

REPRESSION AND CONFLICT: LIFE IN KWANDEBELE

The South African government, amidst growing opposition, recently confirmed its plan to make KwaNdebele an "independent homeland" in December this year.

This plan has been shaken by the resolution of the KwaNdebele Legislative Assembly to cancel the proposed independence. To date, however, the South African government has not issued an official response.

Opposition to independence, and to the incorporation of Moutse into the territory, has reached such proportions that KwaNdebele has become one of South Africa's worst troublespots.

The credibility of Skhosana's homeland government has been shaken by the violence perpetrated by him and the group of vigilantes launched by him. Since the beginning of this year, residents have seen a reign of terror which, they fear, will become permanent if the "homeland" gains independence.

The following article provides some information about the opposition to independence, and police and vigilante violence.

But more particularly, this article tries to show how exactly this affects people's daily lives, what additional problems they are facing, and how they are grappling to come to terms with these problems.

The wrangle over Moutse

The area north of Pretoria known as KwaNdebele started as half a dozen resettlement camps. The area is very poor with hardly any infrastructure.

For its viability as a so-called independent homeland, KwaNdebele would need fertile land, roads, rail roads, hospitals, schools and other facilities.

The district of Moutse, which is much better off, has 66 000 hectares of rich farming land, tarred roads, over 60 schools and a hospital. Coal has been found in Moutse 1 and 3. These are exactly the facilities which KwaNdebele needs, and that is the reason why Moutse is to be incorporated into KwaNdebele.

In October 1980, the South African government proclaimed that the Moutse district was to be excised from an area governed by the Lebowa Legislative Assembly. The area was then placed under the control of the Pretoria government. Moutse community leaders rejected the plan outright.

In December 1985, the South African government proclaimed the incorporation of Moutse into KwaNdebele. Ever since then, police and vigilante violence have become the order of the day.

The "choice" of Moutse residents: starvation or violence

The incorporation plan carried out by the Pretoria government is relatively new. Long before these plans were tabled, the government saw Moutse as a "black spot" and had planned to remove Moutse residents to Tweefontein, Salieslout and Kwaggasfontein.

These resettlement areas are bleak, infertile and carry hardly any water. They are far away from places of employment and there is no public transport. The people were to be housed in tents, with tin toilets.

Ever since the incorporation plan was hatched, the government put it to Moutse residents to either have their area incorporated into KwaNdebele, or to face removals. By giving Moutse residents this "choice" the government is saying that the removals are "voluntary".

These options, however, do not offer Moutse residents any choice. Both options were forced on the people without allowing them any say in the matter. And both options give Moutse residents little chance of surviving: removals mean unemployment, poverty and starvation, while incorporation means falling prey to police and vigilante violence.

Even those people who did move, did so under great pressure and violence. Under threats from police and vigilantes, some residents signed papers. From the beginning of this year, residents of Moutse district were moved, often at gunpoint, in hippos and government removal trucks, and under heavily armed police presence.



Moving from Moutse to KwaNdebele, January 1986

Moutse's opposition to incorporation

The incorporation of Moutse was a slap in the face to Moutse residents.

Even the people of Ndebele tradition in Moutse, who are in the minority, are opposed to the incorporation of Moutse into KwaNdebele, and plans for KwaNdebele's "independence". The present King Mabhokho and his two sons, Prince James Mahlangu (who is the chairperson of the Ndzundza Tribal Authority) and Prince Jabu Mahlangu have openly opposed the government of Simon Skhosana, Chief Minister of KwaNdebele. They are joined in their stance by the Sotho-speaking Chief Tlokwe Mathebe, the senior chief in Moutse.

