



## **Being Inclusive to Survive in an Ethnic Conflict : The Meaning of ‘Basotho’ for Illegal Squatters in Thaba Nchu, 1970s**

**Sayaka Kono**

University of the Free State, South Africa  
Tsuda College, Japan

### **Abstract**

The apartheid regime’s attempt at ‘ethnic division’ practiced through its Bantustan policy caused conflicts in South Africa. A squatter area called Kromdraai became the center of such a conflict between ‘Basotho’ and ‘Batswana’. This paper studies why and how those ex-Kromdraai residents started to claim that they were ‘Basotho’. Firstly, it will discuss the political and economic situation in which the conflict occurred. Secondly, it will argue how politicians of Qwaqwa, a Bantustan for ‘Basotho’, attempted to mobilize people in forming their identity, and why Kromdraai residents got involved in its politics as ‘Basotho’. Thirdly, using oral testimonies, it will reveal the meaning of identifying oneself as ‘Basotho’ for Kromdraai residents. Finally, it will conclude that Kromdraai residents interpreted the word Basotho as being inclusive, not to be ‘ethnically’ exclusive as ‘Batswana’, but at the same time to secure help from Sotho Bantustan, Qwaqwa.

### **Introduction**

Nation-building has been one of the significant challenges in post-apartheid South Africa. Under the slogan ‘One Nation, Many Cultures’, it places ethnicity as signifying simply cultural difference, and praises the diversity of the ‘Rainbow Nation’. This tendency regarding ethnicity in South Africa today is an attempt to overcome the history of divide and rule. Yet, looking back at how ethnicity was fostered under the apartheid system, it might also mean dismissing the history of the people who had struggled subjectively to solve the problems under the layered structure of the oppression. Bantustan policy under apartheid was an extreme practice of divide and rule under which ethnicity became most controversial in South African history. To give an insight into the issues associated with ethnicity and nation-building in today’s South Africa, this paper attempts to reveal a part of the Sotho speaking people’s experiences under the Bantustan policy. It will suggest what it has meant to be a particular ethnicity for people when they face

threats.

The Bantustan policy, which was practiced from the 1970s onward, developed an institutionalised ‘ethnic’ framework.<sup>1</sup> The policy divided African populations into nine ‘ethnic’ groups and limited them to a mere 13 percent of the land. It aimed at creating the cheap labour migration system as well as a chasm among Africans to establish White minority rule. Ethnic division was based on the theory that “each ethnic group had, or was meant to have, its own territory where it would develop its inherent potential and become a sovereign ‘nation’ ” (Sharp 1988: 79). First, all members of the African population were compelled to register as belonging to one of the ‘ethnic’ groups. From the 1950s, the idea of ‘separate development’ became official government policy and evolved a series of Bantustan policies. The Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act (1959) provided that Africans should have been self-determined in separate territories called ‘homelands’ or Bantustans, which were premised on ‘historically ethnic grounds’ (Dubow 2014: 105). Then, by the beginning of the 1970s, all the members of each ‘ethnic’ group were obligated to belong to ascribed Bantustan, without considering the reality of the African people. At the same time, the influx of Africans into urban areas and their stay there were strictly restricted. Africans’ political rights which were limited in South Africa were expanded within Bantustans. Scholars in the 1970s and 1980s offered harsh criticism that the policy was aimed at forcing African population onto Bantustans and letting ‘beneficiaries’ of the system like Bantustan politicians or ‘tribal’ leaders rule for the sake of the apartheid government’s convenience (Southall 1977, Rogers 1980 etc.). ‘Ethnically’ divided Bantustan governments gained limited but much expanded rights of administration and ruled the members of ‘ethnic’ groups. Many African people were forcibly removed from where they had stayed for generations and had to move to new places where they were considered to belong according to the policy. Places where several ethnic groups had lived together fell under the rule of one of the Bantustan governments. In these places, ‘ethnic’ conflicts took place for limited resources in Bantustans.

These ‘ethnic’ conflicts under Bantustan policy have been studied primarily by anthropologists. These studies have contributed to understanding Africans’ flexibility in the context of the policy that promoted a fixed ‘ethnic identity’, especially from a cultural perspective. Some researchers point out that the most active actors of the conflicts were Bantustan officials, and most of the ordinary people opposed conflicts because they had coexisted peacefully in the same area for years (Niehaus 2002, Segar 1989). In these cases, both of the ethnic groups adapted some parts of the cultural customs of the other ethnic group since they had lived together. Thus these studies show that the boundaries of ‘ethnic’ groups in reality were not as clear-cut as the policy expected, while Bantustan governments or elites tried to confining people to their ‘ethnicity’, which perpetuated the ideologies of separatism..

On the other hand, it is also studied how Bantustan politicians and bureaucrats tried to mobilize people under a name of an ‘ethnic’ group. This perspective has revealed that ‘ethnic’

---

<sup>1</sup> In this paper, the ethnic groups defined by Bantustan policy will be called ‘ethnic’ groups for the sake of convenience to emphasize the gap between the policy’s aspiration and people’s reality.

identities were fostered by the interaction between Bantustan elites and ordinary people (Harries 1989, Lekgoathi 2003). Cultural symbols from a certain chosen past were strategically used and became known among even others as symbols of the 'ethnic' groups (Harries 1993, Jones 1999). Thus, the Bantustan identity gradually penetrated ordinary people's daily life and, in some cases, it contributed to intensify the 'ethnic' conflicts in Bantustans.

