

Note to WISER readers:

Dear all,

Thanks for reading this edited/shortened version of a chapter from my recently completed PhD at the University of Michigan, **Property of the People? Imaginaries of Property Ownership in South Africa, 1900-1994**. I would be grateful for your thoughts on how to improve this chapter for future incorporation into a book based on the PhD, or a standalone article.

Here is a brief summary of my PhD, so you get an idea of where this chapter fits in. “Property of the People?” studies collective land-holding schemes on farms in the former Transvaal province to examine how land buyers imagined kinds of property that offered alternatives to the narrow categorizations envisioned by successive white-minority governments. I drop into specific moments and situations to examine the political purposes and conceptions of belonging underlying claims to land. My dissertation focuses particularly on the Native Farmers Association (the Association), a land-buying syndicate comprising over 250 families on the farms Driefontein and Daggakraal in the Transvaal province, in order to explore property debates and practices that circulated around South Africa more broadly. I argue that land buyers challenged and shaped the state’s governance project, its legal order and its track towards industrial racial capitalism. After the Introduction (‘Chapter 1’):

Chapter 2: “Making Collective Property: Seme’s Vision, 1905-1913”, details the founding of the Association. It elucidates Association founder Pixley ka Seme’s approach to property law, specifically how individual title deeds were central to his vision for an ideal community.

Chapter 3: “Land Bonds: Black Land Buyers’ Visions of Collective Property, 1913-1920”, charts how land buyers brought networks of credit with them to the Association that enabled them to imagine and implement a politics of collective land ownership – in a context where it was extremely difficult for black South Africans to obtain credit through formal legal means like banks.

Chapter 4: What you are reading for this workshop. It looks at the fortunes of the black farmers who bought land through syndicates – specifically at the Association and at another syndicate at Mogopa near Ventersdorp.

Chapter 5: “Land and God: Women’s church groups organizing against forced removals”, focuses on the work of black women’s church groups to facilitate spaces for women to debate and transform property issues (1970-1990).

Chapter 6: “Forging Property from Struggle: The Emergence of Communal Property Associations in South Africa” studies how farmers’ committees, women’s groups, land activists, lawyers and NGOs forged new juristic entities (Communal Property Associations) as well as new visions for a more equal South Africa, through their struggles against forced removals in the 1980s and 1990s.

Chapter 4: “Bargaining with the state:” black farmers’ petitions for agricultural support, amidst white farmers’ subsidies, 1920s-1970s

Abstract

In the early 20th century, groups of black land buyers purchased land in the Transvaal with the intention of farming on a large scale. Three of those farms include: Daggakraal and Driefontein in the Wakkerstroom district, purchased by Pixley ka Seme and the Native Farmers Association (‘the Association’), and Mogopa in the Ventersdorp district, purchased by a group of families from the Free State. I suggest that there remained windows of possibility for Transvaal black farmers to accumulate in the early 20th century, later than in the Eastern Cape. I trace the declining fortunes of these Transvaal farmers between 1920 and 1970, an era in which the government undermined black collective land holding projects like the Association and lent hitherto unprecedented support to white agricultural cooperatives. I examine how families in Daggakraal and Driefontein launched petitions seeking economic and infrastructural assistance from the government, in a context in which the state aimed to cut off areas privately-owned by black farmers from access to markets and resources. I argue that Association farmers were willing to co-operate with certain government mandates, without submitting entirely to the categories of political community demanded by the government. In Mogopa too, residents found ways around the limitations in place for black farmers, though their economic prospects were bleak. They relied on white intermediaries to access markets, equipment and credit usually available only to white farmers through agricultural cooperatives.

1.1 Introduction

When black South Africans purchased land in Mogopa in 1911 and in Daggakraal and Driefontein in the Transvaal in 1912 via Pixley ka Seme’s Native Farmers Association, they

envisioned becoming successful farmers. Daggakraal, Driefontein and Mogopa were situated outside of the “native reserves” established by the Union government.¹ Black land buyers purchased land with the intention of farming on a large scale. They had in mind a community of black landowners, in which they would build their own infrastructure, run their own schools and churches, and manage their own affairs.

In the first two decades following Mogopa and the Association’s purchase of land, black farmers competed relatively well on the agricultural market. Mogopa is located in South Africa’s ‘maize triangle’, which is considered the most environmentally suitable part of the country for growing maize. Mogopa farmers initially did well in terms of maize and sorghum sales. In Daggakraal and Driefontein, which was (and remains) famous as a wool-producing area, black landowners focused on sheep farming, in addition to maize. However, by the 1930s, black farmers in Daggakraal, Driefontein and Mogopa had seen their efforts so substantially undermined by government policies, legislation and support for white farmers, that they had largely given up on the vision of becoming independent farmers. In the 1930s, black land buyers shifted their aim from commercial to small-scale and subsistence farming, supplemented with wage labour.

The period between 1930 and 1970 was marked by more intense segregation from above, especially during the apartheid era (1948-1994). During this period, in the context of their declining fortunes, black landowners sought recognition in aid of their farming endeavours. I argue that landowners maintained a commitment to certain norms and practices around authority

¹ After the South African War (1899-1902), the Union government was established in 1910 to unite provinces that had previously been under British rule (the Cape and Natal), with the provinces governed by the Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek (the Boer republics of Orange Free State and the Transvaal, which the descendants of Dutch settlers had occupied). See Introduction/Chapter 1.

over land ownership, while still engaging with government bureaucracies.² I focus on land buyers' petitions for financial and infrastructural support from the government to aid their farming efforts.

Land buyers' petitions in the twentieth century followed a particular arc. Between 1905 (when Edward Tsewu's case set the precedent for black people to buy land) and 1919 (when Pixley ka Seme was ousted from the Association by I.W. Schlesinger), Seme and his political and intellectual contemporaries often addressed petitions and letters to the British monarch or officials of the British government in the Cape. They positioned themselves as "imperial citizens" who should be entitled to the same rights and privileges as British citizens (Chapter 2). They often presented themselves as obedient and loyal citizens of the British empire and its political projects. They also appealed to British claims of moral superiority about their perceived democratic and just treatment of Africans, as set against the perceived violence of Boer governance.

By 1950, black land buyers had become disillusioned with earlier appeals by Seme to the British government and colonial administration. They had also witnessed the failure of these institutions to protect them from the racist laws, policies and actions embodied by the National

² Writing on the relationships between Native Americans and U.S. government officials, Justin Richland argues that Hopi First Nation people insisted on their sovereignty by accepting some of the state's terms of recognition, without conceding most of their authority over how they wished to identify. Justin B. Richland, *Cooperation without Submission: Indigenous Jurisdictions in Native Nation-US Engagements*, Chicago Series in Law and Society (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 4. In *The Cunning of Recognition*, Elizabeth Povinelli argues that in order to obtain redress for dispossession of their land rights, indigenous Australians have to make their land practices recognizable to the Australian state. But this process of recognition has a "cunning" to it, in that it forces indigenous claimants to bind themselves to the state's categories of indigeneity. For Povinelli, it is impossible for indigenous Australians to get recognition through the legal system, without also compromising their sovereignty. Unlike Povinelli's work, Richland's theory of "cooperation without submission" eschews the binary of opposition or submission to state power. His conceptual framework allows us to see the actions of black South African land buyers beyond a resistance-collaboration dichotomy. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *The Cunning of Recognition: Indigenous Alterities and the Making of Australian Multiculturalism*, Politics, History, and Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

Party's victory in 1948. Between the 1920s and 1950s, black land buyers targeted their petitions at officials in the Departments of Native Affairs and Agriculture. They asked the government for financial support and access to markets similar to that given to white farmers. In exchange, they offered to cooperate to some extent with the state's policy of reserves and Betterment planning. Land buyers' petitioning of the government for support did not necessarily mean buying wholesale into the state's desire to incorporate them into the reserves. In a flurry of petitions around support for farming, Association land buyers sought to make themselves legible to the state.

In Driefontein and Daggakraal, which had been a hotbed of legal activity and intellectual debate since Seme established the Association in 1912 (Chapter 2), petitions and petitioning became an important avenue of claim-making. However, government officials generally rejected the bargain that land buyers had put on the table. They remained threatened by the possibility of a successful class of black commercial farmers. Correspondence between government officials suggests that many believed that if they offered support to black farmers, they would deplete the pool of cheap labour that white farmers, mining bosses and business owners demanded, and lose some of their rural, white voting base. Government officials responded to most petitions by telling residents that they were on their own, and that it was not the government's responsibility to assist them with farming infrastructure or access to markets. Since black farmers owned land privately in places like Daggakraal and Driefontein, the government did not offer financial support as it did in the reserves (even though financial support for reserve farmers came with problematic conditions such as Betterment planning). This policy had the effect of isolating black land buying syndicates.

