53 Mashiane, Interview by Phillips, Hwibi; Mafalo, Interview by Phillips, Lebowakgomo.
would enable them to buy or built their own house. This policy overlaid with the already existing patriarchal norms of society, in which married men often held greater economic power than their wives. In various letters written to the Departmental Housing Committees, it was clear that it was very common for houses to be registered in the name of male employees.

The registration of a rented or purchased house in a husband’s name gave married men important control over a powerful capital asset. In some cases, married women were able to share in the value of the house, but in other cases a husband’s control over the house entrenched their wives as their dependents. In one case, a nurse, MM Mokumo, wanted to join her husband in the family house he occupied in Lebowakgomo. However, unless she was prepared to position herself as his dependent, her application for the house was treated as a new application and her name went on to a waiting list that had an expected waiting period of eight years. Though, in theory, married women could own assets outside of community of property this was relatively rare and the Lebowa government privileged male property ownership for securing loans and housing. Thus married men, like Mr Mokumo, were able to accumulate through the Lebowa government policy with greater ease than their married wives.

Not only did the allocation of housing give married men additional economic and social power over their wives but entrenched their social power over unmarried men. Unmarried men particularly struggled to gain access to family housing in Lebowa. The department did not look favourably at the many men who asked for leniency in the housing policy because of the dependents they supported. But as one unmarried male nurse explained, he needed access to a departmental house for precisely the same reason that he had not been able to get married – that is, he had too many dependents to have been able to save enough for marriage. Unmarried, poorer younger men struggled to accumulate enough capital to get married, and thus were more often overlooked by the housing committees when applying for family housing to support their dependents.

Paradoxically, perhaps, unmarried women found it somewhat easier to access family housing than their unmarried male counterparts. This was partially because the Housing Committee assumed that unmarried men left their families and dependents behind in their rural village, whereas women were more likely to bring their dependents with them to the Bantustan townships. The children of unmarried men were also assumed to live with their mothers, rather than their fathers. This assumption did not produce a hard and fast rule, but it did give unmarried women, such as the nurse, Lorraine Mothiba, a sense that there was “standing rule that women with dependents can be afforded.” Housing access thus gave some unmarried female civil servants in Lebowa a form of economic independence that may otherwise not have been possible.

The 1986 shift in housing policy, which saw the Lebowa government sell off its housing in the proclaimed towns, gave an additional boost to the married men and unmarried women who had already secured access to family housing. Though the Lebowa government extended loans and housing subsidies to civil servants, in reality it was a lot harder to build one’s own house or purchase property off the open market. Those who had secured housing in the pre-1986 era were thus in a better position than their younger counterparts, who found it difficult to set up independent households to their parents and elders. The shift in the housing policy in

56 “Authority to Occupy No. 121,” April 18, 1986, Dept. of Health, Box 3, 8/8/6/2, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
57 “Memo to the Cabinet,” March 26, 1981, Landbou, Box 1, 1/8/4 Part 1, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
59 “Housing for Officers of the Department - Your Letter 10.8.81.”
60 Lee, African Women and Apartheid, 69.
61 “To Sec. Housing Committee,” May 1986, Dept. of Health, Box 3, 8/8/6/2, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
Lebowa thus contributed to the creation of multi-generational households centred around the assets secured by an older generation, with long lasting consequences. As unemployment rates rose across South Africa from the mid-1970s, the generational skewing of resources was increasingly a national pattern.

Not only did housing entrench and shift gender relations, but it shaped social relations more broadly, in turn stratifying Lebowa society in particular ways. Because of the political economy of the Bantustans, the vast majority of households were in constant flux, with new members entering and exiting in cycles that often followed the growth and collapse of the local economy. However, despite the near ubiquity of migrant labour in families across Lebowa, a physical home in a proclaimed town nonetheless helped to stabilise movement, both drawing clearer boundaries around a family unit and attracting extended family who made new claims on the network of the ‘house.’ Access to a government house thus both consolidated the household as a unit of production and a network of distribution. Time and time again, Lebowa’s civil servants wrote to the Housing Committee explaining that they needed a government house to separate their family from others. It made no sense, wrote Lucas Matlakala Maoto, a senior health inspector, for his family to stay with another family. “This may be compared,” he explained to the Housing Committee - seemingly without any irony - “to a government with full status in another government of similar status.”

Government housing thus helped harden familial boundaries – or, in Lee’s terminology, narrow the “geographical stretch” of the household - by creating one, unified physical space that delineated networks of distribution and production. Civil servants often applied for a government house citing the need to keep their dependents together and manage the complexity of their dependency networks.

As the unit of the family hardened through the availability of housing, departmental housing – both to rent and to buy – also drove diversified urban centres within the Bantustans. While town councils were in charge of administering a portion of the government built housing in Lebowa, government departments had far greater numbers of houses at their disposal. The town council, headed by an elected local superintendent, was sometimes accused of favouritism in its allocation of housing. The availability of departmentally allocated housing thus broke up the biased allocation of local town councils, as the imperatives of departments were often quite different to that of the superintendents and the town council. Government housing in some ways then helped contribute to a greater ‘pan-Northern Sotho’ community, breaking with some of the local patronage networks driven by Town Councils. As several informants have indicated, towns like Lebowakgomo were unified by the fact that they were populated with people doing very similar work. This helped create networks of commonality and ‘class-based’ trust.

Access to housing also allowed for the unit of production to expand and for civil servants to live more comfortably. Many female nurses and teachers hired ‘nursing girls’ to look after their children while they were at work. With a family house, there was more room for a ‘nursing girl’ to look after the children while parents were at work. Ultimately, government housing had an important stabilising effect on households, serving to make both

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64 “Application for Accommodation,” August 1983, Dept. of Health, Box 40, 8/8/6/2, Lebowa Archive (Polokwane).
65 Lee, African Women and Apartheid, 46.
67 “Application to Purchase a House. Miss Mabitsela MM.”
their networks of distribution and production more predictable and consolidated. This stands in contrast with the residents of ‘single quarters’ where tensions often ran high. Living in close proximity with strangers led to regular fights, weak social networks and low levels of trust.

Thus, ultimately, the availability of ‘family housing’ in Lebowa’s towns played a key role in shaping the lives of civil servants and stratifying society. A house served as a capital asset, especially (though not exclusively) if it was owned. A family house also had the power to shape social relations, which in turn shifted Lebowa’s civil servants’ livelihood strategies.

Conclusion

Thus the growth of the civil service accelerated a process of differentiation and stratification, giving educated Lebowa residents access to state resources that reconfigured social and economic structures in the Bantustan. The administration’s expansion was heavily influenced by the central and Bantustan states’ concerns with ‘developing’ Lebowa and creating a rooted, black middle class – a goal which some hoped would justify apartheid’s Homeland policy and others hoped would simply allow for upward mobility among the local population. However, as I’ve shown, the Bantustan state was not a neutral institution and accumulation was heavily skewed according to race, ethnicity, local politics and – importantly - gender.

As schools mushroomed across the Lebowa territory in the 1970s, the rapidly expanding Bantustan administration was able to draw young graduates into the ranks of teacher, nurses, clerks and police. Though I have explained that government employees had vastly different experiences, those who were able to secure regular employment and access to a government house or housing subsidy were at a significant advantage to their peers. These civil servants were particularly well positioned in the post-1994 period, building on their Bantustan era base in the new democratic era.