To bridge these two perspectives, this paper will examine how ordinary people perceived and interpreted this Bantustan officials' attempt of fostering 'ethnicity' for the sake of their survival in an 'ethnic' conflict. From the perspective of national politics, their efforts to improve their daily living situations were said to be incorporated into the 'ethnic' rhetoric of Bantustan policy since they had become strong supporters of the Bantustan government at the end as the policy intended. The paper, however, attempts to analyse the situation from the perspective of the local ordinary people in their struggle to show that their strife within the system was actually against the apartheid state's effort to divide Africans. The narratives of ex-Kromdraai residents in Thaba Nchu in 1970s will be examined as a case study.<sup>2</sup> Kromdraai was a 'squatter' area developed in Thaba Nchu which was an enclave of the 'Batswana' Bantustan (Bophuthatswana), in Orange Free State Province in the 1970s. Those 'squatter' residents were newcomers who arrived in Thaba Nchu mainly in the 1970s, and were harassed by Bophuthatswana officials for occupying the land for 'Batswana'. To resist the harassment, the Kromdraai residents organized a committee and called for help from 'Basotho' Bantustan (Qwaqwa). Firstly, the paper will show the political and economic background of the establishment of Kromdraai and the conflict between 'Batswana' and 'Basotho' there. Secondly, it will examine the Qwaqwa government's attempt to build a 'Basotho' nation, showing the reason Qwaqwa had to help Kromdraai residents, and why the residents accepted Qwaqwa's offer. Thirdly, it will discuss how the Kromdraai residents perceived and interpreted Qwaqwa's 'nation-building' to survive the hardship in the conflict. The discourse of the former Kromdraai residents' oral testimony will be analysed. In conclusion, it will suggest the implications from the case study for current South African nation-building.

### **Ethnic conflicts under the Bantustan policy: The case of Thaba Nchu**

During the 1960s and 1970s, the population of Bantustans increased rapidly due to evictions from urban areas and, more importantly for the case of Orange Free State, from white farms, where mechanisation had been promoted. There were two Bantustans in Orange Free State, namely Thaba Nchu and Qwaqwa. They also experienced a mass influx people. According to the theory of Bantustan policy, the 'Basotho' had to live in Qwaqwa, the former native reserve allocated to 'Basotho', and the 'Batswana' had to reside in Bophuthatswana, a Bantustan for 'Batswana'. This, however, was neither suitable for the reality of multi-ethnic African society, nor an important consideration among those who were forced to move in the 1970s. Confronting sudden eviction, they did not have many options. Qwaqwa and Thaba Nchu were almost the only

---

<sup>2</sup> The research was based on the oral testimony of former Kromdraai residents. Most interviews were conducted in Botshabelo from August to September 2011, February to March 2012.

options available to most Africans living in Orange Free State. They could not go to the urban areas since the influx of the African population into towns was strictly regulated. Some went to Qwaqwa,<sup>3</sup> and others went to Thaba Nchu. As most of the African population in Orange Free State were historically Sotho speaking people, it was natural that many Sotho speaking people moved to Thaba Nchu even though it was a part of 'Batswana' Bantustan. There were also significant numbers of Xhosa and other ethnic groups.

Newcomers changed the demography of Thaba Nchu. Some of them resettled in the existing residential areas in Thaba Nchu. However, the residential areas in Thaba Nchu were also overpopulated. Thus, a huge 'squatter' settlement developed in the area which had been designated as assigned grazing land in Thaba Nchu. The people who settled there, however, believed that the site had been sold or allocated to them (Murray 1992: 218). There was a rumour that circulated among Africans who had been threatened eviction from white farms in the early 1970s. It said that there was a place in Thaba Nchu where 'everybody could get his/her own land'. This site became known as Kromdraai. The population of Thaba Nchu increased rapidly.

The following example illustrates the importance of the rumour and the con artist who took advantage of the situation in decisions of the people to move to Kromdraai.

Informant M4, who was born in 1954, grew up on a white farm in Orange Free State. He was the first child born to his family and had to take care of his younger siblings while his parents were working on the farm. Therefore he never went to school. When he was working at a mine, his family had to move to Kromdraai from the white farm because the owner of the farm fired them due to M4's periodic absences for the mine job.

I heard about Qwaqwa and Thaba Nchu when we were chased away from the farm. I heard that there was a place where all newcomers could stay. That was Kromdraai. So we decided to move there. I heard the rumour that people coming from outside Thaba Nchu could also get their own houses and yards after living there for a while.<sup>4</sup>

Informant F14 also had a similar experience that led her to Kromdraai. She and her family were chased away from a white farm and came to Thaba Nchu as well.

We rented a room in the Mokoena location there. My husband tried to buy a plot and paid to Bohuthatswana (government). But after he paid money to them, they told us to go away, saying that they did not realise that we were Basotho, so we must go to the place for Basotho.<sup>5</sup>

The Barolong Tribal Authority, which was ruling Thaba Nchu under the Bophuthatswana

---

<sup>3</sup> The population of Qwaqwa was about 24,000 in 1969, but it increased to about 100,000 in 1975 and to more than 200,000 in 1979 (Bank 1995: 577).

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Informant M4, on 31 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Informant F14, on 5 September 2011 in Botshabelo.

government, refused permission for them to live there due to the lack of and. Thus F14 and her family had to look for another white farm to stay and work. The rumour about Kromdraai led them to return to Thaba Nchu. Because her husband became sick and could no longer work, they wanted to move to a place where they could live without the fear of being chased away.

One day, my son went to see his uncle in Thaba Nchu. .... On that day, he heard the rumour about Kromdraai, where you don't have to be Motswana and could get land. So we decided to move there.<sup>6</sup>

Ten of the 19 informants interviewed identified the rumour that they could get their own land in Kromdraai as the reason for moving there. Most of them could not obtain the citizenship or permission to stay in Thaba Nchu even though some of them had tried to apply.