Tribal authorities in the Moutse district first tried peaceful means of expressing their opposition to incorporation. Report-back meetings called by the tribal authorities were banned or dispersed. In May this year, Prince James Mahlangu presented certain demands to parliament. He asked that:

- the Mbokotho vigilante group should disband
- the Homeland Legislative Assembly should not accept independence; instead, it should discuss the issue with all Ndebeles
- The 23 MP's who represent the Ndzundza Mabhokho Tribal Authority should resign from their seats for not having discussed the independence issue with the community.

Moutse residents did not get any reply to these grievances.

There are many reasons why Moutse people reject incorporation into KwaNdebele. First and foremost, they do not want to live under the violence which they experienced at the hands of Skhosana and his collaborators.

They object to KwaNdebele's rule of the whip, whereby women have no right to vote, tribal courts mete out floggings, male circumcision is compulsory, and school children will be taught in the medium of Ndebele, and will fall under the Ndebele system of education.

The citizenship issue is of concern to the Moutse people and others opposing independence. It is likely that people living in an "independent" KwaNdebele will share the fate of residents of other "independent" homelands (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei), as far as South African citizenship is concerned. To get South African citizenship, people from these areas need to prove that they are permanently and lawfully living in the Republic of South Africa.

Moutse residents further fear that their privately owned or designated trust land will be nationalised without compensation in Skhosana's KwaNdebele.

Migrant workers stand to lose their jobs if they refuse to obtain Ndebele contract stamps. Moutse people have reason to believe that business licenses will be issued only to Skhosana's chosen few. And the Tribal Authorities fear that they will lose the coal mining rights at Kwarrielaagte.

Police and vigilante violence

As the scheduled date for the incorporation drew closer, both police violence and the determination of the people to oppose incorporation, grew.

Since November last year, police have allegedly broken up meetings and fired shots. At one such meeting, Moutse residents retaliated. The police allegedly responded by carrying out house-to-house searches, by beating and torturing residents, ransacking houses, and by arresting scores of people. The assaults, random shootings and killings and ransacking of homes are continuing.

It appears that police violence has increasingly been replaced by vigilante violence. The vigilante Mbokhotho gang was launched at the end of January this year. It is headed by Chief Minister Skhosana himself, with the late KwaNdebele Minister of Interior, Peter Ntuli, as vice-president.

The gang, made up mainly of shop owners and businessmen, was set up to stamp out all opposition to independence. Their job, in Skhosana's own words, is to recruit members and to supervise action against "trouble makers".

According to Skhosana, the gang numbers between 800 and 900 men. They carry out a campaign of terror and violence against all opponents of Skhosana's rule. Residents have suffered abductions, beatings, assaults, killings and mutilation at the hand of the vigilantes.

Moutse residents and others opposed to independence have been rendered defenceless victims in the face of such brutal terror. The only path open to them is to form strong organisations to ward off violence and injustice on all possible levels. Area committees and youth groups are working together to find ways of combatting terror and violence.

Their opposition and actions have shown results: the opposition to independence is growing, and recently, the majority of the KwaNdebele Legislative Assembly called for independence plans to be cancelled. The demands of Moutse community leaders have been taken up by KwaNdebele civil servants and workers. A stayaway was heeded by both groups recently. Secondary school children are boycotting schools and many businesses of independence-supporters have been burned down.

The State of Emergency in KwaNdebele

Shortly after the stayaway, tough restrictions were placed on individuals and organisations, in the wake of the State of Emergency. Police Commissioner Brigadier C M van Niekerk ordered special measures for the KwaNdebele area. The most far-reaching of these regulations say that:

- Persons of schoolgoing age may only be in KwaNdebele if their parents are permanent residents, or if these students can prove that they have enrolled at an educational institution. Those students who fulfil these requirements are not allowed to move out of the magisterial district where their parents live or where they themselves go to school.
- To stay in the area of KwaNdebele, people must have either a permanent home or a legal job.

- There is a curfew between 9pm and 5am which applies to everybody, except those people who are moving to and from work and those who have special permission.
- There are curbs on publicising or distributing news on the actions of members of the KwaNdebele forces.