In Mogopa, claim-making took a different route from Daggakraal and Driefontein. There, land buyers challenged government officials' plans to place them under the authority of Otto Mamogale More, a paramount chief (*kgosikolo*) in a reserve that was later to become the Bantustan of Bophuthatswana. Instead, they sought official recognition of their headman, Thomas More. For Mogopa residents, advocating for recognition of a headman meant neither submitting to the apartheid government's categories of tribalism, nor to its offer of Betterment planning. They charted a path in which they could emphasize their identity as landowners, while also seeking forms of state recognition and assistance that could aid their work as farmers. The Mogopa land buyers had been relatively prosperous sharecroppers in the Orange Free State. After purchasing land at Mogopa, they developed relationships with white farmers who could act as intermediaries for transacting with the local agricultural cooperative. Instead of seeking state recognition of their farming activities, they sought to remain under the radar.

Land buyers' strategies took account of the challenging political and economic climate for black farmers. At the same time that the government undermined black collective land holding projects like the Native Farmers Association (Association) and the land buying syndicate at Mogopa, it threw its weight behind white agricultural cooperatives. From the 1930s until the 1970s, cooperatives were the fulcrum of the agricultural economy in South Africa's Transvaal province. In many instances, government support transformed small-scale farmers into large-scale commercial farmers. These white farmers were also influential in bringing the Afrikaner nationalist political party, the National Party, to power in 1948. Agricultural cooperatives came about in large part due to pressure from white farmers and political conservatives who pushed for racially exclusionary state intervention.

The growth of farming cooperatives skewed the maize industry heavily in favour of white farmers. Maize was the main agricultural product sold by black farmers who had bought land in Mogopa, Driefontein and Daggakraal. I focus on maize as a way into examining how black farmers in these areas navigated the state's agricultural price controls and its preferential treatment for white farmers. These dynamics in turn affected the way that black landowners managed their land, and navigated their identities as land buyers, especially in contrast to black farmers in the "native reserves." Unprecedented state support for white farmers also played a role in suppressing the class of black farmers that had survived in the Transvaal, a few decades later than in the Cape province.³ This class of farmers were market oriented but had a limited capacity for capital investment.

The Marketing Act of 1937 enabled dedicated bureaucratic channels for white farmers to receive government support. The Act created the Maize Board and allowed for the registration of local maize cooperatives around the country. Via the Maize Board, the government became the arbiter of the maize price and the sole buyer and seller of all maize in the country. It artificially kept the South African maize industry afloat by fixing the price of agricultural produce, as well as providing white farmers with debt relief, subsidies and other kinds of support (such as making available agricultural extension officers, combating soil erosion and providing irrigation infrastructure). These measures protected farmers when South African maize exports failed to compete on the international market, particularly against cheaper maize from the United States and Argentina. They also protected white farmers from competition with relatively successful

³ Colin Bundy, *Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry* (Cape Town: James Currey, 1988).

black farmers, like those in Mogopa, by excluding black farmers from cooperative membership – and therefore from buying and selling maize.

While the de jure rule was that black farmers could not be members of cooperatives, in practice they continued to farm and sell their produce. For example, black land buyers in Mogopa worked via intermediaries in the Ventersdorp area. White farmer intermediaries bought Mogopa residents' produce, took a cut, sold it on to the cooperative and stored it in the cooperatives' silos in Venterdorp, giving the income from sales back to the farmers in Mogopa. Black farmers relied on their relationships with local white farmers sympathetic to their efforts or willing to do business with them. In Driefontein and Daggakraal, wool, rather than maize, was the main interest of surrounding white farmers. Nevertheless, black farmers seeking to sell their maize there faced similar obstacles.

1.2 The fortunes of Association and Mogopa land buyers between 1920 and 1948

1.2.1 The backdrop to petitions

The first half of the twentieth century marked a transition to widespread white commercial farming in the Transvaal and a decline in fortunes for black land buyers who farmed for a living. Several factors contributed to black farmers' insecure livelihoods. One of these was the government's plans to incorporate land bought by black land buying syndicates into the reserves. In the case of Driefontein and Daggakraal, Schlesinger's influence offered Association members some protection from incorporation. As a well-known businessman, with the ear of government officials, Schlesinger emphasized the importance of the Association to his business dealings. Although agricultural profits declined between the 1930s and 1960s, the Association remained a thriving market in land sales. Most people who bought land after 1940, managed to

pay off their debts to the Association over a period of a decade. Some paid in large amounts every few years, others in small amounts each year. For example, Josiah Moloi bought land in 1944 for the price of £100.76, with an interest rate that added a total of £32 to the original price by the time Moloi settled his debt in 1951.⁴ Property and credit moguls like Schlesinger were willing to do business with black people, if it contributed to their profits (Chapters 2 and 3).

Another factor that added to the insecurity of black land buyers, was the 1936 Native Trust and Land Act's attack on labour tenancy and sharecropping. In the years following the 1936 Act, labour tenants and farm workers flooded into Driefontein and Daggakraal. Many were evicted by white farmers, and moved because the Association-run area was seen as an "oasis" for black farmers.⁵ Hundreds of tenants entered into agreements with land buyer families. The 10 morgen (8.5 hectare)⁶ plots that buyers had acquired in 1913 were slowly whittled away into smaller areas for each family. While many Association landowners took on tenants, this rent was very low and not enough to cover the owners' debts.⁷ Tenants did compensate owners in other ways. They provided additional labour sometimes. They also offered protection by maintaining the presence of the landowner even when the owners were away, working elsewhere.⁸

⁴ Josiah Moloi, entry listed in C.K. Barry and W.B. Schuurman, *Accounts Ledgers* (unpublished, 1903-1929), on file with Anton Roets, Wakkerstroom, South Africa.

⁵ Beauty Mkhize, interview by Tara Weinberg, 25 November, 2018, Driefontein, South Africa.

⁶ As I explain in earlier chapters, the unit of measurement for land in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was "morgen." Records from the Deeds Registry in Pretoria show that government officials equated 1 morgen with 0.85 hectares.

⁷ Beauty Mkhize, interviewed by Tara Weinberg in Driefontein, 25 November, 2018, Driefontein, South Africa; Sibongile Mtshali, interview by Tara Weinberg, 18 August, 2019, Driefontein, South Africa.

⁸ Catherine Madlala, interview by Tara Weinberg, 24 November, 2018, Driefontein, South Africa.

Retaining land ownership was one battle for land buyers. Garnering an income from farming was another, sometimes more difficult one. The petitions launched by black land buyers for farming support from the government took place against a backdrop of unprecedented state support for white farmers. Wakkerstroom is known by local farmers as the “mist belt” because of its wet, foggy climate.⁹ This meant the district was not ideal for farming maize. White farmers who operated near Driefontein and Daggakraal were primarily in the sheep business. The wool outputs in the Wakkerstroom district were the highest performing in the Transvaal. In the 1920s, for example, white farmers in the district produced a yearly average of around 1,175,000 tons of wool, out of a provincial average of 7,160,093 tons per year.¹⁰ It was also Pixley ka Seme’s intention for the Association to produce wool. In 1912, he had purchased 2,000 sheep alongside other livestock from Daggakraal farm’s previous landowner, Willem Gouws. That year, Association landowners made around £500 pounds in wool sales.¹¹ But this was not sustainable. The challenge for Association members from the 1930s onwards, was as much lack of access to markets, as it was to land and credit.

⁹ Jan C. Greyling, Nick Vink, and Van der Merwe, Emily, “Maize and Gold: South African Agriculture’s Transition from Suppression to Support (1886 – 1948),” in *Agricultural Development in the World Periphery: A Global Economic History Approach*, ed. Vicente Pinilla and Henry Willebald (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 179–204. Also, when I visited Catherine Madlala in Driefontein, it was raining. She looked out the window and remarked, “There’s that rain again, and maize doesn’t grow well in wet conditions.” Catherine Madlala, interview by Tara Weinberg, February 25, 2019, Driefontein, South Africa.