As a consequence, Kromdraai developed as a huge 'squatter' area in Thaba Nchu in the mid-1970s. From these testimonies, it is obvious that, for those who resettled in Kromdraai, the theory of Bantustan policy or 'ethnic' division was not a key issue of concern for them when they came there. Survival was the most significant and urgent problem. Thus Kromdraai residents were mainly consisted of ex-farm workers regardless of their ethnicity.

Due to the mass influx of Sotho, the population of Sotho in Thaba Nchu grew larger than that of Tswana in the late 1970s. In 1970, the total official population of Thaba Nchu was 42,217, including 24,253 Tswana and 17,733 non-Tswana Africans (Republic of Bophuthatswana 1977: 1). The population of newcomers, however, had caught up with that of long-time Tswana residents. As the very existence of these Sotho became a major threat to Bophuthatswana (Twala and Barnard 2006: 166), the latter started to harass the new residents, who were mainly Sotho, especially those who lived in Kromdraai, because of their 'illegal' status.

At first, the Bophuthatswana government tried to move the Kromdraai residents to Qwaqwa. In 1974, L. Mangope, the Chief Minister of Bophuthatswana, announced that he had arranged transportation for Kromdraai residents, and some moved to Qwaqwa (Murray 1992: 219). However, the mass influx into Kromdraai never ceased.

Kromdraai residents faced serious harassment by the Bophuthatswana police, which were known as MaYB because of the number-plates on their cars. MaYB frequently came to the site and tried to chase residents away, saying that the land was not for 'Basotho' but for 'Batswana'. 'Conflicts developed within Thaba Nchu along ethnic lines' (Murray 1992: 224), as the policies of apartheid held that African land should be divided into 'ethno-national units'. Those who came to Kromdraai hoping to get their own land found themselves seriously threatened. They were regarded as illegal 'squatters' by the Bophuthatswana government and denied even the minimal rights needed to earn a livelihood on a daily basis. Informant F3 recalled the effects of the oppression of 'Basotho' by the Bophuthatswana government.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Informant F14, on 5 September 2011 in Botshabelo.

If you were Mosotho, the Bophuthatswana government would never give you a work permit. Then you could not go to Bloemfontein to look for a job. Then you could not even go to school. To go to school in Thaba Nchu, we must pay R40. If you have a baby, you must pay R40 per child to the chief in Thaba Nchu. If your parents could not pay, then you could not go to school. That is why I had to go to school in Bloemfontein. My parents didn't or couldn't pay for it.<sup>7</sup>

Informant F4 also remembered when her children could not go to school in Thaba Nchu. She was a Xhosa born in Umzimkulu in Transkei (one of the 'Xhosa' Bantustans) and had moved to Orange Free State because her husband worked in Bloemfontein.

No! Those Batswana...My children couldn't go to school. Batswana asked us, 'Does your father have cattle?' If you want to go to school, (you need to pay those cattle to them). If your father didn't have cattle, you had to go back to Umzimkulu.<sup>8</sup>

Problems with the services provided to Kromdraai residents were not restricted to education; they affected their daily lives. Since Kromdraai consisted of only a grass field, which was used for grazing, and the people themselves built mud houses or shacks in which to live, there were no public services in Kromdraai. Informant F13 calmly talked about the situation.

We used to drink water from a small river between Kromdraai and Zone 1. MaYB told us not to drink even this dirty water because they said we did not belong in this place. Also, I remember one day, a young lady was about to deliver a baby. She wanted to go to hospital, but MaYB was there outside so she could not go. They didn't sleep because they monitored us, and we couldn't sleep because of their monitoring us.<sup>9</sup>

After December 1977, when Bophuthatswana became 'independent', The raids on Thaba Nchu by the Bophuthatswana police became more intense. The number of 'squatters' in Kromdraai was estimated at about 38,000 by the time (Twala and Beinart 2006: 166). Several major raids were carried out by the Bophuthatswana police. For example, 301 people were arrested on 24 April 1978 (Murray 1992: 220). T. K. Mopeli, the chief minister of Qwaqwa, asked the Bophuthatswana government to stop the attack on the 'Basotho' in Kromdraai until they could resettle in another area. Major raids were nonetheless carried out by the Bophuthatswana police in December of the same year.

Informants also remembered the intensification of the situation. Informant F4 said:

I was pregnant. When MaYB came to Kromdraai, the kids were all attending the school under a tree.

---

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Informant F3 on 16 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Informant F4 on 18 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Informant F13 on 31 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

They destroyed everything. They beat the children and teachers, killed people, and shot them. I fell down near the train station because I was pregnant. I had already almost been shot at that time. The bullet just passed next to my head. They came to Kromdraai to attack the people at the school. They came with dogs, and the dogs chased kids and bit them. They shot one of the teachers. ...but she was shot just because she was a teacher.<sup>10</sup>

Informant F11 recalled that she did not make a report to the police, although she was raped in the raid, because she did not know whether the person who raped her was a police officer and because nobody cared about these kinds of incidents, which happened in Kromdraai on a regular basis.<sup>11</sup>

In the middle of the 1970s, some of the Kromdraai residents decided to establish a residential organization for improving their daily life circumstances. Bophuthatswana administration refused to give IDs, birth certificates and work permits to Kromdraai residents, thus they were excluded from all the public services as schooling, medical service, water supply and even the residential permit. Without the IDs, they could not even go to the urban area to look for a job. Therefore, the first aim of the organization was to support the residents to get those documents from the Qwaqwa government. The organization was named as the South Sotho Central Committee (SSCC/ *Lakgotla la Basotho*).