A victim of a vigilante attack

What people in Moutse have to live with

People in the Moutse district live under extreme stress. They have been under threat of forced removal and of losing a limited degree of self-determination through incorporation into KwaNdebele. They are in constant fear of vigilante attacks, KwaNdebele and South African police violence, and reprisals from local white farmers.

Having to live with these fears has prompted some Moutse residents to take part in a workshop to identify problems of people, and to learn how to listen to them and support them.

Within the overall problems of police and vigilante violence and the threat of removal or incorporation, the workshop participants pointed to the following problems in their communities:

- inadequate housing and water supply
- inadequate health facilities
- high infant mortality rate
- conditions of poverty: hunger, lack of clothing, money problems, debts, high prices
- inadequate pensions and difficulties in obtaining pensions
- difficulties with employment: even those who do have jobs face problems regarding contracts, and harassment by employers
- problems related to schooling and education: inadequate schooling, people being expelled from school because of involvement in organisations, and being unable to defend their rights
- the tribal system, which brings conflicts in loyalty. Some tribal chiefs harass and exploit people, possibly with backing and reward from the government
- fear of witchcraft: people are manipulated through fear. Events such as lightning are explained through witchcraft
- oppression of women: women are kept subservient to men. Married women's role in organisations is limited because they are expected to run the household and care for children
- break-down of family relationships: There is a great deal of separation and divorce. This often happens if one partner is involved in an organisation and the other one is not involved, and does not share an understanding of the organisational work. There is also a break-down in parent-child relationships for similar reasons. Often, parents become very anxious if their children become involved. The discomfort at home often becomes so great that the child can no longer stay there. This brings about a conflict of loyalty to parents and family on the one hand, and organisational work on the other
- indifference and fear: these are two of the main problems in organising people

All these stress factors result in feelings of fear, insecurity, conflict, hatred, aggression, despair, loneliness, bitterness and powerlessness. Many people are depressed, anxious, bewildered and angry. There are few ways of helping these people. For those who are organisationally involved, there is support from fellow members. But there is no way of dealing with severe psychological or psychiatric symptoms.



Residents of Moutse attacked by vigilantes



Taking statements from residents of Moutse

Coming to grips with the problems

In the beginning, the workshop participants found it very difficult to accept that they could not offer immediate relief and help the people in their community who have serious problems.

The participants' first response to any of these problems was to look for immediate solutions. At the same time, though, they realised that it was not realistic to offer immediate solutions; that they would only disappoint people who sought help if they made promises that they could not possibly carry out.

Workshop participants learnt that it is, first of all, very important to listen to the person who is facing a crisis. The next step would be to get the person concerned to say what he or she would do about the situation. Then the listener would take up these suggestions and put them before the person concerned as possible "options" or "choices".

But even so, the individual's options or choices are very limited. They can become "choices" only within the wider framework of organisational work, when it comes to making policy decisions and choosing strategies of how to go about addressing problems which the community is facing.

HEALTH SERVICES IN MOUTSE

KwaNdebele, without Moutse, does not have any hospital. The "homeland" gained a hospital only with the incorporation of the Moutse district. The superintendent of Philadelphia Hospital was recently appointed secretary for Health in KwaNdebele. He then questioned the entire hospital staff as to their allegiance to the KwaNdebele government.

Co-inciding with this development, various Moutse residents who became victims of police and vigilante violence, have reported that they were turned away by hospital staff when they came to Philadelphia Hospital for treatment.

Another recent incident has made people mistrust the health services in the area. Thomas Mnayakeni (18) of Vlaklaagte was shot and wounded in the arm and leg during a skirmish. He was put into an ambulance which, it seemed, was bound for Philadelphia Hospital. That was the last time he was seen; he has disappeared without trace. People close to him have searched for him high and low. They went to all the surrounding police stations, hospitals and mortuaries but there was no trace of him anywhere.