¹⁰ Department of Statistics South Africa, *Agricultural census 1918* (Pretoria: Govt. Printer, 1950), <http://books.google.com/books?id=rDbvgWK4aIYC>. Wakkerstroom produced 2,350,000,000 pounds of wool – average between 1918 and 1923; Transvaal as a whole produced an average of 14,320,185,000 pounds between the same years.

¹¹ Unkown author, ‘Umhlangano e Daggakraal: Inhlangano Yabalimi Abangabantu Base South Africa Limited’ (Meeting at Daggakraal: The Native Farmers Association of South Africa Ltd), *Abantu Batho*, October 1912. Copy in the Department of Native Affairs, NTS 3439 56-308, National Archives.

Oral history interviewees in Mogopa describe their great-grandparents making a profit from farming maize, sorghum and livestock between the time of their purchase of the farm Swartrand in 1911 and their purchase of the farm Hartesbeeslagte in 1931.¹² The group put the funds accrued from farming operations, over £7,000, into the purchase of Hartesbeeslagte, so as to expand their maize and grazing fields.¹³

However, black farmers in Mogopa began to find it hard to make ends meet, even before the Marketing Act of 1937 came into force. For example, maize output on black owned farms and reserves in South Africa as a whole declined by 69% between 1923 and 1936.¹⁴ On white owned farms, maize output remained stable during the same time period.¹⁵ After the maize cooperative boards took over the buying and selling of maize, black farmers struggled to find markets for their produce. Farming equipment was also heavily subsidized in cooperative shops and since they were excluded as members, black farmers had to rely on older ploughing methods with horses and oxen.

Agricultural census figures from the Wakkerstroom show modest average returns for crop farming. For example, black farmers there produced 430 tons of maize in 1936, compared with white farmers' 44,794 tons of maize.¹⁶ As in Mogopa, farmers were cut out of the sales

¹² Phillip More, interview by Tara Weinberg, 23 November 2021, Mogopa, South Africa; Petrus Rampoe, interview by Tara Weinberg, 23 November 2021, Mogopa, South Africa.

¹³ Hartbeeslagte 146 IP, Deed no 1032/1931, National Deeds Registry, Pretoria.

¹⁴ Between 1923 (799,302,000 pounds/399,651 tons of maize) and 1936 (247,217,000 pounds/123,609 tons).

¹⁵ Agricultural census reports: 1923: 2,835,328,000 pounds/1,417,664 tons and 1936: 2,480,717,000 pounds/1,240,359 tons. Department of Statistics South Africa, *Agricultural census 1923; 1936* (Pretoria: Govt. Printer, 1950), <http://books.google.com/books?id=rDbvgWK4aIYC>.

¹⁶ Department of Statistics South Africa, *Agricultural census 1936* (Pretoria: Govt. Printer, 1950), <http://books.google.com/books?id=rDbvgWK4aIYC>. Original figures given as follows: black farmers produced 860,000 pounds of maize, to white farmers' 89,587,000 pounds.

chain by white maize cooperatives. The Magistrate of Amersfoort near Daggakraal wrote that most Association members are working “on the reef and probably in the majority of cases they have left their families and relatives behind”, an indication that “many of the male inhabitants are unable to make a living here and they are, therefore, forced to seek employment elsewhere, mainly in the industrial centres of the Union.”¹⁷

Further evidence of Association farmers’ declining fortunes comes from their persistent letters to the Departments of Land, Agriculture and Native Affairs, petitioning for support in the form of boreholes, fencing and ploughing equipment. While the Department of Native Affairs had committed to providing (albeit non-consultative and problematic) support to black farmers in the reserves, they conveyed to black land buyers, who owned land privately, that they were on their own. The irony of this reasoning is stark in a context where privately owned white farms were offered plenty of support.¹⁸

1.2.2 Land buyers’ petitions for government support

The petitions launched by black land buyers, for farming support from the government, took place against a backdrop of unprecedented state support for white farmers. Association members’ petitions indicate a request for government support, without acquiescing to officials’ desires to pigeonhole them into ethnic and tribal categories or incorporate them into reserves. Residents in Daggakraal and Driefontein had been steeped in the culture of literacy and

¹⁷ Magistrate of Amersfoort to Chief Native Commissioner, Pretoria, 15 Oct 1946, ‘Proposed Sale - divisions of portions of the farm Vlakplaats No 72, Amersfoort’, NTS 3442 56-308 Vol VII, National Archives.

¹⁸ J.A. Groenewald, “The Agricultural Marketing Act: A Post - Mortem,” *South African Journal of Economics* 68, no. 3 (2000): 161–76.

education that accompanied Seme’s land buying project. Many of them mobilized the skills and resources derived from the political and intellectual culture of the Association, to write petitions. Some wrote in their own hand, and others on typewriters they had borrowed from colleagues in Johannesburg. Lawyers, legal intermediaries, messengers and letter-writers also played a crucial role in framing how Daggakraal and Driefontein residents made claims for land, state assistance and recognition.

Denial of farming support was one of the ways in which the government froze Association residents out of the possibility of becoming prosperous farmers. In 1946 and 1947, Zachariah Nkosi of Daggakraal asked for assistance with installing a borehole to service twenty households who often have to walk “half a mile” for water.¹⁹ Nkosi wrote directly to the Secretary for Native Affairs in English, on a typewriter, from an address in Jeppestown, Johannesburg, where many migrant workers from Daggakraal and Driefontein lived.²⁰ Nkosi wrote formally and politely – a tone that was common to the petitions addressed by Association land buyers to government officials. He ended his letter with “I agree that I shall meet the borehole expences [sic], I shall be very much pleased if you could be so kind as to let me know per foot of boring...Yours obediently, (Sgd) Zachariah Nkosi.”²¹ In his work on petitions in British colonial era Togo, Benjamin Lawrance argues that African petitioners and letter-writers often wrote in a tone they hoped would endear officials to accept their requests.

¹⁹ Zachariah Nkosi, Daggakraal to Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 4 January 1947, Department of Bantu Affairs, Amersfoort, Chief Native Affairs Commissioner, Northern Areas (1904 – 1986), HKN 1-1-119 27N5-1-3, National Archives.

²⁰ Ibid; Beauty Mkhize, interview by Tara Weinberg, 25 November 2018, Driefontein, South Africa.

²¹ Zachariah Nkosi, Daggakraal to Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 4 January 1947, Department of Bantu Affairs, Amersfoort, HKN 1-1-119 27N5-1-3, National Archives.

No. 63a, Wolhuter, Street
Jeppestown,
Johannesburg.
4th January, 1947.

The Secretary,
Native Affairs Dept.,
P.O. Box 84,
Pretoria.

Sir,

re: our advice regarding water
boring machine.

With reference to your letter of the 3rd inst, whose contents were understood by me. the place of the proposed borehole is at Daggakraal No. 2 in the district of Amersfoort. The proposed borehole is at stand No. 112.

The borehole is required by me, because I am running a butchery business which requires water. Furthermore, a lot of people in the same locality are also in need of water; we usually walk half a mile to a place where water is drawn. Therefore, I thought it fit to have a borehole in our locality, as I feared we might get an accident through walking a long distance, to get water.

I agree that I shall meet the borehole expenses, I shall be very much pleased if you can be so kind as to let me know the per foot of boring; and further let me know as to when you will be prepared to come, so as to keep myself ready. The hole has never been dug before, and we have no previous knowledge of the presence of water in that place.

Yours obediently,

(Sgd) ZACHARIAH NKOSI.

Figure 1: Zachariah Nkosi's letter to the Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 4 January 1947. Source: Department of Bantu Affairs, Amersfoort, Chief Native Affairs Commissioner, Northern Areas (1904 – 1986), HKN 1-1-119 27N5-1-3, National Archives.

Government officials deliberated for several years but never answered Nkosi's request. Instead, he Nkosi raised the funds to build the borehole himself.²² In 1950, Chief Maitse Popo Moloji wrote to the Association's legal representative, C.K. Barry, to ask for funds to repair another borehole in Daggakraal. Barry replied that this was "not the responsibility of the

²² Zachariah Nkosi, Daggakraal to Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 4 January 1947, Department of Bantu Affairs, Amersfoort, HKN 1-1-119 27N5-1-3, National Archives.

company [the Association].”²³ He directed Moloji instead to write directly to the Chief Native Commissioner in Pietersburg to ask “politely” for funds, given that the Department of Native Affairs was contemplating incorporating Daggakraal into the reserves. He agreed to also write a letter to the Native Commissioner of the district, in support of Moloji’s request.