### **‘Solidarity as Basotho’: Qwaqwa’s nation-building and Kromdraai residents**

Before the Bantustan policy, there were the Bakwena ‘tribe’ and the Batlokwa ‘tribe’ in then Witsieshoek (later renamed Qwaqwa) which were recognized officially by the South African government. The concept of ‘tribe’ was remarkably biased by colonizers: it was regarded, at first, to have “a primordial attachment to defined territories and to particular traditions,” and secondly, to have “kinship in general...are a fundamental basis of ‘tribal’ social and political structure” (Quinlan 1988: 79-115). The power relationship between these ‘tribes’ were highly influenced by the policies of the colonial state. In the 1970s when Qwaqwa was reformed as a self-governing territory of a Bantustan, the Legislative Assembly was established to govern the entire ‘Basotho nation’. The two tribal authorities fell under the Qwaqwa government. T. K. Mopeli, who was a member of the Bakwena ‘tribe’, became the Chief Minister of Qwaqwa. Because he was the paternal uncle of the Bakwena paramount, his party, the Dikwankwetla Party, was criticized at the village level for being “an instrument of Bakwena tribal power” (Bank 1995: 580). Therefore, T. K. Mopeli had to try to show ‘solidarity as Basotho’ in order to deny ‘tribal politics’ which were dominant before the Legislative Assembly was established (Bank 1995: 580). In addition to this, most of Qwaqwa ‘citizens’ lived outside Qwaqwa.<sup>12</sup> Thus they also needed to show

<sup>10</sup> Interview with Informant F4 on 18 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Informant F11 on 31 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>12</sup> In 1970, only 1.76 percent of Qwaqwa ‘citizens’ lived in Qwaqwa, and 8.42 percent lived in other homelands: 42.05 percent in white urban areas, and 47.76 percent in white farm areas (BENBO 1978: 21).

‘solidarity as Basotho’ to maintain their power in the government (Kono 2014b).

For showing the ‘Solidarity as Basotho,’ T. K. Mopeli focused on the land issue. Firstly, he demanded the return of “all territories conquered by the Boers” in the late nineteenth century (Bank 1995: 580). He emphasized the places like Harrismith where there were people whose ‘tribe’ was not yet officially recognized and therefore had not got the right for the land in which they stayed. Secondly, he supported the struggles of the Sotho communities living in other Bantustans and that were being harassed by other ‘ethnic’ governments. For example, he allied with Sotho chiefs in Transkei (one of the Xhosa Bantustan) who refused to be ruled by Xhosa dominated Transkei government.<sup>13</sup> He promised the land in Qwaqwa for those people. Kromdraai residents were another significant example of Qwaqwa’s attempt for the ‘Solidarity as Basotho’.

At the same time, T. K. Mopeli and his allies tried to construct a new version of ‘Basotho-ness’ to overcome the political division between ‘tribes’ in the Bantustan (Bank 1995: 581). They claimed the importance of the Sesotho ethos of *re a thusana* (help each other) in the tradition of ‘Basotho’. Mopeli emphasized that “nation building would have to take place around this ethos” (Bank 1995: 581). The campaigns for ‘Basotho’ in Transkei and Thaba Nchu were used as the evidence of his commitment to help other ‘Basotho’. However, their nation-building faced a serious problem. Symbols that Mopeli used as of the ‘nation’ such as the conical hat, the pony and the blanket had already been used by the elites in Lesotho for its own nation-building.<sup>14</sup> Thus it was not received widely among the people in Qwaqwa, or ‘Basotho’ in South Africa. Therefore, he had to promote a South African version of ‘Basotho-ness’, which was significantly different from that of Lesotho. He tried to put a broader meaning to ‘Basotho-ness’, namely an inclusive ‘Basotho-ness’, meaning ‘African-ness’ which opposed ‘whiteness (*sekgowa*)’ (Bank 1995: 581).

Considering that T. K. Mopeli had tried to improve the circumstances of the people in Qwaqwa who were oppressed by apartheid, it made sense that he put the oppositional meaning of ‘whiteness’ to ‘Basotho-ness’. In his speeches in the late 1970s, he repeatedly warned of white domination. He never agreed with the ‘independence’ of Qwaqwa which the apartheid government was willing to give, because he thought that the ‘independence’ only meant that his followers became more vulnerable being ‘foreigners’ in the white South Africa whose economy they heavily depended on.

In the case of ‘Basotho’ in Thaba Nchu, T. K. Mopeli negotiated with Bophuthatswana to leave them alone until they would get their own places in Qwaqwa. The attempt to move ‘Basotho’ in Thaba Nchu to Qwaqwa did not work well, because Qwaqwa was already

---

<sup>13</sup> Although Bantustan ‘should’ have been ethnically homogenous, considering the reality, the constitution of Transkei admitted that there were certain number of Sotho residents in the territory. Therefore, Transkei government included Sotho members who did not oppose the Xhosa majority rule.

<sup>14</sup> Sotho speaking people were divided by the border during the colonial era, and 99 percent of the population in Lesotho, a small country placed in South Africa, consisted of Sotho speaking people. It got its independence in 1966. Qwaqwa shared a border with Lesotho.

overpopulated by that time. Meanwhile, T. K. Mopeli supported 'Basotho' in Thaba Nchu, especially Kromdraai residents, to obtain the official documents such as IDs and work permits.

The SSCC in Kromdraai started to work as a conduit through which the residents could obtain official documents from Qwaqwa. These were important for Africans to live and work in urban areas. As the SSCC was recognised not only by Kromdraai residents and the Qwaqwa government but also by the Bophuthatswana government, it represented the Kromdraai residents in negotiations with the Bophuthatswana government.<sup>15</sup> As a result, it became the main target of the attacks carried out by the Bophuthatswana police. Mr. Mfokazi recalled when he was kidnapped and tortured by the Bophuthatswana police because he was one of the leaders of the SSCC.<sup>16</sup> Although the leaders were in constant danger, they did not stop supporting the residents in their efforts to improve their daily conditions. Informant F13 remembered how the SSCC had helped the arrested residents during the raids.