There is no copy of Moloji’s letter in the archives, but we know from the Department of Native Affairs that the Department rejected his request. The Secretary of Native Affairs told the Chief Native Commissioner that “as the land is held under title by natives, the department is not responsible for the provision or maintenance of water supplies on the above farm.”²⁴ The other option, suggested the Chief Native Commissioner, was for the residents to organize themselves as a tribe under Chief Moloji, take a “tribal resolution” and then pay for the borehole repairs “at their own expensive”, via their “tribal fund.”²⁵

Land buyers in Mogopa petitioned the Department of Native Affairs not to be incorporated into the reserves. Officials in the Department of Native Affairs wanted Mogopa residents to fall under the authority of Otto Mamogale More, who was *kgosikolo* (paramount chief) of the larger Bakwena ba Mogopa group, based in Bethanie (around 95 miles away from Mogopa).²⁶ The Mogopa land buyers on the other hand, wanted their land to be governed by a man they considered to be their own *kgosi* (chief or headman), Thomas Madladi More. Back in 1911, Thomas More had led his group from the Heilbron district of the Orange Free State to the

²³ C.K. Barry to Popo Maitse Moloji, 13 October 1950, HKN 1-1-119 27N5-1-3, National Archives, Pretoria.

²⁴ Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria, to the Chief Native Commissioner, Pietersburg, 28 December, 1950, HKN 1-1-119 27N5-1-3, National Archives.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Kopano Kalvyn More, *Conversations with My Elders: A Remarkable Courage & Proud Legacy of Bakwena Ba Mogôpa* (Afriway Trading, 2019).

farm Swartrand in the Transvaal. After buying Swartrand, Thomas More's group renamed it Mogopa. Thomas More's petition to be recognized as headman is not included in the records, but correspondence between the Native Commissioner of Ventersdorp (Mogopa's district) and the Chief Native Commissioner of the Transvaal indicates that his petition was approved in 1951. However, the Commissioner indicated the plan was still to incorporate Mogopa into a reserve.

Records from the National Deeds Registry (of title deeds) shed further light on how the Mogopa land buyers contested the government and Otto Mamogale More's desire to incorporate the farms Swartrand and Hartesbeeslagte into the reserves, and under Otto Mamogale More's authority. On the 4 October, 1916, Swartrand was signed over to Otto Mamogale More.²⁷ The deed records note that Swartrand "belongs to the said Johannes Otto More Mamogale and the Bakwena Tribe, it having been purchased by the said Johannes Otto More Mamogale on behalf of the Bakwena Tribe, as well appear from the Deed of Sale entered into between the said Johannes Otto Mamogale, Chief of the Bakwena Tribe, acting for himself and as an Agent of certain of his Natives, and William Albert Edward Schultz [the seller]; but for reasons unknown the property was transferred into the name of the said Johannes Otto More Mamogale."²⁸ Gavin Capps has documented similar cases in the Transvaal in which government officials registered land buying syndicates' title deeds in the names of chiefs. He notes that this practice obscured the identity of the other land buyers.²⁹

²⁷ Swartrand 145 IP, Deed no 7530/1916, National Deeds Registry, Pretoria.

²⁸ Swartrand 145 IP, Deed no 10391/1922, National Deeds Registry, Pretoria.

²⁹ Gavin Capps, "Tribal-Landed Property: The Political Economy of the BaFokeng Chieftancy, South Africa, 1837-1994." (PhD diss., London School of Economics and Political Science (University of London), 2010), Chapter 5.

Mogopa land buyers were opposed to the title deeds to the farms being registered in Otto Mamogale More's name.³⁰ In 1921, Mamogale More employed the conveyancer Charles William Clark to transfer the deed from his name into that of the Minister for Native Affairs, to hold the land "in trust" for the Bakwena ba Mogopa.³¹ The other farm making up Mogopa, Hartebeeslagte, was also registered to the Minister of Native Affairs to be held in Trust for "Bakwena Ba-Magopa [sic] tribe of natives resident on the farm Zwartkop No 48, District Ventersdorp."³² As I discuss later, the land was re-registered in the name of the Mogopa residents in the 1950s.

1.3 Land buyers' petitions during the apartheid period

1.3.1 White farming cooperatives freeze black farmers out of the market

After 1948, when the National Party was elected, the Marketing Act began to have a more powerful effect on cooperative membership and farming yields.³³ That year, national maize production hit a new high of 2.9 million tons.³⁴ Between 1948 and 1952, the price of maize increased by a third. White farmers' maize outputs doubled in the period between 1948-1960.³⁵

³⁰ Kopano More, personal communication, 1 December 2022.

³¹ Swartrand 145 IP, Deed no 10391/1922, National Deeds Registry, Pretoria.

³² Hartbeeslagte 146 IP, Deed no 1032/1931, National Deeds Registry, Pretoria.

³³ Henry Bernstein, "How White Agriculture (Re)Positioned Itself for a 'New South Africa,'" *Critical Sociology* 22, no. 3 (October 1996): 15.

³⁴ Greyling et al, "Maize and Gold".

³⁵ Bernstein, "How White Agriculture (Re)Positioned Itself," 17.

Meanwhile, production of maize for black farmers on both farms they owned and, in the reserves, declined. In the Transvaal province, black maize farmers produced 41% less in 1961 than they had in 1949.³⁶

At a time when credit apartheid tightened the screws on black farmers, the Land Bank offered loans at favourable rates to white farmers. Local cooperatives administered these loans. They also ran heavily subsidized supply and equipment shops, which would only sell to cooperative members. Since black people were not admitted as members, they could not buy their goods (even though some shops wanted to sell to black people for revenue purposes).³⁷ Bernstein argues that the Maize Board's monopoly had several effects that benefited white farmers: increased mechanization (which made farmers less reliant on black labour tenants and farm workers); improved maize varieties that could be adapted to places where white farmers had not previously invested in maize due to soil or climate issues (such as Wakkerstroom); the construction of modern silos and bulk handling facilities to be managed by cooperatives (the Venterdorp cooperative benefited from this in particular); and an avenue to dispose of surplus maize, facilitated by the government.³⁸

³⁶ Department of Statistics South Africa, *Agricultural census 23 of 1949* (Pretoria: Govt. Printer, 1950), <http://books.google.com/books?id=rDbvgWK4aIYC>. The 1949 Census lists black farmers' agricultural output on land they owned and in the reserves as 589,747 bags of maize (at 200 lb. bags); Department of Statistics South Africa, *Agricultural census: Report on Agricultural and Pastoral Production and Sugar Cane, Timber and Wattle Plantations* (Pretoria: Govt. Printer, 1962), <http://books.google.com/books?id=rDbvgWK4aIYC>. The 1962 Census lists black farmers' agricultural output on land they owned and in the reserves as 348,412 bags of maize (at 200 lb. bags). The years in between show production amounts of around 400-500,000 bags, with a steady decline beginning in 1955. See also Charles Simkins, "Agricultural Production in the African Reserves of South Africa, 1918-1969," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 7, no. 2 (April 1981): 256-83.

³⁷ Faeza Ballim, "The Pre-History of South African 'Neo-Liberalism': The Rise and Fall of Co-Operative Farming on the Highveld," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 41, no. 6 (November 2, 2015): 1248.

³⁸ Bernstein, "How White South Africa (Re)positioned Itself," 16-17.

Mogopa farmers found ways around the restrictions on their access to resources from the local maize cooperatives. Mogopa resident Phillip More remembers that, in order to get around the Ventersdorp cooperatives' exclusion of black farmers, his parents hired the services of white people who had access to ploughing equipment such as tractors. From the 1950s to the 1980s, his family sold their produce to white intermediaries, for them to take to the Ventersdorp mills and sell via the cooperatives.³⁹

Meanwhile, although Association farmers' production declined, there remained an enormous demand for plots in Driefontein and Daggakraal. When the apartheid government's laws narrowed black people's mobility, and their support for white agriculture began to take effect, many black labour tenants and farmworkers who lived on farms in the Wakkerstroom district, were evicted by their long-time employers. The growth in mechanization and decline in demand for labour were partly responsible for this shift. So too was the desire, albeit not new, of black farmers to seek out the possibility of land ownership or at least of better treatment by landowners.