So many people were arrested. Especially young ones. They were taken by trucks. Men and women. At the police station, they were fined 60 days, 21 days in a jail, or money according to what they did. Sometimes, people were arrested just after they had come out of jail. And they were fined again. Bophuthatswana took money from people living in Kromdraai. And in this situation, the committee paid a fine for the people and tried to get them out of the jail.<sup>17</sup>

Mr. Mfokazi also recalled that the SSCC found a sponsor for those who were arrested. This sponsorship by the Roman Catholic Church in Thaba Nchu was organised by Kromdraai residents who attended the church.

The Bophuthatswana police arrested people in Kromdraai; even those who were old, pregnant, and disabled were arrested. Most of them were sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church in Thaba Nchu. I was also arrested because I was a leader of the SSCC. The Roman Catholic Church also sponsored me. After I came out of jail, I asked the church to support other people who had been arrested. Those who were pregnant, old, and disabled were the priority.<sup>18</sup>

In short, the SSCC was established by volunteers from the Kromdraai community to improve their daily lives. It worked as a platform to reach any support which they could get including Qwaqwa on behalf of Kromdraai residents who were resisting harassment by the Bophuthatswana police.

The Qwaqwa government also supported the volunteer open-air school run by the residents themselves through the SSCC. Children in Kromdraai were denied access to school. Even

---

<sup>15</sup> Interview with M. J. Mfokazi on 22 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with M. J. Mfokazi on 22 February 2012 in Botshabelo.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Informant F13 on 31 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>18</sup> Interviews with M. J. Mfokazi on 22 August 2011 and 22 February 2012 in Botshabelo.

‘Basotho’ children who lived in a particular location in Thaba Nchu were evicted if their parents opposed Bophuthatswana. In this context, some residents decided to start an open-air school. Although the volunteer teachers were not qualified, they were slightly more educated than were others. Secondhand textbooks were donated by the Qwaqwa government through the SSCC. The residents called the school *Iketsetseng* (do it yourself) (Kono 2014c).

When students completed Standard 5, they had to take written exams. Because the situation at Iketsetseng school did not allow pupils to take exams without being disturbed, the SSCC asked the Qwaqwa government to give the pupils an opportunity to take their exams in the security of Qwaqwa. Qwaqwa government granted this request. One of the residents drove for the pupils all the way to Qwaqwa in secret without drawing the attention of the Bophuthatswana police. The results were good, and the students earned Junior Certificates from the Qwaqwa government.<sup>19</sup>

Qwaqwa’s effort to improve the daily situation of Kromdraai residents resulted in the establishment of a new township next to Thaba Nchu. In 1978, the South African government, Qwaqwa government and Bophuthatswana government agreed to establish a new township for ‘surplus’ Africans (Twala and Barnard 2006: 168). The urban areas in OFS could not accommodate the rapidly increasing African population. Besides this, ‘illegal’ squatters in Kromdraai were obviously unwanted by Bophuthatswana, and the Qwaqwa government needed to help these ‘Basotho’ struggling in Thaba Nchu. Thus the interests of these three stakeholders met to establish a new township. However, for Kromdraai residents, this meant that T. K. Mopeli and Qwaqwa government worked to change their hardship. They perceived it as a result of ‘solidarity as Basotho’. Kromdraai residents were moved to the new location called Onverwacht in 1979. ‘Basotho’ in other areas in Thaba Nchu were also relocated to Onverwacht. During this period, about 64,000 people were moved from Thaba Nchu to the new township. The place was later called Botshabelo, a place of refuge in Sotho.

### **Being ‘ethnically’ inclusive to protest exclusiveness?: Kromdraai residents’ interpretation of ‘Basotho-ness’**

The SSCC played a significant role in the struggle of the Kromdraai residents. Although the name of the committee included ‘South Sotho’, referring to an ‘ethnic’ identity, membership was not ethnically exclusive. For example, the mother tongue of Mr. Mfokazi, one of the leaders, was Zulu, and he identified himself as Zulu; there were some leaders who were Xhosa or Ndebele as well. Additionally, the SSCC never refused to support people because of their ethnicity. Kromdraai residents were consisted of multi-ethnic groups, such as Xhosa, Zulu, and Ndebele individuals, as far as the informants could tell. In fact, Kromdraai residents were recognised as homogenous Sotho speaking people by the media. In addition to this, the Bophuthatswana or Qwaqwa governments called them ‘Basotho’. Mr. Mfokazi recalled that most of Kromdraai residents were Sotho speaking people. However, the residents themselves did not care about their

---

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Informant M3 on 28 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

ethnic origin.<sup>20</sup> There were even a few Tswana speaking people who opposed Bophuthatswana's rule,<sup>21</sup> although it seems that most of the Kromdraai residents did not recognize it.

The reason why they put the 'ethnic' name on the committee was more strategic. According to Mr. Mfokazi, the committee's name derived from the fact that the majority of the residents were Sotho speaking people.<sup>22</sup> However, the root of the name could be traced to the 1960s. 'Ethnic' division had been introduced in the urban areas before the Bantustan policy. Kromdraai leaders were advised to organise a committee to support the residents by local politicians in Bloemfontein,<sup>23</sup> which was the nearest urban area from Thaba Nchu. They worked as members of the Bloemfontein Urban Bantu Council (UBC) as the representatives of 'Basotho'. To unite the 'Basotho' residents to gain access to the limited resources in the area, they had already organized the committee called the (Bloemfontein) SSCC and had the Tribal Authorities in Qwaqwa (Kono 2014a). Thus it could be said that the advice to establish the SSCC in Kromdraai was in line with these processes and that the strategic naming of the committee was successful. It was for assisting people in the area to improve their life within the apartheid system, and to accomplish this aim they needed to follow the ideology of 'separate development'.

Nevertheless, the SSCC in Kromdraai never became a mere practitioner of the forced 'ethnic' division. Those from the Bloemfontein SSCC became the co-founders of the Dikwankwetla Party later on, which became the ruling party in Qwaqwa in 1975. Then the SSCC in Kromdraai also got involved in the Dikwankwetla Party,<sup>24</sup> since they needed help from the Qwaqwa government and believed that T. K. Mopeli, the leader of the party, would save them from the situation. Thus the Kromdraai residents and the SSCC have been considered as the supporters of the Qwaqwa government until now. Yet Mr. Mfokazi emphasised that they established the SSCC as a residents' committee to help the residents there and that the SSCC was a totally different organization from the Dikwankwetla Party, even though almost all members later joined the party.<sup>25</sup> All the informants also confirmed that the SSCC was an organization which supported the residents' life in Kromdraai. The evidence shows that the SSCC in Kromdraai was established voluntarily by the residents to improve their daily life whatever the aims of the politicians who supported the committee were.

The motivation for Kromdraai residents to join the SSCC was that they shared the problems of harassment by 'Batswana,' the Bophuthatswana police, and the poor living condition caused by them. A fixed 'ethnicity' as 'Basotho' was not internalized among the residents in Kromdraai, as the policies expected. The informants explained the problems they had faced in Kromdraai as

<sup>20</sup> Interview with M. J. Mfokazi on 22 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with M. J. Mfokazi on 22 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with M. J. Mfokazi on 22 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>23</sup> Interviews with Mr. M. J. Mfokazi on 22 August 2011 and 22 February 2012 in Botshabelo.

<sup>24</sup> Neither interviews nor documents have yet revealed the year in which the SSCC was established. M. J. Mfokazi, however, remembers that it was "before Dikwankwetla (Party)" and that they joined the party before the election.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with M. J. Mfokazi on 22 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

such:

We are Basotho. Batswana hated Basotho. They fought us.<sup>26</sup>

We didn't have the Bophuthatswana citizenship because we were fighting over the land. Barolong hated Basotho working there and didn't give us even water.<sup>27</sup>

We had a good relationship with our neighbours. They were all Basotho, and I'm Maxhosa. The only problem we had was MaYB. The only people who disturbed our life... There were problems between Batswana and us. They didn't like us living there.<sup>28</sup>

They said this place belonged to Batswana. And because I'm Mosotho I should have gone to Transkei or wherever.<sup>29</sup>

The common feature of the informants' narrative about the problems in Thaba Nchu is the composition of the confrontation; 'we, Basotho', versus 'them, Batswana/ Barolong/ Bophuthatswana'. These three words can be understood to refer almost the same meaning, since the people who harassed Kromdraai residents were 'Batswana' under the Barolong Tribal Authority in Thaba Nchu, which was the lower branch of the Bophuthatswana government. Kromdraai residents understood the violent exclusion by the Bophuthatswana administration or Brolong Tribal Authority through the framework of 'ethnicity' fixed by the Bantustan policy, namely 'Basotho' versus 'Batswana'.

Nevertheless, it should be noticed that, in the residents' narratives, the word *Basotho* did not mean the fixed 'ethnic' group that the policy had promoted. As mentioned above, Kromdraai residents were consisted of multi-ethnic groups. In addition to this, most of them were former farm labourers who had been isolated from interaction with other people. None of the informants knew anyone in Kromdraai except for their own family when they came to Kromdraai. The only tie they had was the fact that they had been threatened by 'Batswana' as 'Basotho' in their daily life in Kromdraai. Furthermore, they shared the hope to be released from being the oppressed in the Bantustan. In other words, it could be said that they all longed for liberation from apartheid's oppression, since this 'ethnic' conflict was caused at the tip of the apartheid structure to perpetuate the White minority rule. Therefore, when they called themselves as 'Basotho', the word *Basotho* could be interpreted as 'people harassed by Bophuthatswana', 'the oppressed', or even 'Black people' as 'Batswana' was the symbol of the apartheid oppression who they directly faced.

---

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Informant F1 on 12 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Informant F2 on 15 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Informant F5 on 18 August 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Informant M5 on 5 September 2011 in Botshabelo.

Although the word *Basotho* in Sotho is generally understood as the Sotho speaking people who belong to a certain ethnic group and practice Sotho traditions, the interpretation as having a broader meaning is supported by some studies. Anthropologists Lye and Murray (1980: 25) stated that “ ‘BaSotho’ translates from their language as ‘Black People’ ”. In historical perspective, Eldredge (1993: 40) pointed out that the word had been defined when the Chief Moshoeshoe distinguished himself in Difaqane (Mfecane) by expanding the followers in the early 19th century before the encounter by the colonialists. Moshoeshoe accommodated small groups which escaped from other powerful chiefs such as Chief Shaka of Zulu, so his followers were ethnically heterogeneous. According to her statement, the word *Basotho* was used as ‘Moshoeshoe’s people’ in this context. Whereas the way the word had been used by Sotho speaking people is not perfectly clear, it is incontrovertible that there is room to interpret the use of the word in a broader meaning.

In addition to this, the interpretation is also supported by the residents’ explanation of why they eagerly supported T. K. Mopeli. Their will to call for help from the Qwaqwa government was pushed by the fact that Qwaqwa tried to support all the people who were harassed by the Bophuthatswana or Transkei regardless of their ethnic origin. In the interviews, informants often mentioned the slogan, ‘*Phuthaditjhaba* (Gather the nations together)’, which they believed that T. K. Mopeli claimed. *Phuthaditjhaba* had been the name of the capital city in Qwaqwa even before the 1970s when T. K. Mopeli appeared in the political sphere in Qwaqwa. Even T. K. Mopeli himself denied in an interview having used the word for his campaign.<sup>30</sup> It was, however, believed by the Kromdraai residents that T. K. Mopeli said the words as a slogan and some of the informants even emphasized this aspect. This sympathy regarding *Phuthaditjhaba* can be seen in the narrative of the informants.