In 1951, a 12-person committee made up of Driefontein landowners worked with Association lawyer Edward Gordon to buy out a local sheep farmer.⁴⁰ The committee collected

³⁹ Phillip More, interview by Tara Weinberg, 23 November 2021, Mogopa, South Africa. Two photographers who were active in Mogopa in the 1970s and 80s, Paul Weinberg and Gille de Vlieg, corroborate More's view that it was common for black farmers to work via white farmer intermediaries to access cooperatives in the Transvaal during the apartheid period. Gille de Vlieg, personal communication, 21 December, 2022; Paul Weinberg, personal communication, 22 December, 2022. Charles van Onselen describes black sharecropper Kas Maine sending his maize to the South-Western Transvaal Agricultural Cooperative. Maine also obtained bags of maize on credit from the cooperative, thanks to a note from one of his white landlords, Koos Kloppe. Onselen, *The Seed Is Mine*, 188; 193.

⁴⁰ Phillimon Yende, interview by Leslie Witz, 5 November 1986, Driefontein, South Africa, Leslie Witz Archive MCH93, Mayibuye Archives. The committee members, according to Yende, were Jacob Dlamini, Victor Manqele, Mthabela, Abner Mkhize, Johan Manana, Mathew Manana, Luke Manana, Noah Ngwenya, Shede Mshololo, Sidwi, Magangani and J.B. Gamede.

R1 from every Association member, plus interested families living on the surrounding white-owned farms.⁴¹ The farm, called Joskop or Mbolwane, was incorporated into Driefontein under the Association and became known as New Stands. It offered the opportunity for a new wave of black land buyers to settle in Driefontein; it also offered the Association a chance for further property sales.

Oral history interviewees – owners and tenants alike – describe the 1950s as a time of plenty, relative to the 1980s. This may be in part because many were interviewed at a time when they were combatting the threat of forced removals and so they emphasized what they might lose. Phillemon Yende, who bought land at Driefontein New Stands in 1954, remarked, “This place is the place where I became wiser and improved, now I love it and I don't intend to move from here. I intend to die in it together with my generations and my children. And I'm still willing to progress and improve in this place.”⁴²

Phillemon Yende's parents had worked for a white farmer near Driefontein. Yende argues that it was his farming prowess that allowed him to pay off the mortgage and acquire several more plots to expand his farming operations in Driefontein: “I started to make a living on my own and feed my family with my own money; I cultivated everything that could be cultivated, I raised cows, milked them, and we would eat maas [fermented milk, with a yoghurt texture] and milk. I also raised chickens and we would eat the eggs and meat of those chickens, and pigs. I lived well that way and I liked it because it was within my abilities.”⁴³ In 1958, the

⁴¹ Phillemon Yende, interview by Leslie Witz, 5 November 1986, Driefontein, South Africa, Leslie Witz Archive MCH93, Mayibuye Archives.

⁴² Phillemon Yende, interview by Leslie Witz, 5 November 1986, Driefontein, South Africa, Leslie Witz Archive MCH93, Mayibuye Archives.

⁴³ Ibid.

Driefontein community voted for Yende to build and operate a grain mill on their behalf. Given that black farmers were not legally allowed to use mills belonging to white farming cooperatives, Yende's mill ran a vital service.

Zebulon Ndlangamandla and Stephen Maseko's families also speak glowingly of their arrival in Driefontein. Both were tenant farmers who rented land from black landowners like Yende. Ndlangamandla moved from Bethal to Driefontein in 1956 and became a tenant of an Association member, Mr. Nkosi. He noted that, "when I came here I loved the place. There was a difference [between] here and the location. Here you can raise cows, grow maize. The life here is better than the location."⁴⁴ Maseko's family were labour tenants on a farm near Driefontein, owned by Johannes Bruwer, for twenty-four years. They moved to Driefontein in 1967, after Bruwer had imposed harsher restrictions on the tenants, demanding that they relinquish their livestock and not build further houses. Maseko became a tenant of Joshua Tshabalala in Driefontein Old Stand, who charged R12 per year. Maseko noted that although water was scarce, "what made me happy was that I had enough land to build and enough land to cultivate everything that is cultivated and my cow had enough land to graze on."⁴⁵

1.3.2 Association farmers' petitions

Although oral history interviewees describe their farming activities in the 1950s with great pride, this was also an era marked by a continued decline in farming profits for Association

⁴⁴ Zebulon Ndlangamandla, interview by unknown, 5 November 1986, Driefontein, South Africa, Leslie Witz Archive MCH93, Mayibuye Archives.

⁴⁵ Stephen Maseko, interview by Bongani Mkhize, 5 November 1986, Driefontein, South Africa, Leslie Witz Archive MCH93, Mayibuye Archives.

members. By the 1950s, most farmers in Driefontein and Daggakraal could not make a living from the land. A Department of Native Affairs memorandum on Driefontein and Daggakraal in 1954, argued that while the farms had plenty of water and were good for farming mielies, most men and young women worked in and around Johannesburg, returning only during the holidays. “This is a gathering place for old women and young children,” stated the memorandum about Daggakraal’s population of 2,250.⁴⁶

While black farmers in Driefontein and Daggakraal farmed some maize, sorghum, beans and sheep on a small scale, they also invested in timber for sale – a crop better suited to the climate.⁴⁷ The local agricultural cooperatives for orchards and timber, like those for maize, refused to buy from black farmers.⁴⁸ From the 1960s onwards, various commercial timber companies created plantations in the area surrounding Driefontein. These include PG Bison and Tafibra (chip board manufacturing), ACM WoodChem (glue manufacturing) and Mondi Packaging (paper mill). As of 2022, Mondi’s plantation is located just north of Driefontein

⁴⁶ Committee (names unknown), Memorandum to the Minister of Native Affairs, ‘Van ‘n besoek aan ‘n aantal Naturelleplase in die kiesafdeling Wakkerstroom,’ (Translation: “From a visit to the native farms in the District Wakkerstroom”), 18 February 1954, NTS 3442 56-308, National Archives.

⁴⁷ One crop that the Daggakraal area became known for is, as its name suggests, *dagga* (the South African word for marijuana). In 1963 Elsina Mthembu was accused of cultivating marijuana amongst her maize. Mthembu took her case on appeal to the Transvaal Supreme Court. There she testified that her husband had planted the marijuana (for which he was already serving jail time) and that she had not realized the plant was dotted amongst her fields. She was acquitted in the Transvaal Supreme Court, on the basis that, as Judge Galgut put it, she was “carrying at that which she was obliged to do by normal tribal custom namely cultivate her husband’s land. There it seems quite clear that the State has not proved that she planted the dagga, or that she was attending to this dagga or that she was gathering this dagga. She was, as I have already stated, merely carrying out her tribal duties, and attending to her husband’s land.” *Elsina Mthembu vs The State*, 9 April 1963, Supreme Court of South Africa (Transvaal Provincial Division), Landdros (Magistrate) Wakkerstroom, Strafsuke (criminal cases) (1953-1963), LWM 225 32-1963, National Archives.

⁴⁸ Gille de Vlieg, ‘Report on Driefontein’, *Black Sash*, February 1983, Leslie Witz Archive, MCH93, 2.2.41, Mayibuye Archives.

(visible from the main road in the village), on the tar road from Piet Retief.⁴⁹ The plantation includes wattle (genus *acacia*), gum and pine trees.

The economic success of Mondi's plantation contrasts with the failed attempts of Driefontein residents to make a go of wattle farming in the 1950s. In 1955, Driefontein residents visited the Native Commissioner for Wakkerstroom in person to ask for assistance with increasing the scale of their wattle operations. Wattle bark was harvested mostly for its tannins, which were used to treat leather.⁵⁰ In a responding memorandum, the Native Commissioner for Wakkerstroom, P.J. Fourie, wrote “the planting of wattle bark trees cannot be agreed. Most of the land does not lend itself to the planting of trees because the land is too shallow and rests on an old stone and slate layer. the area as a whole cannot be considered one of the best parts for planting wattle bark, and it would not be advisable to lead the natives in the direction of a marginal product.”⁵¹ Driefontein landowners became labourers on Mondi plantations, but not owners of the wattle industry. A Black Sash report from 1983 argues, “But because surrounding white farmers needed labour, the timber merchants stopped buying wood of Driefontein black residents. This was a cruel blow to black farmers who increasingly were forced to work on nearby farms and white-owned sawmills.”⁵²

⁴⁹ “Mondi Business Paper South Africa: Socio-Economic Assessment Report,” 2005, accessed January 20, 2023, https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&ved=2ahUKEwihvOSliI7-AhU1mmoFHbP3C58QFnoECAwQAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.mondigroup.com%2Fmedia%2F7450%2Fmondi_seat_piet_retief.pdf&usq=AOvVaw3gl8UeXIP0HM-KdDRA4ffS, 8.