Mopeli collected Basotho and developed. So I like him. He gathered all the nations together. Not like Bophuthatswana, they were only for Batswana.<sup>31</sup>

Because they faced the ‘ethnic’ exclusiveness of ‘Batswana’, their motives were not to be exclusive like them but to sympathize with T. K. Mopeli’s concept of inclusive ‘Basotho-ness’.

Furthermore, there is the common notion that it was T. K. Mopeli who helped them and brought them to Botshabelo where the threats of ‘Batswana’ would decrease. In the process of relocation, the Qwaqwa government accepted all the Kromdraai residents regardless of their ethnicity. One informant explained her loyalty to Dikwankwetla Party during an interview as such:

I like Dikwankwetla. Because it was led by Mosotho, and I’m also Mosotho. And Mopeli rescued us

<sup>30</sup> Interview with T. K. Mopeli held on March 24, 2012 in Qwaqwa.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with M1 held on August 16, 2011 in Botshabelo.

from Barolong.<sup>32</sup>

Her explanations continued.

Basotho has two meanings. It means Blacks, and there are Basotho, Maxhosa and so on, who have different culture and languages<sup>33</sup>.

In short, sympathizing with the inclusive 'Basotho-ness' of T. K. Mopeli, and believing that he would help them from the harassment of Bophuthatswana, Kromdraai residents asked for the support from Qwaqwa, as 'Basotho' who faced the threat of exclusive 'Batswana'.

From this analysis, it could be said that Kromdraai residents' strategy of survival was to interpret 'Basotho-ness' as inclusive and to try to obtain the help from Qwaqwa. Although the Bantustan policy promoted the fixed 'ethnicity', they did not just follow it as it was presented. Resisting against Bophuthatswana's harassment did not mean to be exclusive as 'Batswana'. For the people who had been refused and left with no place to go, the issues of ethnic origin was less of a concern. What was more important for them was to help each other to survive and to improve their lives. For them, helping each other under the threat itself meant 'being Basotho'. At the same time, the Qwaqwa government had to promote a broader meaning of 'Basotho-ness' by compromising between the policy and the relationship with Lesotho. Here the interests of Kromdraai residents and Qwaqwa government met. Therefore, Kromdraai residents could get help from Qwaqwa as 'Basotho' while resisting to be 'ethnically' exclusive.

### **After the relocation to Botshabelo: The struggle continued**

Kromdraai residents' struggle did not end after they were relocated to Botshabelo as they expected. By the early 1980s, it rapidly expanded due to an influx of Africans who came mainly from the urban areas and the ex-Kromdraai residents were outnumbered by them. The population estimated at 10,000 by June 1980 became about 500,000 in 1986 (Murray 1992: 225, 237). Those who knew the difficulties in Kromdraai became a minority there.

In the late 1980s, massive raids occurred against the Qwaqwa government's declaration to incorporate Botshabelo into Qwaqwa in 1987 (Twala and Barnard 2006: 171). Most of the ex-Kromdraai residents were still supporting T. K. Mopeli and the Qwaqwa government for their help for the relocation, so they supported the incorporation. However, mainly jobless youth influenced by the ANC ideology criticized the Bantustan policy and the apartheid system itself and attacked ex-Kromdraai residents.<sup>34</sup> For those who did not owe T. K. Mopeli a debt of gratitude like ex-Kromdraai residents, the incorporation into Qwaqwa did not mean anything

---

<sup>32</sup> Interview with F2 held on August 15, 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with F2 held on August 15, 2011 in Botshabelo.

<sup>34</sup> Approximately 70% of the population in Botshabelo was under 30 years old and almost 80% were unemployed (Twala and Barnard 2006: 171).

since Qwaqwa also suffered from a high unemployment rate. They believed that to support a Bantustan government meant to support the apartheid system. Houses of the ex-Kromdraai residents were burnt and many were killed for their support for Qwaqwa.

In this situation, the strategy of Kromdraai residents backfired. Their strategy to resist against Bophuthatswana's oppression within the Bantustan system was in a sense successful, since they finally got a plot in a newly established township called Botshabelo after 1979 as a result of the negotiation between the Qwaqwa, Bophuthatswana and South African governments. For the Kromdraai residents, it meant refuge from the harassment by Bophuthatswana. Yet, it was construed as being in support of apartheid even though it arose from urgent needs for security after they moved to Botshabelo. This is because the situation had shifted from the conflict within the framework of Bantustan policy to the crush outside Bantustan. Although the reason they claimed themselves as 'Basotho' was for improving their lives, as the youth who attacked them longed for as well, they were regarded as 'collaborators' by other Botshabelo residents. In this sense, the attempt of the apartheid government to divide African population via the Bantustan policy succeeded even at the local level, because the system led to people who struggled for the same purpose taking on different strategies and fighting one another because of this difference.

## **Conclusion**

This paper examined the meaning of being 'Basotho' for Kromdraai residents who came to the area to get their 'own land'. The people faced serious harassment by the Bophuthatswana police, supported one another's attempts to improve their living conditions, and requested support from Qwaqwa as 'Basotho' living in an exclusively 'Batswana' area. The interviews revealed that although the SSCC was established within the 'ethnic' framework forced by the apartheid system, it worked on behalf of the interests of the residents. It was obvious that the activities of the SSCC and its cooperation with Kromdraai residents were not motivated by an 'ethnic conflict' between the 'Basotho' and 'Batswana' but by residents' desires to improve their living conditions. Although they were not ethnically homogeneous as described by the media or Bantustan governments, they called themselves 'Basotho' to get help from the only people, 'Basotho' politicians from Qwaqwa, who showed were sympathetic to their struggle. The promotion of the inclusive concept of 'Basotho' by the Qwaqwa government was easy to accept for the residents, since they hoped for release from the 'ethnic' exclusiveness of 'Batswana'. Interpretation of the word 'Basotho' as an inclusive concept drove those who fought for a better daily life into expressing themselves as 'Basotho' to get help. Their strategy was useful when the situation was restricted by the Bantustan policy. Nonetheless, it did not work where the 'ethnic' discourse was criticized as supporting apartheid.

In conclusion, the author has argued the implication of the experiences of Kromdraai residents. After the collapse of apartheid, African people were, for the first time in their history, included by the state as full citizens. National identity as South African became significant for Africans, and ethnicity was regarded as mere cultural differences which do not interrupt national 'unity'.

However, there is always a possibility that people would claim a certain ethnicity when it could be a significant discourse to solve a problem they face, as the case of the Kromdraai residents suggests. This case tells us that the notion of ethnic groups in today's South Africa was actually fostered through the people's experiences under the 'ethnic' division forced by apartheid, and it contains somehow the intention to liberate the people from oppressive situation under the name of the group.

## References

- Bank, L. (1995) 'The Failure of Ethnic Nationalism: Land, Power and the Politics of Clanship on the South African Highveld 1860–1990', *Africa*, 65.
- BENBO (Bureau for Economic Research Bantu Development) (1978) *Qwaqwa: Economic Revue*, Pretoria: BENBO.
- Dubow, S. (2014) *Apartheid: 1948- 1994*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eldredge, E. A. (1993) *A South African Kingdom: The Pursuit of Security in Nineteenth-Century Lesotho*, African Studies Series 78, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harries, P. (1989) 'Exclusion, Classification and Internal Colonialism: The Emergence of Ethnicity Among the Tsonga-Speakers of South Africa', in L. Vail (ed.), *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa*, London: James Currey.
- Harries, P. (1993) 'Imagery, Symbolism and Tradition in a South African Bantustan: Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Inkatha, and Zulu History', *History and Theory*, 32(4).
- Jones, P. S. (1999) "'To Come Together for Progress": Modernization and Nation-building in South Africa's Bantustan Periphery- The Case of Bophuthatswana', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 25(4).
- Kono, S. (2014a) 'A Study on Ethnic Divide and Rule in Apartheid South Africa: Focusing on the Spread of "Basotho" Organizations from the Urban to the Rural', in Kinzo Matsuo Memorial Foundation (ed.), *Asu e Tobu: New Perspectives on Humanities and Social Sciences 3*, Tokyo: Kazama Shobo (in Japanese).
- Kono, S. (2014b) "'Divide and Rule" or "Self-determination"?: The Process of Fostering "Basotho-ness" in Qwaqwa Legislative Assembly in the late 1970s', The paper presented at the Biennial Conference of the Historical Association of South Africa.
- Kono, S. (2014c) 'Mechanism of Becoming "Ethnic" in Bantustan: "Illegal" Squatters in Thaba Nchu and Their Daily Struggle for Survival, 1970s', The paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Oral Historical Association of South Africa.
- Lekgoathi, S. P. (2003) 'Chiefs, Migrants and North Ndebele Ethnicity in the Context of Surrounding Homeland Politics, 1965-1978', *African Studies*, 62(1).
- Lye, W. F. and Murray, C. (1980) *Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and Southern Sotho*, Cape Town and London: David Philip.
- Murray, C. (1992) *Black Mountain: Land, Class and Power in the Eastern Orange Free State*

- 1880s–1980s*, Washington D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- Niehaus, I. (2002) ‘Ethnicity and the Boundaries of Belonging: Reconfiguring Shangaan Identity in the South African Lowveld’, *African Affairs*, 101.
- Quinlan, T. (1988) ‘The Perpetuation of Myths: A Case Study on “Tribe” and “Chief” in South Africa’, *Journal of Legal Pluralism*, 27.
- Republic of Bophuthatswana (1977) *Bophuthatswana Statistics*, Republic of Bophuthatswana.
- Rogers, B. (1980) *Divide and Rule: South Africa’s Bantustans*, revised and enlarged edition, London: International Defence & Aid Fund.
- Segar, J. (1989) *Fruits of Apartheid: Experiencing ‘Independence’ in a Transkeian Village*, Bellville: Anthropos Publishers.
- Sharp, J. (1988) ‘Ethnic Group and Nation: The Apartheid Vision in South Africa’, in E. Boonzaier and J. Sharp (eds.), *South African Keywords: The Use and Abuses of Political Concepts*, Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip.
- Southall, R. J. (1977) ‘The Beneficiaries of Transkeian “Independence”’, *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 15(1).
- Twala, C. and Barnard, L. (2006) ‘The Incorporation of Botshabelo into the Former Qwaqwa Homeland: A Logical Consequence of the Apartheid System?’, *Journal for Contemporary History*, 31(1).

### **Biographical Note**

Sayaka Kono is a PhD candidate in the Graduate School of International and Cultural Studies at Tsuda College. She is currently a visiting PhD fellow at the Department of Political Studies and Governance at the University of the Free State as well.

### **Acknowledgements**

This paper is the revised version of research originally presented at the biannual conference of the Southern African Historical Society in 2013, which was supported by the Murata Science Foundation and the Sasakawa Scientific Research Grant from the Japan Science Society. Additional research resulting in this paper was supported by the JSPS Strategic Young Researcher Overseas Visits Program.