⁵⁰ UCL Company (Pty) Ltd, “Wattle Extract Manufacturing: Mimosa Wattle Bark Extract,” accessed January 19, 2023, <https://www.ucl.co.za/business-units/wattle-extract-manufacturing.html>.

⁵¹ PJ Fourie, Native Commissioner of Wakkerstroom, Memorandum (in Afrikaans) to the Chief Native Commission, Pietersburg, 25 January 1955, NTS 3442 56-308, National Archives.

⁵² Gille de Vlieg, ‘Report on Driefontein’, *Black Sash*, February 1983, Leslie Witz Archive MCH93, 2.2.41, Mayibuye Archives.

Petitions for assistance with farming from Association members continued thick and fast during the 1950s and 60s. Edward Jacob Zihali Hlongwane wrote to the newspaper *Farmers' Weekly* in 1955 to explain the struggling state of farming affairs in Daggakraal (Figure 12). *Farmers' Weekly* was an English language newspaper published in Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State Province. It served a primarily white readership. In his letter, Hlongwane referred to previous articles about black farmers, suggesting that he was a regular reader of the paper. Hlongwane framed his letter as an appeal for assistance from his fellow farmers. His decision to write to the newspaper rather than directly to the Department of Agriculture or Native Affairs implies that he saw himself as a member of a larger farming community. Hlongwane's letter was hand-written in English and included a mix of formal and informal language. Hlongwane requested that his letter be published under his nickname, "Ngwalabutho", meaning leader or pioneer in isiZulu. His choice of name hints at his identity as a leader of farmers in his area.

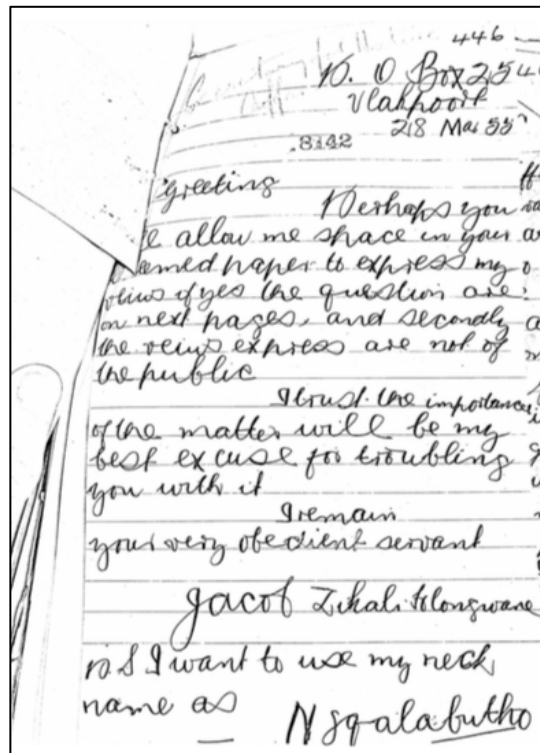


Figure 2: Hlongwane's letter reads:

Greetings,

Perhaps you will allow me to share with you at your esteemed paper to express my views...I trust the importance of the matter will be my best excuse for troubling you with it.

*I remain your very obedient servant,
Jacob Zihlali Hlongwane*

PS: I want to use my neck [sic] name as Ngqalabutho.⁵³

In his letter Hlongwane put a bargain on the table for government officials to consider. He expressed his support for Betterment planning in Daggakraal, if it meant residents there would receive some infrastructural assistance: “what steps can the area take so as to be under the soil conservation or to next to be under Betterment area?”⁵⁴ Hlongwane also requested “some help with roads, streets” and asked for the latest maps of the area.

A clerk from the Department of Native Affairs picked up on Hlongwane’s letters in *Farmers’ Weekly*. He wrote back to Hlongwane, arguing that since the land is owned by the Association except where “allotments sold and transferred to the plot holders [he listed the number of plots as 230]”, the Department could not offer support. Instead, if Daggakraal residents wished to receive Betterment facilities, “they can ask the Magistrate to hold a tribal meeting at which they can pass a resolution which will then be sent to this office for attention...”

⁵³ Jacob Zihali Hlongwane to the Secretary for Native Affairs, 31 March 1955, NTS 3442 56-308, National Archives.

⁵⁴ Jacob Zihali Hlongwane to the Secretary for Native Affairs, 31 March 1955, NTS 3442 56-308, National Archives.

and then they will also have to request to become a “scheduled area”, since Betterment only applies to the reserves.⁵⁵

Esau Piet Pungwayo too argued that he would be willing to accept Betterment planning in return for recognition and approval of his demand in relation to his land. He wanted the Deeds Office to recognize that he owned a subdivided portion of a plot in Vlakplaats. Pungwayo argued that although he paid the purchase price a decade ago, he was still waiting for his 5-morgen plot to be registered in his name: “I am happy on the plot with my family, and am very anxious to keep the land.”⁵⁶ Pungwayo went into the office of the Native Commissioner in Amersfoort, whose jurisdiction covered Daggakraal and Vlakplaats, another of the Association’s farms. There he gave a formal statement, complete with fingerprint, in the presence of the Native Commissioner. The Native Commissioner’s clerk recorded and translated Pungwayo’s words. This makes it difficult to discern whether Pungwayo’s willingness to accept Betterment was his own idea, or a suggestion from the Native Commissioner that pliancy might win over other government officials.

In his statement before the Native Commissioner, Pungwayo made a number of arguments in an attempt to indicate his worthiness for the plot: at age 62, he has recently retired from working for the Amersfoort Municipality, where he conscientiously cycled the 25 miles to work from Vlakplaats each day and earned £5 a month; he ploughs the entire 5 morgen of his land, and in a good year, with enough fertilizer, he can reap up to 60 bags of maize, 1.5 bags of beans, and a wagonload of pumpkins. He has 17 cattle and 2 horses, but not enough grazing land

⁵⁵ Unnamed clerk in the Department of Native Affairs, to Jacob Zihali Hlongwane, undated, NTS 3442 56-308, National Archives.

⁵⁶ Native Commissioner Amersfoort to Chief Native Commissioner, Pretoria, ‘Voorgestelde Onderverdeling van Gedeelte Nr 96 van die plaas Vlakplaats’, 13 July 1956, NTS 3442 56-308, National Archives.

or fodder for them; he has made out a will to pass on the plot to a single heir, rather than allow it to devolve in undivided shares. Pungwayo added that he was “quite prepared to link up with the Bantu Authority if and when established in my area” and “accept the conditions in regard to this land as follows...” He then listed his acceptance of some the typical Betterment provisions — combatting soil erosion, limitation of livestock, promoting conversation etc.⁵⁷

Reflecting on Pungwayo’s visit, the Amersfoort Native Commissioner noted in his records that “normally, 5 morgen on the farm Vlakplaats cannot be considered an economic unit. However, this also applies to many of the 10 morgen plots, which contain little or no arable land. However, if one takes into account all the circumstances of this particular application, and measured according to native standards of life, I am inclined to support the application, and to recommend the application.”⁵⁸ The month after Pungwayo recorded his statement, he engaged the services of Barry and Schuurman’s firm. They addressed a letter directly to the Secretary for Native Affairs, imploring him to authorize the transfer to Pungwayo. In making their case, Barry and Schuurman also referred to Pungwayo’s long but ultimately successful efforts to raise the funds to pay for the transfer costs (mostly the surveyor’s fees): “The unfortunate part is that the parties in question had not the money at the time [that Pungwayo bought the land in 1941] and have been struggling all along to collect the necessary money for transfer and diagram costs. Now that they have been successful at last at this late stage in gathering money together for the purchase and now, they are told that their application for subdivision has been refused.”⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Letter from Barry and Schuurman, quoted by Ross and Jacobsz Law Firm, ‘Approval diagram of Portion 123 (a portion of portion 96) of the farm Vlakplaats No. 72, Amersfoort,’ 30 August 1956, NTS 3442 56-308, National Archives.

Hlongwane and Pungwayo's petitions for assistance goes against the grain of popular feeling towards the reserves and the Betterment programs. There was wide-spread popular resistance in the Transvaal, Eastern Cape and Natal to both reserves and Betterment planning.⁶⁰ Hlongwane and Pungwayo's willingness to accept Betterment planning (and in the latter's case, also to accept incorporation into the reserves or Bantustans), if it meant recognition and financial assistance from the state, suggests how black farmers negotiated the limited options available to them to receive support, without submitting wholesale to the government's policy of moving them to the reserves. Writing on similar kinds of petitions in colonial era Nigeria, historian Chima Korieh remarks that petitions often served as a form of "negotiation" and "bargaining with the state."⁶¹

In the 1950s, the question of forced removals or incorporation into the reserves arose again. Government records suggest that the new impetus for removals came from white-owned farms neighbouring Daggakraal and Driefontein.⁶² In 1960, S.J. Maisela wrote a long letter to the Secretary for Bantu Affairs (previously called the Secretary for Native Affairs) to protest incorporation. Maisela wrote on behalf of a group he referred to as the 'Daggakraal Native Farmers Association.' Ten men signed the letter as the committee behind Maisela, and many others still were listed as attendees at a community meeting, who approved Maisela's idea to

⁶⁰ Peter Delius and Stefan Schirmer, "Soil Conservation in a Racially Ordered Society: South Africa 1930–1970," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26, no. 4 (December 1, 2000): 719–42; William Beinart and Colin Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); Laretta Ngcobo, *And They Didn't Die* (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 1999).

⁶¹ Chima J. Korieh, "'May It Please Your Honor': Letters of Petition as Historical Evidence in an African Colonial Context," *History in Africa* 37 (2010): 89.

⁶² Committee (names unknown), Memorandum to the Minister of Native Affairs, 'Van 'n besoek aan 'n aantal Naturelleplase in die kiesafdeling Wakkerstroom' (Translation: "From a visit to the native farms in the District Wakkerstroom"), 18 February 1954, NTS 3442 56-308, National Archives.

write to the Secretary. The list of names, which stretches across Zulu and Sesotho-speakers, suggests the involvement of many in Daggakraal in the act of petitioning – as well as of selecting petitions.

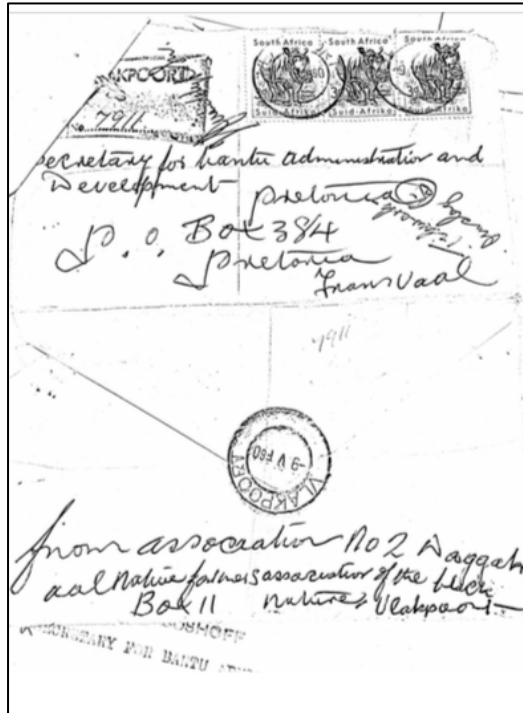


Figure 3: The envelope containing Maisela's letter to the Secretary for Bantu Affairs, 9 May 1960. Source: Native Farmers Association, NTS 3442 56-308, National Archives.

Maisela raised three issues. The first was the lack of clean water and another request for assistance with boreholes for Daggakraal. The second was to complain about Barry and Schuurman ignoring their requests for the Association to provide them with farming infrastructure. Maisela wrote:

We ask Pretoria to help us...our intention is not to take our solicitor against our masters without reason and asking them to give again...we may beseech our kings of the world holders... today we have received no reply from these official Barry and Schuurman and

*the Native Farmers Association of Africa Ltd...our Native Commissioner is very weak man. Please masters quickly we have no water.*⁶³

The third issue that Maisela raised in his letter was that his group were neither willing to sell their land, nor to be moved. This final complaint was clearly in response to talk of relocating the people of Daggakraal and Driefontein to the reserves. Two years later, the Secretary for Bantu Affairs, W.A. Van de Merwe took up the thread of Maisela's letter. He conveyed to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner for the Transvaal province that he should deny all of Maisela's demands because "there are now prospects that the Bantu from the above-mentioned farm will soon be moved to a Bantu area."⁶⁴ The threat of forced removal and incorporation later reappeared, with more violent effect, in the 1970s and 80s (Chapter 5).

1.3.3 Mogopa petitions

Like the Association land buyers, Mogopa residents refused to be incorporated into the Bantustans. In 1951, there was no longer a chief listed on the Department of Native Affairs payroll for Mogopa, which indicates that there was no government recognized chief in Mogopa at the time.⁶⁵ But in 1955, Thomas More II was known to government officials as the headman

⁶³ Daggakraal Native Farmers Association to the Secretary for Native Affairs, 9 May 1960, NTS 3442 56-308, National Archives.

⁶⁴ W.A. Van de Merwe, Secretary for Bantu Affairs to the Bantu Affairs Commissioner in Pietersburg, 23 June 1962, NTS 3442 56-308, National Archives.

⁶⁵ List of "tribal authorities" ("stamowerheide") for the Potchefstroom District (which at the time included administrative information on Mogopa and the Ventersdorp area), 2 May 1951, addressed to the Under Secretary of Native Affairs, Ventersdorp Bantu Tribal Authorities, Bantu Authorities: Western Areas, NTS 9008 221-362(3), National Archives.

of Mogopa.⁶⁶ Together with More, Mogopa residents again resisted falling under the authority of Chief David Mamogale (descendent of Otto Mamogale) in Bethanie. According to correspondence in the Department of Bantu Affairs, officials planned to incorporate Mogopa into the reserve (later ‘Bantustan’) of Bophuthatswana, which was established in 1961 under the Tswana Territorial Authority. Letters between government officials in 1961 indicate that while Thomas More recognized David Mamogale’s “great house” (a term used to refer to the *Kgosikolo*) in Bethanie, he argued that David Mamogale had nothing to do with the purchase nor the ownership of land at Mogopa.⁶⁷ Thomas More visited the Bantu Affairs Commissioner of Ventersdorp to inform him that his group had bought Swartkop independently of David Mamogale. He noted that if it brought Mogopa prosperity, they would be willing to consider Bantu Authorities, but they refused to submit to David Mamogale’s authority. He warned that any attempt to impose Mamogale or Bantu Authorities on the Mogopa residents would result in bitterness.⁶⁸ When the forced removals occurred in Mogopa in 1984, the Department of Native

⁶⁶ ‘Stigting van Bantoe-Owerhede: Bakwena ba Mogopa: Swartkop’ (Translation: “State of Bantu Authorities: Bakwena ba Mogopa: Swartkop”), Native Commissioner of Ventersdorp to the Head Native Commissioner, Potchestroom, 20 May 1955, NTS 9008 221-362(3), National Archives.

⁶⁷ Senior Information Officer at the Office of the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Potchestroom, to the Head Bantu Affairs Commissioner, ‘Bakwena ba Mogopa stam: Swartkol (Distrik Venterdorp)’ (Bakwena ba Mogopa tribe (District Ventersdorp), 8 May 1961, NTS 9008 221-362(3), National Archives. The letter says in Afrikaans: “Hy [Thomas More] erken dat die Groothuis die te Bethanie is, maar dat dit niks afdoen aan sy onafhanklikheid ni.” (Translation: He admits that the big house is the one at Bethanie, but that it does nothing to diminish his independence.)

⁶⁸ Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Ventersdorp, to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Potchestroom, ‘Bakwena ba Mogopa stam: Swartkop,’ 17 January 1961, NTS 9008 221-362(3), National Archives. The original Afrikaans text puts More’s meeting with the Ventersdorp Commissioner as follows: “Swartkop het nie stamowerheid aanvaar nie, ek vermoed dat dit vrees vir onderhoringheid aan Mamogale is wat verhinder dat hulle dit doen (Translation: Swartkop did not accept tribal authority, I suspect that it is fear of subordination to Mamogale that prevents them from doing so)... Van my kant is ek seker dat enige poging om die twee seksies te verenig sal misluk, die Swartkop stam is baie verbitterd teenoor Mamogale (Translation: For my part, I am sure that any attempt to unite the two sections will fail, the Swartkop tribe is very bitter towards Mamogale.)

Affairs had to expropriate Swartrand and Hartebeeslagte – evidence that the land was no longer in the name of the Minister.⁶⁹

As with Chief Maitse Moloi in Daggakraal (Chapter 3), archival evidence suggests that Mogopa landowners saw Thomas More as a representative regarding their land, rather than as the sole owner. At a meeting attended by 396 Mogopa residents, David Mamogale and Rustenburg Bantu Affairs Commissioner, J.R. Thorpe at Swartrand in 1962, the residents asked to put on record “that land belonged to the tribe as a whole and Thomas More had been sent there merely to care for it and its people.”⁷⁰ Mamogale spoke in favour of Bantu Authorities, calling it “a good wind, which would bring them progress.”

At the same meeting, the majority of Mogopa residents reiterated their rejection of Bantu Authorities, leading the Commissioner to remark that “in the three-hour discussion that followed it was clear that there was a wall of prejudice against Bantu Authorities.”⁷¹ In particular, residents were against Betterment measures that might accompany Bantu Authorities, warning that they did not interfere with their agricultural practices. One speaker, Joshua Segale, had been a member of the Natives Representative Council. The Council was a body formed in 1937, made up of partly elected and partly government nominated black members, ostensibly to advise

⁶⁹ Hartbeeslagte 146 IP, Deed no 1032/1931, National Deeds Registry, Pretoria. The back page of the title deed has a stamp from August 6, 1984 – around six months after the forced removal of the Mogopa residents – indicating that the properties have been expropriated by the Department of “Gemeenskapnaturrekeling” (Native Community Affairs, directly translated).

⁷⁰ J.R. Thorpe, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Rustenburg to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Potchestroom, ‘Proposed Tribal or Regional Authority for the Bakwena ba Mogopa Tribe: Your endorsement of 29th October, 1962,’ 22 Nov 1962, NTS 9008 221-362-3, National Archives. In the letter Thorpe writes about a meeting he attended at Swartrand in the presence of 396 Mogopa residents as well as Lerothodi Mamogale, the Bakwena ba Mogopa *Kgosikolo* from Bethanie. National Archives, Pretoria.

⁷¹ J.R. Thorpe, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Rustenburg to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Potchestroom, ‘Proposed Tribal or Regional Authority for the Bakwena ba Mogopa Tribe: Your endorsement of 29th October, 1962,’ 22 Nov 1962, NTS 9008 221-362-3, National Archives.

the government on matters relating to black South Africans.⁷² However, most scholars have viewed it as a symbolic institution, which government officials did not take seriously. At the meeting in Mogopa, Joshua Segale called for a signed resolution that, should the Commissioner wish to return to discuss Bantu Authorities again, he could do so in “twenty to thirty years.”⁷³ His resolution passed with resounding support. The message was a clear “no and don’t come back” to Bantu Authorities. But while Mogopa residents may have resisted incorporation, they continue to suffer the economic effects of their exclusion from the maize market.

1.4 Conclusion

Black land buyers’ farming skills, social networks and superior access to labour meant that they some could potentially outcompete some white farmers. This challenged the racial capitalist project in South Africa, which depended on black workers for its profits. Government officials and white employers implemented numerous manoeuvres to undermine black land buyers, including exclusionary laws, the destabilization of leadership committees elected by residents, the appointment of chiefs favoured by the government, and the isolation of black farmers from official lines of credit and infrastructural support.

Black farmers’ losses and white farmers’ gains between the 1930s and 1970s were linked to the government and white settlers’ control of land, labour and markets. The spaces where land purchase by black farmers was possible closed significantly during the apartheid period. The

⁷² “Pamphlet by Professor Z. K. Matthews,” November 1946, accessed January 20, 2023, <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/pamphlet-professor-z-k-matthews-published-november-1946>.

⁷³ J.R. Thorpe, Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Rustenburg to the Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner, Potchestroom, ‘Proposed Tribal or Regional Authority for the Bakwena ba Mogopa Tribe: Your endorsement of 29th October, 1962,’ 22 Nov 1962, NTS 9008 221-362-3, National Archives.

alliance between the state and white farmers brought about unprecedented levels of market regulation and crippled an already struggling black farming community. In Henry Bernstein's words, "this intimacy of organized agriculture, political party, and state was the basis of the system of regulation that delivered a golden period of prosperity to white farmers in South Africa, especially those on the highveld [between 1937 and 1980]."⁷⁴

Buying and selling of land continued within the Association during the apartheid period, with some old members leaving and new members being incorporated. Driefontein and Daggakraal residents' farming fortunes contrast strongly with that of white farmers in Wakkerstroom and other parts of the Transvaal, who received unprecedented levels of political and economic support from the government. While white agricultural cooperatives aimed to freeze black farmers out the market, de facto social relations meant it was still possible for black farmers to sell some of their produce – but at a cost.

After 1948, black land buyers doubled down on their claims to membership of a national farming community. In the 1950s, residents in Daggakraal and Driefontein read and wrote to the white-owned English-language magazine *Farmers' Weekly*, where they debated issues related to agriculture, farming infrastructure and development. But in response to land buyers' petitions, letters and newspaper pieces, government officials refused to bargain back. In the majority of their responses, officials in the Departments of Agriculture or Native Affairs, suggested that any support black land buyers needed for funding would require them to set up "tribal meetings" and start the process of seeking recognition as tribes who could be incorporated or moved to the reserves (later 'Bantustans'). There is no evidence that Association land buyers set up these

⁷⁴ Bernstein, "How White Agriculture (Re)Positioned," 16.

“tribal meetings. Instead, the archives from this period suggest that they changed tack in way they laid claim to their land by taking up more direct forms of protest against the state.

In Daggakraal and Driefontein, Association director I.W. Schlesinger’s influence in government and business offered people there some measure of protection from being forcibly removed by the government and white farmers. They were wary of disturbing Schlesinger’s business operations within the Association. Although, some families lost their land for failure to pay their debts to Schlesinger. In the context of declining profits from agricultural production, Association residents went over Schlesinger’s head and petitioned the local magistrates and Native Commissioners for assistance with farming infrastructure, agricultural equipment and subdivisions to allow for additional buyers and tenants.

With some government recognition in Daggakraal, Driefontein and Mogopa, came some support for farming and at least the ability to stay on their land, in a context where the odds were stacked against black landowners. In Mogopa, residents continued to stay on the land their families had bought in 1911, and share it amongst their heirs. During the apartheid period, their farming operations kept ticking over, in part thanks to relationships with local white farmers who could act as intermediaries. However, Mogopa farmers faced serious hardships from the 1950s onwards, when government support for white maize farmers made it impossible for black farmers to compete. They also resisted the government’s attempts to incorporate them into the reserves, under the authority of Chief Mamogale in Bethanie. They succeeded in instead having their local leader Thomas More recognized in 1955. But in 1984, they were forcibly removed and fought a battle of attrition to win it back (Chapter 5).

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GNLB	Government Native Labour Bureau (1904-1950)
HKN	Chief Native Affairs Commissioner, Northern Areas (1904 – 1986)
JUS	Secretary of Justice (1899 – 1966)

KWN	Native Commissioner's Records, Wakkerstroom: Natives: Civil and Criminal (1900-1901)	
LDE	Department of Lands (1882 – 1979)	
LWM	Landdros (Magistrate) Wakkerstroom, Strafsuke (Criminal Cases) (1953-1963)	
LWN	Landdros (Magistrate) Wakkerstroom, 1908-1911	
MHG	Master of the Supreme Court, Pretoria. Estates (1873-1976)	
NTS	Secretary for Native Affairs	
	3439 56/308	The Native Farmers Association of Africa Ltd.
	3440 56/308	The Native Farmers Association of Africa Ltd.
	3441 56/308	The Native Farmers Association of Africa Ltd.
	3442 56/308	Wakkerstroom: Daggakraal and Vlakplaats
	7410 368-327	Native Agriculture: Collective Farming (Crops)
	9008 221-362(3)	Bantu Authorities: Western Areas
TPD	Registrar of the Supreme Court of South Africa, Transvaal Provincial Division (1923-1928)	
URU	Decisions of the Executive Council (1910 – 1985)	

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